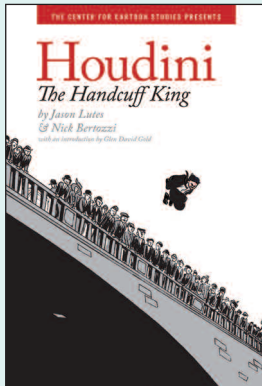


This guide was created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and the author of *Reaching for Sun*, from Bloomsbury.

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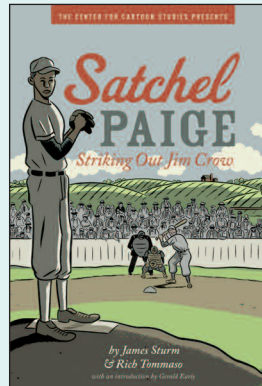
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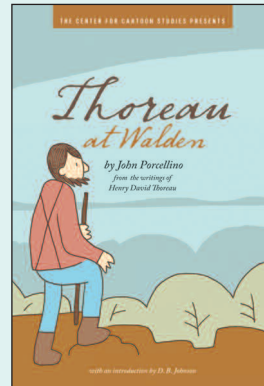
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**Thoreau
at Walden**

by John Porcellino

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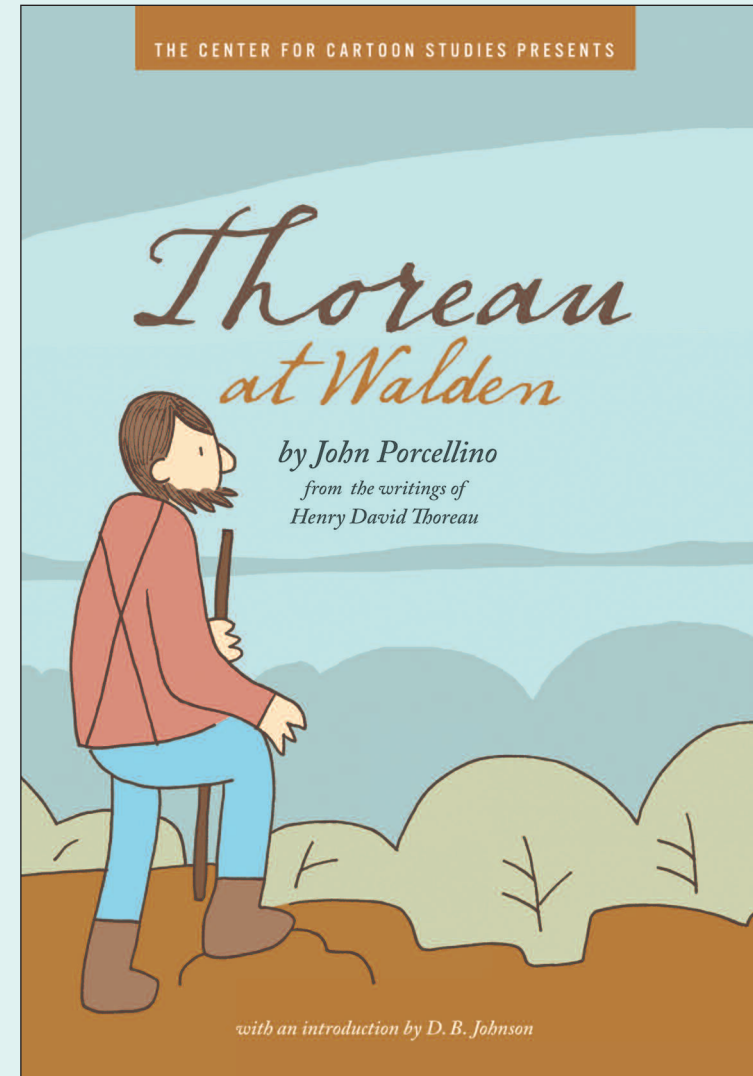
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DISCUSSION GUIDE

HYPERION

About the Book

"I am convinced, both by faith and experience, that to maintain one's self on this earth is not a hardship but a pastime, if we will live simply and wisely."

—Henry David Thoreau, 1845

In this graphic masterpiece, John Porcellino uses only the words of Henry David Thoreau himself to tell the story of the two years he spent off the beaten track on Walden Pond. The pared-down text focuses on Thoreau's most profound ideas, and Porcellino's fresh, simple pictures capture the essence of the philosopher's writings.

For readers who know *Walden* intimately, this graphic treatment will provide a new interpretation of Thoreau's story. For those who have never read the original, *Thoreau at Walden* presents a contemporary look at his call to slow down in an ever-accelerating world.



Pre-reading

Have you ever heard of Henry David Thoreau? What, if anything, do you know about him? Why do you think some authors' work becomes timeless while that of others does not?

