

## Thoreau in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

A recommended reading list from the Thoreau Alliance Education Committee

### Short Takes on Thoreau's Enduring Relevance

- "Thoreau's *Walden* in the Twenty-first Century." *The Concord Saunterer: A Journal of Thoreau Studies*, N.S. vol. 12/13, 2004/2005, pp. 6-17.
- Rebecca Solnit, "The Thoreau Problem." *Orion*, May/June 2007. <https://orionmagazine.org/article/the-thoreau-problem/>
- Danny Heitman, "Not Exactly a Hermit: Henry David Thoreau." *Humanities*, September/October 2012, vol. 33, no. 5. <https://www.neh.gov/humanities/2012/septemberoctober/feature/not-exactly-hermit>
- Rebecca Solnit, "Mysteries of Thoreau, Unsolved." *Orion*, May/June 2013.
- James Sullivan, "Why Thoreau Still Matters." *The Boston Globe*, January 3, 2017. <https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/books/2017/01/03/why-thoreau-still-matters/hpNPLf00CFXrotnU4GWDfN/story.html>
- William Howarth, "Reading Thoreau at 200." *The American Scholar*, June 5, 2017. <https://theamericanscholar.org/reading-thoreau-at-200/>
- Laura Dassow Walls, "7 Reasons Why Henry David Thoreau Still Matters Today." *Publishers Weekly*, July 21, 2017. <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/tip-sheet/article/74280-7-reasons-why-henry-david-thoreau-still-matters-today.html>
- Andrea Wulf, "What Thoreau Saw." *The Atlantic*, November 2017, pp. 107-120. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/11/what-thoreau-saw/540615/>
- David Gessner, "Looking Back From the End of the World: What Thoreau Can Teach Us About Living Life During—and After—the Pandemic." *The American Scholar*, June 2, 2020. <https://theamericanscholar.org/looking-back-from-the-end-of-the-world/>
- Jen Tota McGivney, "Waldenomics: Modern Lessons from Henry David Thoreau." *Success*, March 21, 2021. <https://www.success.com/waldenomics-modern-lessons-from-henry-david-thoreau>
- J. Drew Lanham, "A Letter to Hank." *The Thoreau Society Bulletin*, no. 315, fall 2021, pp. 1-5. <https://thoreausociety.org/thoreau-society-bulletin-315-fall-2021/>
- Andrew Furman, "What Would Thoreau Do?" *Terrain.org*, September 9, 2025. <https://www.terrain.org/2025/currents/letter-to-america-furman/>

### Life Lessons from Thoreau

- Robert Sullivan, *The Thoreau You Don't Know: What the Prophet of Environmentalism Really Meant*. HarperCollins, 2009.
- Jen Tota McGivney, *Finding Your Walden: How to Strive Less, Simplify More, and Embrace What Matters Most*. Hampton Roads, 2025.

### A Pair of Interesting Spin-offs

- Ian Marshall, *Walden by Haiku*. U of Georgia P, 2009.
- Robert B. Primack, *Walden Warming: Climate Change Comes to Thoreau's Woods*. U of Chicago P, 2015.

## **The Pond Scum Debate of 2015**

Kathryn Schulz, "Pond Scum." *The New Yorker*, October 19, 2015.

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/10/19/pond-scum>

Jedediah Purdy, "In Defense of Thoreau." *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 20, 2015.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2015/10/in-defense-of-thoreau/411457/>

Donovan Hohn, "Everybody Hates Henry." *The New Republic*, October 21, 2015.

<https://newrepublic.com/article/123162/everybody-hates-henry-david-thoreau>

Richard B. Primack and Abraham J. Miller-Rushing, "Sorry, New Yorker, Thoreau Is More Relevant Than Ever." *The Boston Globe*, October 21, 2015.

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2015/10/21/sorry-new-yorker-thoreau-more-relevant-than-ever/XsF28iSLPwrLkiNZlpHmol/story.html>

## **Illuminating Essay Collections**

*A Historical Guide to Henry David Thoreau*, edited by William E. Cain, Oxford UP, 2000.

*Thoreau at 200: Essays and Reassessments*, edited by Kristen Case and K. P. Van Anglen, Cambridge UP, 2016.

*Henry David Thoreau in Context*, edited by James Finley, Cambridge, UP, 2017.

*Thoreau in an Age of Crisis: Uses and Abuses of an American Icon*, edited by Kristen Case, Rochelle Johnson, and Henrik Otterberg, Brill Fink, 2021.

## **Deeper Dives: Cultural History & Biography**

Alan Hodder, *Thoreau's Ecstatic Witness*. Yale UP, 2001.

Sandra Harbert Petruionis, *To Set This World Right: The Antislavery Movement in Thoreau's Concord*. Cornell UP, 2006.

Elise Lemire, *Black Walden: Slavery and Its Aftermath in Concord, Massachusetts*. UPenn P, 2009.

Robert Thorson, *Walden's Shore: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Science*. Harvard UP, 2014.

Robert Thorson, *The Boatman: Henry David Thoreau's River Years*. Harvard UP, 2017.

Laura Dassow Walls, *Henry David Thoreau: A Life*. U of Chicago P, 2017.

Robert Gross, *The Transcendentalists and their World*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021.

## **What's New: Recent Books by Thoreau Society Scholars**

Richard Higgins, *Thoreau's God*. U of Chicago P, 2024.

Barry Andrews, *The Gospel According to This Moment: The Spiritual Message of Henry David Thoreau*. U of Massachusetts P, 2024.

John Kucich, *Unsettling Thoreau: Native Americans, Settler Colonialism, and the Power of Place*. U of Massachusetts P, 2024.

Kristen Case, *Henry David Thoreau's Kalendar: Charts and Observations of Natural Phenomena*. Milkweed, 2025.

Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Thoreau's Journal Drawings: The Power of the Visual*. U of Massachusetts P, 2026.

Robert Thorson, *The Walden Experiments: The Science of Henry David Thoreau*. Princeton UP, 2026.

Lydia Willsky-Ciollo, *Wildness: Henry David Thoreau and the Making of an American Theology*. U of Notre Dame P, 2026.

Compiled by Mark Sturges for the Thoreau Alliance Education Committee

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