

## Guiding Questions for Thoreau and *Walden, or Life in the Woods*

### Reading Check

- a) According to the second paragraph in “Economy,” why has Thoreau decided to write about his life?
- b) How does Thoreau answer the questions implied in the title “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For”?
- c) What arguments does Thoreau present in “Solitude” to demonstrate that he is not lonely in his isolated situation?
- d) What satisfactions does Thoreau find in the labor of raising beans in “The Bean Field”?

### First Thoughts

1. What do you think of Thoreau—as a writer and as a personality? Is his message still valid, or do you find it dated and irrelevant?

### Shaping Interpretations

2. What does Thoreau mean when he says, “Simplify, simplify” (page 237)? Do you think he has a valid point here? Explain.
3. How would you summarize Thoreau’s ideas on technological progress, judging from what he says about railroads and other inventions of his era? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
4. What do you think Thoreau means in his final paragraph by the words “Only that day dawns to which we are awake”?
5. What do you think is the lesson of the **parable** involving the insect in the wood table at the conclusion of *Walden*?

### Connecting with the Text

6. If it were possible, would you like to spend a day or two with Thoreau? What would you most like to discuss with him?

### Analyzing *Walden*

7. Evaluate evidence of the Romantic point of view in *Walden*—for instance, the emphasis on intuition, the power of nature, and the importance of human emotion. Is Thoreau a Romantic, in your opinion? Or can you identify strong anti-Romantic strains in his thinking? (Review the characteristics of Romanticism on page 144.) Be sure to quote details from *Walden* to support your evaluation.

### Challenging the Text

8. The Pulitzer Prize-winning author Wallace Stegner, who admired much of Thoreau's thought, once made this observation about Thoreau's message in *Walden*: "At times he sounds perilously like his spiritual descendants of the 1960s, who trusted no one over thirty and believed that they existed outside of, and were exempt from, the society they were protesting." Do you agree or disagree with Stegner's statement? Support or refute it with examples from *Walden*.