



FLORIDA

SUNSHINE STATE STANDARDS

Literary Analysis

Benchmark LA.1112.2.2.2 Use information from the text to answer questions or to state the main idea or provide relevant details.

Benchmark LA.1112.2.2.3 Organize information to show understanding or relationships among facts, ideas, and events....

NOTABLE QUOTE

"The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation."

FYI

Did you know that Henry David Thoreau ...

- worked off and on as a pencil maker in his family's pencil factory?
- kept a journal that when published filled 20 volumes?
- pared down his expenses to 27 cents a week, which he earned by working only six weeks a year?

AuthorOnline

For more on Henry David Thoreau, visit the Literature Center at ClassZone.com.

from *Walden* from *Civil Disobedience*

Essays by Henry David Thoreau



Henry David Thoreau

1817–1862

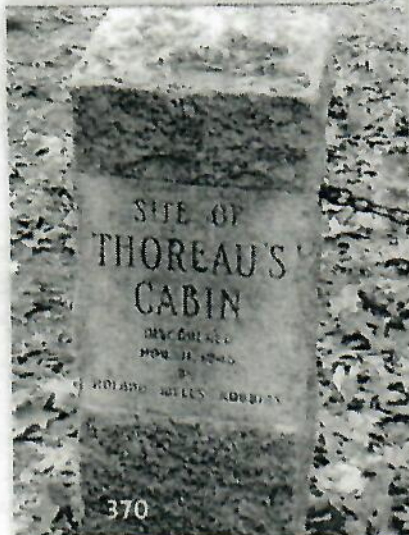
Henry David Thoreau (thə-rō') advocated simple, mindful living and rejected a lifestyle dedicated to the pursuit of wealth. Thoreau spent much of his life writing and observing nature, devoting only a minimum of time to earning a wage. He published just two books, both of which sold very poorly in his own lifetime. Few of his contemporaries would have judged him much of a success. In the years since his death, however, his reputation has grown tremendously. Today, he is regarded as a writer of uncommon vision and remembered as one of the first environmentalists.

Independent Spirit Thoreau was born and raised in Concord, Massachusetts, and attended Harvard University. After graduating, he returned to Concord to teach school. Though some of Thoreau's

neighbors viewed him as eccentric, he was a careful observer and a deep thinker. Taking to heart the ideas of his friend Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thoreau tried to live by his own values, often doing odd jobs that would earn him just enough money to meet his own modest needs.

Defiant Nonconformist Thoreau's life was full of examples of his nonconformity to society's norms. As a Harvard student, he was required to wear a black coat but sported a green one instead. In his first year of teaching, he refused to punish his students physically, a harsh but common practice of the time, and resigned his post. In 1845, he conducted his famous experiment, living simply and frugally in a small cabin on the shores of Walden Pond. In 1846, he was arrested and spent a night in jail for refusing to pay a poll tax, an act of protest against the U.S. government's war with Mexico and its support of slavery. This exercise of conscience over law later became known as civil disobedience.

Influential Thinker At the time of Thoreau's death from tuberculosis at age 44, he was viewed as an unsuccessful nature writer. Today, however, he is known as the father of American nature writing and an important political thinker. His observations about the natural world and the value of the simple life, as well as his promotion of nonviolent protest, have helped bring about great societal change. He has provided inspiration to many, including conservationist John Muir and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.



LITERARY ANALYSIS: ESSAY

An **essay** is a work of nonfiction that usually deals with a single main subject. Though essays can be formal or informal, they are often loosely structured and contain the personal views of the writer. To analyze an essay, pay careful attention to

- the writer's **tone**, or attitude toward his or her subject
- **figurative language** that makes abstract concepts more understandable and emphasizes ideas
- **anecdotes**, or short accounts of personal incidents
- **imagery** that creates vivid impressions for the reader

As you read, consider how these elements illuminate Thoreau's ideas and give readers a glimpse into his personality.