Questions to Consider

- 1 What do you think most motivated Thoreau to leave his life in town?
- 2 Which of the quotes from Thoreau resonates with you most? Why?
- 3 Select three different quotes from the text and explain what you think Thoreau means by them. Why do you think people enjoy collecting and sharing quotes from famous people or texts?
- 4 Who most inspired Thoreau's work? How do your friends influence your own interests and work? How do you influence theirs?
- 5 Would you consider living in the woods, as Thoreau did? Why or why not? Do you think you would come to conclusions similar to the ones he did or not? Why?
- 6 Which feature of nature does Thoreau call its most beautiful and "the earth's eye?" Do you agree? Which feature of nature is most important to you?
- 7 How did Thoreau feed himself during his time in the woods? What odd jobs have you done for money? How does Thoreau feel about work in general? Why?
- 8 Thoreau became very close to nature and her seasons. In which season do you feel closest to the earth? Which season is your favorite? Why?

- 9 Do you think your life could ever become its “own amusement”? Why or why not? What amusements do you rely on? Do you think Thoreau would consider your life a happy one or not? What in your life could you be happy without?
- 10 Thoreau was rich in time but not in money. In what ways are you rich?
- 11 Is there any issue for which you would be willing to go to jail? Why did Thoreau go to jail? Do you think he should have been incarcerated?
- 12 Reread pages 87 and 88. Do you agree with Thoreau’s assertions? Do you endeavor to live the life that you imagine? How can you change your path if you are not on it?



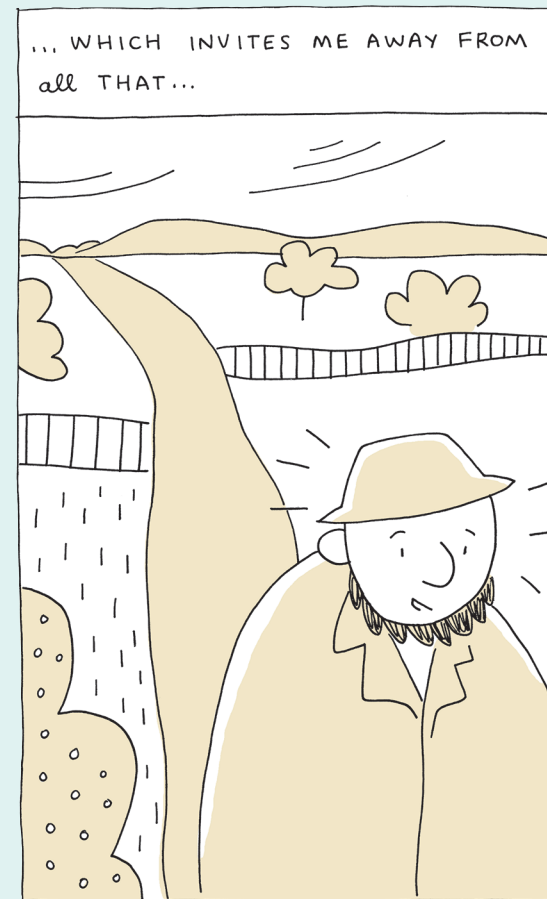
Projects

Language Arts

Create a time line of Thoreau’s life. Illustrate it if you like.

Art

Create a piece of art (sculpture, painting, collage, etc.) inspired by a favorite quote from Thoreau. On the back, explain your piece, in an Artist’s Statement.



About the Author

John Porcellino has been writing, drawing, and publishing comics, mini-comics, and graphic novels for the last twenty-five years. His celebrated series King-Cat Comics, begun in 1989, has inspired a generation of cartoonists. *Diary of a Mosquito Abatement Man*, a collection of King-Cat stories about Porcellino's experiences as a pest-control worker, won an Ignatz Award in 2005. *Perfect Example*, first published in 2000, chronicles his struggles with depression as a teenager. According to cartoonist Chris Ware, "John Porcellino's comics distill, in just a few lines and words, the feeling of simply being alive." John Porcellino lives in Denver with his wife, Misun, and a small black cat named Maisie Kukoc.

Visit www.king-cat.net



Author Interview

1 Why did you decide to focus on Thoreau?

I've been interested in Thoreau's life, work, and ideas since my high school years. I appreciate his love of nature and philosophy and his willingness to take a path that society didn't exactly encourage.

2 Could you live a solitary life the way Thoreau did while he was at Walden? What do you think you would learn about yourself?

I did in fact live a life somewhat similar to Thoreau's Walden experience when I lived alone, with my cat Maisie, in Elgin, Illinois, from 1999 to 2002. I wasn't living out in the woods, but I was living a semi-isolated life on the edge of town, without much distraction, where I could focus on both my relationship with nature and my artwork. I was working a simple day job to support myself and spending all other hours on creative and spiritual work.

What I found is that once you learn to avoid the distractions that are so prevalent nowadays, life gets very simple, yet rich and very interesting. It's a matter of slowing things down enough that you start to be aware of what's really inside you. This potential for awareness is within us all, if we can find the way to notice it and encourage it.

3 What advice do you have for young cartoonists?

Do it because you love it, because you *need* to do it . . . because cartooning is a sometimes difficult path that requires a lot of time and commitment. At the end of the day, it comes down to those hours spent alone at the drawing table. But there's also the need to be active in the outside world. Be involved, observe, and let your own natural proclivities and interests lead you. Don't worry so much about comparing yourself to others. Find the unique creative spark within yourself, and find a way to give voice to that.