

**TITLE**

# A COMPREHENSIVE INTRODUCTION TO TRANSCENDENTALISM

**GRADE LEVEL:** 9-12

**DISCIPLINE:** English AP Language & Composition

**TOPIC:** Transcendentalism and the origins of Transcendentalism (Hinduism and Confucianism)

**STANDARDS:** CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.1 | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.7 | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.8 | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.9 | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.4 | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.2.B | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.1.B | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.1.A | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.1.A | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.1.B | CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.10 | APLANG.CLE.4.A, APLANG.REO.6.C | APLANG.STL.8.B | APLANG.STL.7.A, APLANG.RHS.1.A

**OBJECTIVES:**

- Students will identify and explain the causes, effects, and characteristics of the Transcendentalist movement and Transcendentalist texts in a short paragraph.
- Using an example from the literature examined in class, students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the varying Asian cultural and religious ideologies (i.e. Hinduism and Confucianism) that influenced Transcendentalist thought and identify these ideologies in the context of American Transcendentalism.
- Students will apply their knowledge of American Transcendentalism and the related Asian cultural and religious concepts to prominent Transcendentalist works to analyze related themes, identify examples of rhetorical devices (i.e. how ethos, pathos, and logos are created in a given text), and develop nuanced interpretations of the texts introduced in class.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:**

- What is Transcendentalism and what did the movement aim to accomplish?
- How did Transcendentalism affect American society and through what means?
- Who led the Transcendentalist movement and what texts did they create?
- How did Hinduism and Confucianism influence the creation of Transcendentalist literature?
- What aspects of Hinduism and Confucianism are prevalent in Transcendentalist literature?
- How are they similar to the characteristics/ concepts of Transcendentalism?

**KIT INCLUDES:**

[Intro to Transcendentalism Educator Presentation](#)  
[Intro to Transcendentalism Journal Assignment](#)  
[Transcendentalism SOAPStone and Rhetorical Analysis Assignment](#)

[Walden \(PDF\)](#)  
[Self-Reliance \(PDF\)](#)  
[Women in the 19th Century \(PDF\)](#)  
[Glossary of Terms](#)

**CLASSROOM HOURS NEEDED:**

Approx. 1 hour and 40 min

**FINAL ASSESSMENT TYPE:**

Journaling activity or argumentative essay

**MATERIALS NEEDED:**

(Optional) Printouts of the lecture materials, worksheets, and activities

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## INTRODUCTION

Transcendentalism was a movement that completely changed America, from inspiring reform movements to challenging corruption. As a literary movement specifically, the Transcendentalists introduced a variety of concepts and characteristics that recognized the potential for human goodness. However, Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Transcendental Club developed their works in alignment with ideologies from Asian cultures and religions, namely those of Hinduism and Confucianism. It is important to note that these 'religions' are more often considered to be lifestyles by the communities they belong to, so religion and culture can be used interchangeably when referring to them. This lesson plan will introduce students to the holistic Transcendentalist movement - from the key concepts, figures, works, and impacts of American Transcendentalism to the Hindu and Confucian influences on Transcendentalism - to create a well-informed understanding of the Transcendentalist movement.

### DAY 1:

Introduce Transcendentalism to your students using the visual presentation provided, or a lecture-style presentation. Students may also use this presentation as a supplementary resource to explore concepts on their own, so feel free to edit the slides accordingly. Intro to [Transcendentalism Educator Presentation](#)

- Review the presentation notes included in each slide to customize the slide / lecture material in a way that appeals to your students best. You may also choose to keep the slides as they are. The presentation notes detail the purpose of each slide and contains instructions for engaging the students with the content.

- Please review the concepts of Hinduism and Confucianism beforehand, as the pronunciations and concepts may be new to you and your students.

The introduction portion of this activity should take approximately **30 minutes**.

Once you have finished going over the key points, go over the instructions for the activity: [Intro to Transcendentalism Journal Assignment](#)

Have students choose a 3-5-page excerpt from [Walden](#) to read and annotate. Go over the prompt questions

- from the assignment with the students. Then, they should use the provided prompt questions to compose a journal entry that applies the concepts from the lesson. Students should work on this until the **end of the class period**.

### DAY 1 TAKE HOME ASSIGNMENT:

The journal assignment should be completed as homework. At the very least, reading and annotating the excerpt should be completed by the next class period for the class discussion.

**DAY 2:**

Have students share out their work from the journal analysis activity in small groups (3-4 students). They should spend 10 minutes sharing their responses to the journal prompts, as well as their chosen excerpts.  
Reinforce the content that students learned yesterday by reviewing Slides #3, 4, 6, 9, and 12. Have students try to define key terms and ideas without projecting the presentation on the board. This should take approximately 10 minutes.

Introduce the next activity and have students either get into groups or complete the assignment individually:

- [Transcendentalism SOAPStone and Rhetorical Analysis Assignment](#) (Note: Please make a copy of this Google Form BEFORE editing it or accepting responses.)
- Students will complete a SOAPStone activity using a paragraph from [Self-Reliance](#) that they choose. They will then identify examples of rhetorical devices used in the text, identify the concepts of Transcendentalism used in the text, and identify the ideologies of Hinduism and /or Confucianism used in the text. When they are done with the activity, they will submit the Google Forms. They should have until the end of the class period to complete this.

**DAY 2 TAKE HOME ASSIGNMENT:**

Students should ensure that the Google Forms is submitted before the beginning of the next class period. Additionally, the educator may choose to assign one or more of the following:

- 1) Have students read and annotate a different excerpt from any of the three provided works ([Walden](#), [Self-Reliance](#), or [Women in the 19th Century](#)).
- 2) Have students submit a journal entry reflecting on their takeaways from this lesson and the connections they made between the concepts introduced and the real world.
- 3) (Recommended for AP Lang) Assign a related essay assignment with the following prompt: "The Transcendentalist movement was a powerful literary movement that inspired a spirit of reform and self-reflection in Americans. Many of the concepts that are found in Transcendentalist texts also align with traditional Hindu and Confucian beliefs.

Write an essay that argues your position on the extent to which the tenets of Asian cultural ideologies, popularized through Transcendentalism in the 1800s, continue to impact modern society. Use your knowledge of reform movements from the Transcendentalist era, evidence from texts written by the Transcendental Club, and concepts from the Hindu and / or Confucian ideologies to make your argument." Use the "Argumentative Essay" section of this [rubric](#) as a basis for grading the essays.

## ASSESSMENT:

At the end of the lesson, you may refer to the following questions to judge how well students demonstrate an understanding of the lesson:

- Can students define Transcendentalism?
- Do students understand the purposes of the Transcendentalist movement? Its impact?
- Can students identify the varying concepts and characteristics of Transcendentalist literature?
- Are students able to name the key figures and works of the Transcendentalist movement?
- Can students identify examples of the Asian religions and cultures that influenced the Transcendentalist movement?
- Are students able to explain the significance of different Hindu/Confucian ideologies and their relationships to Transcendentalism?
- Do students understand the extent to which Hinduism/Confucianism impacted the development of Transcendentalist literature?