Review: Transcendentalism

READING SKILL: EVALUATE IDEAS

When you **evaluate** a writer's ideas, you examine them carefully and then make judgments about their value. Before you can judge a writer's ideas, however, you have to identify and understand them. **Summarizing** can help. As you read *Walden*, use a chart like the one shown to briefly restate Thoreau's philosophical ideas in your own words. As you tackle "Civil Disobedience," summarize the author's main political beliefs. After you summarize each idea, note your reaction to it.

	<i>Thoreau's Ideas and Beliefs</i>	<i>My Reactions</i>
<i>Walden</i>		
<i>"Civil Disobedience"</i>		

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Thoreau uses the following words to present his theories about simple, principled living. To see how many you know, choose the word that is closest in meaning to each numbered term.

WORD LIST	abject	impetuous	pervade
	congenial	misgiving	transgress
	deliberately	perturbation	

- | | | |
|----------------|-------------|-----------------|
| 1. err | 4. wretched | 7. impulsive |
| 2. disturbance | 5. friendly | 8. thoughtfully |
| 3. doubt | 6. permeate | |

Do you chart your own
COURSE?

KEY IDEA "Cranks," "crackpots," "oddballs"—society is quick to apply a negative label to people outside the mainstream. Although Thoreau was probably never called an "oddball," he was certainly regarded as an eccentric. **Nonconformity** has never been an easy choice, as people often condemn nonconformists without bothering to find out why they embrace a different set of values. Nevertheless, history has shown that many nonconformists, like Thoreau, are often simply ahead of their time.

DISCUSS With a small group of classmates, create a list of famous nonconformists. How did the individuals you listed depart from the norms of their time? Were they punished for their actions? Were they able to win others to their point of view? Discuss these questions with your group.



Civil DISOBEDIENCE

Henry David Thoreau

BACKGROUND Thoreau put into practice the ideas expressed in Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance." In 1846, he spent a night in jail for refusing to pay a poll tax—a tax one had to pay in order to vote—as an act of protest against the U.S. government. Thoreau was enraged by the government's support of slavery and its war against Mexico, which he viewed as a case of a stronger country overpowering a weaker one simply to expand its own borders. Inspired by his experience in jail, Thoreau wrote this essay.

ANALYZE VISUALS

The photographer who created the image on page 383 made a deliberate choice to focus not on the people in the crowd, but on their shadows. Why might she have made this choice?

I heartily accept the motto, "That government is best which governs least;" and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe,—“That government is best which governs not at all;” and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have **A** been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing
10 government. The standing army is only an arm of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it. Witness the present Mexican war, the work of comparatively a few individuals using the standing government as their tool; for, in the outset, the people would not have consented to this measure. . . .

A EVALUATE IDEAS

Reread lines 1–7. What effect might these lines have on Thoreau's readers?

13 the present Mexican war: the 1846–1848 war between Mexico and the United States.

But, to speak practically and as a citizen, unlike those who call themselves no-government men, I ask for, not at once no government, but *at once* a

better government. Let every man make known what kind of government
20 would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it.

After all, the practical reason why, when the power is once in the hands
of the people, a majority are permitted, and for a long period continue,
to rule is not because they are most likely to be in the right, nor because
this seems fairest to the minority, but because they are physically the
strongest. But a government in which the majority rule in all cases cannot
be based on justice, even as far as men understand it. Can there not be a
government in which majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong,
but conscience?—in which majorities decide only those questions to which
the rule of expediency is applicable? Must the citizen ever for a moment,
30 or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every
man a conscience, then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects
afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for
the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any
time what I think right. It is truly enough said, that a corporation has no
conscience; but a corporation of conscientious men is a corporation *with* a
conscience. Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their
respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice. **B**
A common and natural result of an undue respect for law is, that you may
see a file of soldiers, colonel, captain, corporal, privates, powder-monkeys,
40 and all, marching in admirable order over hill and dale to the wars, against
their wills, ay, against their common sense and consciences, which makes it
very steep marching indeed, and produces a palpitation of the heart. They
have no doubt that it is a damnable business in which they are concerned;
they are all peaceably inclined. Now, what are they? Men at all? or small
movable forts and magazines, at the service of some unscrupulous man
in power? Visit the Navy-Yard, and behold a marine, such a man as an
American government can make, or such as it can make a man with its black
arts—a mere shadow and reminiscence of humanity, a man laid out alive
and standing, and already, as one may say, buried under arms with funeral
50 accompaniments, though it may be,—

“Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note,
As his corse to the rampart we hurried;
Not a soldier discharged his farewell shot
O'er the grave where our hero we buried.”

The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as
machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia,
jailers, constables, *posse comitatus*, etc. In most cases there is no free exercise
whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense; but they put themselves
on a level with wood and earth and stones; and wooden men can perhaps
60 be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well. Such command no
more respect than men of straw or a lump of dirt. They have the same sort
of worth only as horses and dogs. Yet such as these even are commonly

B EVALUATE IDEAS

Reread lines 21–37. What position does Thoreau take on the conflict between majority rule and individual conscience? On your chart, **summarize** and react to his position.

39 **powder-monkeys**: boys with the job of carrying gunpowder to artillery crews.

45 **magazines**: places where ammunition is stored.

47–48 **black arts**: witchcraft.

51–54 “Not a drum . . . we buried”: opening lines of “The Burial of Sir John Moore After Corunna” by the Irish poet Charles Wolfe (1791–1823).

57 **posse comitatus** (pŏs'ē kŏm-a-tā'-tēs): group of people that can be called on by the sheriff to help enforce the law [*Latin*, literally, the power of the county].

esteemed good citizens. Others—as most legislators, politicians, lawyers, ministers, and office-holders—serve the state chiefly with their heads; and, as they rarely make any moral distinctions, they are as likely to serve the Devil, without *intending* it, as God. A very few—as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and *men*—serve the state with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it. . . . **C**

- 70 Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded or shall we **transgress** them at once? Men generally, under such a government as this, think that they ought to wait until they have persuaded the majority to alter them. They think that, if they should resist, the remedy would be worse than the evil. But it is the fault of the government itself that the remedy *is* worse than the evil. *It* makes it worse. Why is it not more apt to anticipate and provide for reform? Why does it not cherish its wise minority? Why does it cry and resist before it is hurt? Why does it not encourage its citizens to be on the alert to point out its faults, and *do* better than it would have them? Why
- 80 does it always crucify Christ, and excommunicate Copernicus and Luther, and pronounce Washington and Franklin rebels? . . . **D**

If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go: perchance it will wear smooth, certainly the machine will wear out. If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps you may consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which

- 90 I condemn. . . .

I meet this American government, or its representative, the state government, directly, and face to face, once a year—no more—in the person of its tax-gatherer; this is the only mode in which a man situated as I am necessarily meets it; and it then says distinctly, Recognize me; and the simplest, most effectual, and, in the present posture of affairs, the indispensablest mode of treating with it on this head, of expressing your little satisfaction with and love for it, is to deny it then. My civil neighbor, the tax-gatherer, is the very man I have to deal with,—for it is, after all, with men and not with parchment that I quarrel,—and he has voluntarily

100 chosen to be an agent of the government. How shall he ever know well what he is and does as an officer of the government, or as a man, until he is obliged to consider whether he shall treat me, his neighbor, for whom he has respect, as a neighbor and well-disposed man, or as a maniac and disturber of the peace, and see if he can get over this obstruction to his neighborliness without a ruder and more **impetuous** thought or speech corresponding with his action. I know this well, that if one thousand, if one hundred, if ten men

C EVALUATE IDEAS

Reread lines 55–69. Which way of serving the state does Thoreau approve of? Which ways does he condemn? Decide whether you agree with his assessment of soldiers and others who serve.

transgress (trāns-grēs') v. to violate a command or law

80 Copernicus (kō-pūr'nē-kēs) and **Luther**: Radicals in their time, Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus theorized that the sun rather than the earth was the center of our planetary system; German theologian Martin Luther was a leader in the Protestant Reformation.

D GRAMMAR AND STYLE

In lines 70–81, Thoreau adds emphasis and emotion to his writing by asking **rhetorical questions**—questions that don't require a reply because the writer assumes the answers are obvious.

95 posture of affairs: situation.

impetuous (ĩm-pěch'ōō-es) *adj.* acting with sudden or rash energy; hasty



Left: London police arresting a suffragist, 1914; center: Gandhi marching to the sea, in defiance of the British salt monopoly

whom I could name,—if ten *honest* men only,—ay, if *one* honest man, in this State of Massachusetts, *ceasing to hold slaves*, were actually to withdraw from this copartnership, and be locked up in the county jail therefor, it would be the abolition of slavery in America. For it matters not how small
110 the beginning may seem to be: what is once well done is done forever. But we love better to talk about it: that we say is our mission. Reform keeps many scores of newspapers in its service, but not one man. . . .

Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison. The proper place today, the only place which Massachusetts has provided for her freer and less desponding spirits, is in her prisons, to be put out and locked out of the State by her own act, as they have already put themselves out by their principles. It is there that the fugitive slave, and the Mexican prisoner on parole, and the Indian come to
120 plead the wrongs of his race should find them; on that separate, but more free and honorable ground, where the State places those who are not *with* her, but *against* her,—the only house in a slave State in which a free man can abide with honor. If any think that their influence would be lost there, and their voices no longer afflict the ear of the State, that they would not be as an enemy within its walls, they do not know by how much truth is stronger than error, nor how much more eloquently and effectively he can combat injustice who has experienced a little in his own person. Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence. A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then;
130 but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight. If the alternative is to keep all just men in prison, or give up war and slavery, the State will not hesitate which to choose. If a thousand men were not to pay their tax bills



Left: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., jailed for civil disobedience; *center:* Vietnam war protester burns his military draft card; *right:* Beijing man stands in front of tanks during the 1989 Tiananmen Square uprising.

this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution, if any such is possible. If the tax-gatherer, or any other public officer, asks me, as one has done, "But what shall I do?" my answer is, "If you really wish to do anything, resign your office." When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished. But
 140 even suppose blood should flow. Is there not a sort of blood shed when the conscience is wounded? Through this wound a man's real manhood and immortality flow out, and he bleeds to an everlasting death. I see this blood flowing now. . . . **E**

I have paid no poll-tax for six years. I was put into a jail once on this account, for one night; and, as I stood considering the walls of solid stone, two or three feet thick, the door of wood and iron, a foot thick, and the iron grating which strained the light, I could not help being struck with the foolishness of that institution which treated me as if I were mere flesh and blood and bones, to be locked up. I wondered that it should have concluded
 150 at length that this was the best use it could put me to, and had never thought to avail itself of my services in some way. I saw that, if there was a wall of stone between me and my townsmen, there was a still more difficult one to climb or break through before they could get to be as free as I was. I did not for a moment feel confined, and the walls seemed a great waste of stone and mortar. I felt as if I alone of all my townsmen had paid my tax. They plainly did not know how to treat me, but behaved like persons who are underbred. In every threat and in every compliment there was a blunder; for they thought that my chief desire was to stand the other side of

E EVALUATE IDEAS

Thoreau holds an **assumption**—an opinion or belief that is taken for granted—that civil disobedience is the only sensible and moral course to take. Reread lines 114–143. How convincing are the reasons Thoreau gives in support of his belief?

157 underbred: ill-mannered.

that stone wall. I could not but smile to see how industriously they locked
160 the door on my meditations, which followed them out again without let or
hindrance, and *they* were really all that was dangerous. As they could not
reach me, they had resolved to punish my body; just as boys, if they cannot
come at some person against whom they have a spite, will abuse his dog. I
saw that the State was half-witted, that it was timid as a lone woman with
her silver spoons, and that it did not know its friends from its foes, and
I lost all my remaining respect for it, and pitied it. F

Thus the State never intentionally confronts a man's sense, intellectual
or moral, but only his body, his senses. It is not armed with superior wit or
honesty, but with superior physical strength. I was not born to be forced.
170 I will breathe after my own fashion. Let us see who is the strongest. What
force has a multitude? They only can force me who obey a higher law than I.
They force me to become like themselves. I do not hear of *men* being *forced*
to live this way or that by masses of men. What sort of life were that to live?
When I meet a government which says to me, "Your money or your life,"
why should I be in haste to give it my money? It may be in a great strait, and
not know what to do: I cannot help that. It must help itself; do as I do. It is
not worth the while to snivel about it. I am not responsible for the successful
working of the machinery of society. I am not the son of the engineer. I
perceive that, when an acorn and a chestnut fall side by side, the one does
180 not remain inert to make way for the other, but both obey their own laws,
and spring and grow and flourish as best they can, till one, perchance,
overshadows and destroys the other. If a plant cannot live according to its
nature, it dies; and so a man. G

160–161 **without let or hindrance:**
without encountering obstacles.

F **ESSAY**

Why do you think Thoreau includes this personal **anecdote** about his night in jail? Consider why he feels free as he stands in his cell, contemplating his own imprisonment.

G **ESSAY**

What **message** does Thoreau convey through his example of the acorn and the chestnut?



SUNSHINE STATE STANDARD
Literary Analysis
Benchmark LA.1112.2.2.2 Use information from the text to answer questions or to state the main idea or provide relevant details.

Comprehension

- 1. Recall** According to Thoreau, what should be respected more than the law?
- 2. Summarize** What should a citizen do about an unjust law?
- 3. Clarify** List the three ways Thoreau says a citizen may serve the state. With which did Thoreau agree?

Critical Analysis

- 4. Make Judgments** Consider the **historical context** of Thoreau's essays. Would it be easier or more difficult to practice his brand of **nonconformity** today? Consider the possible contemporary consequences of the following:
 - refusing to pay a tax ("Civil Disobedience," lines 144–166)
 - going to live alone in the woods (*Walden*, lines 1–37)
 - celebrating or "cultivating" poverty (*Walden*, lines 198–230)
- 5. Analyze Essays** Even when they discuss serious or even lofty ideas, essays are often loosely structured and highly personal. **Skim** *Walden* and "Civil Disobedience," noting passages in which Thoreau refers to himself. Identify his personal feelings and instances when he shares his own experiences, such as the night he spent in jail. How do these passages influence your acceptance of his arguments? Explain, citing specific lines from both essays.
- 6. Interpret Paradox** A paradox is a statement that seems to contradict itself but may nevertheless suggest an important truth. Reexamine both selections and record in a chart the examples of paradox you find. Then explain what truth or idea each paradox illustrates.
- 7. Evaluate Ideas** Ralph Waldo Emerson said of Thoreau, "No truer American ever lived." Review the political ideas you summarized as you read "Civil Disobedience." Do you consider Thoreau's arguments to be those of a patriot or those of a traitor? In your response, consider Thoreau's points on
 - the necessity of government
 - majority rule
 - how unjust laws may be changed

Paradox	Explanation
"I did not wish to live what was not life..." (<i>Walden</i> , lines 26–27)	

Literary Criticism

- 8. Critical Interpretations** Critic Andrew Delbanco has asserted that Thoreau is, "despite all the barricades he erected around himself, an irresistible writer; to read him is to feel wrenched away from the customary world and delivered into a place we fear as much as we need." What does Delbanco mean when he says we both need and fear the world Thoreau creates? After you interpret the critic's statement, explain whether or not you agree with him.

Vocabulary in Context

VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Decide whether each statement is true or false.

1. If an odor were to **pervade** a room, it would be escaping through a chimney.
2. A person who is experiencing **perturbation** usually feels relaxed and confident.
3. An **impetuous** act is one that you do on the spur of the moment.
4. If you have some **misgiving** about attending a party, you should consider not going.
5. A **congenial** person usually gets along with others.
6. If you act **deliberately**, you act with haste and lack of concern.
7. **Abject** sorrow is sadness that will pass quickly.
8. If you **transgress** a law, you break it.

WORD LIST

abject
congenial
deliberately
impetuous
misgiving
perturbation
pervade
transgress

VOCABULARY IN WRITING

Do you agree that the only place to experience nature is in a remote rural setting? Using two or more vocabulary words, write a short explanation of your opinion and what you base it on. You might start like this.

EXAMPLE SENTENCE

*Peace and quiet may not **pervade** most urban settings, but there are still ways to commune with nature in the city.*

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: THE PREFIXES *ab-* AND *per-*

Though the prefixes *ab-* and *per-* are sometimes combined with recognizable base words, often they are attached to Latin roots, as in the vocabulary words *abject* and *pervade*. When you think you recognize the prefix *ab-* or *per-* in a word, look for context clues that support your guess. Then use the meaning of the prefix—and of the root, if you know it—to decipher the word's definition.

PRACTICE The prefix *ab-* or *per-* occurs in each boldfaced word below. Use context clues and root and prefix meanings—or a dictionary, if necessary—to define each word.

1. That man's **pernicious** lies have totally destroyed his son's reputation.
2. To get out of debt, I have decided to **abjure** going to the mall for three months.
3. The recruits immediately obeyed the officer's **peremptory** command.
4. **Abstemious** eating habits can help a person lose weight.
5. His **perfunctory** effort to learn who had **absconded** with the money was unsuccessful.



SUNSHINE STATE STANDARD
Reading Process
Benchmark LA.1112.1.6.7 Identify and understand the meaning of conceptually advanced prefixes, suffixes, and root words.

Prefix	Meaning
ab-	"away"; "away from"
per-	"through"; "thoroughly, very"



VOCABULARY PRACTICE

For more practice, go to the **Vocabulary Center** at **ClassZone.com**.

Reading-Writing Connection

WRITING PROMPT

WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR Thoreau proposed radical ideas in “Civil Disobedience.” Some people found them thrilling; others found them threatening. Choose one of the ideas proposed in “Civil Disobedience.” Write a **three-paragraph letter** to the editor of a local newspaper in which you explain the idea and argue for or against implementing it.

SELF-CHECK

A successful letter to the editor will . . .

- state the issue and your position on the issue
- support your position with reasons and examples
- use rhetorical devices that will help reinforce your position

GRAMMAR AND STYLE

ASK RHETORICAL QUESTIONS Review the **Grammar and Style** note on page 385. Thoreau asks a number of thought-provoking questions in “Civil Disobedience.” But he’s not expecting any answers. The questions he asks are **rhetorical questions**; they don’t require a reply, because the answers are considered obvious. Writers often use these types of **interrogative sentences** to drive home a point or evoke an emotional response. Here is an example from the text:

But even suppose blood should flow. Is there not a sort of blood shed when the conscience is wounded? (lines 139–141)

Read this passage aloud. Consider how it would sound if it lacked a rhetorical question—if the second sentence read, “A sort of blood flows when the conscience is wounded.” Do you think the rhetorical question makes Thoreau’s argument more compelling?

PRACTICE Rewrite the following paragraph, changing some sentences to rhetorical questions.

Thoreau suggests that if citizens disagree with their government’s actions, they should stop paying taxes. However, if a large number of Americans refused to pay their taxes this year, the results would be disastrous. Public schools would collapse, salaries for police officers and firefighters would go unpaid, and services from public transportation to public hospitals would crumble. I do not see how a good citizen could allow this to happen. I do not see the honor in such an act.



SUNSHINE STATE STANDARD

Writing Process

Benchmark LA.1112.3.3.1 Evaluating the draft for development of ideas and content, logical organization, voice, point of view, word choice, and sentence variation.



For prewriting, revision, and editing tools, visit the **Writing Center** at **ClassZone.com**.



On *Civil Disobedience*

Mohandas K. Gandhi

BACKGROUND Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948), called Mahatma (“Great Soul”), helped free India of British rule. As a student, he greatly admired Thoreau’s essay “Civil Disobedience.” Thoreau’s ideas helped shape Gandhi’s key principle—*satyagraha* (sə-tyä’grə-hə), or “truth-force.” In the following excerpt from a 1916 speech, Gandhi describes this powerful weapon for fighting oppression.

July 27, 1916

There are two ways of countering injustice. One way is to smash the head of the man who perpetrates injustice and to get your own head smashed in the process. All strong people in the world adopt this course. Everywhere wars are fought and millions of people are killed. The consequence is not the progress of a nation but its decline. . . . No country has ever become, or will ever become, happy through victory in war. A nation does not rise that way, it only falls further. In fact, what comes to it is defeat, not victory. And if, perchance, either our act or our purpose was ill-conceived, it brings disaster to both belligerents.¹

10 But through the other method of combating injustice, we alone suffer the consequences of our mistakes, and the other side is wholly spared. This other method is *satyagraha*.² One who resorts to it does not have to break another’s head; he may merely have his own head broken. He has to be prepared to die himself, suffering all the pain. In opposing the atrocious laws of the Government of South Africa,³ it was this method that we adopted. We made it clear to the said Government that we would never bow to its outrageous laws. No clapping is possible without two hands to do it, and no quarrel without two persons to make it. Similarly, no State is possible without two entities, the rulers and the ruled. You are our sovereign, our Government, only so long as we consider ourselves your subjects. When we are not subjects, you are not the
20 sovereign either. So long as it is your endeavour to control us with justice and love, we will let you to do so. But if you wish to strike at us from behind, we cannot permit it. Whatever you do in other matters, you will have to ask our opinion about the laws that concern us. If you make laws to keep us suppressed in a wrongful manner and without taking us into confidence, these laws will merely adorn the statute-books. We will never obey them. Award us for it what punishment you like, we will put up with it. Send us to prison and we will live there as in a paradise. Ask us to mount the

1. **belligerents:** participants in a war.

2. **satyagraha** (sə-tyä’grə-hə) *Sanskrit:* insistence on truth. Gandhi used this term to describe his policy of seeking reform by means of nonviolent resistance.

3. **atrocious laws . . . South Africa:** Gandhi led the Indian community in opposition to racial discrimination in South Africa, where he lived for several years.



Gandhi in 1948, after ending a six-day hunger strike for peace

scaffold⁴ and we will do so laughing. Shower what sufferings you like upon us, we will calmly endure all and not hurt a hair of your body. We will gladly die and will not so much as touch you. But so long as there is yet life in these our bones, we will never
30 comply with your arbitrary laws. ☞

4. **mount the scaffold:** ascend the platform on which one is executed by hanging.

Literary Analysis

1. **Summarize** What two ways of countering injustice does Gandhi describe? Explain which approach Gandhi adopted.
2. **Interpret** Reread lines 16–20. What point is Gandhi making about the relationship between a government and its citizens?
3. **Compare Texts** Henry David Thoreau’s ideas influenced many 20th-century reformers, including Gandhi. What connections do you see between the views Thoreau presents in *Walden* and “Civil Disobedience” and Gandhi’s beliefs? Cite evidence from both texts to support your answer.

