

Transcendentalism Today Assignment

Directions: Examine some aspect of contemporary society/popular culture. This might be a film, a television series, a theatrical performance, a piece of music, a social movement—anything that reflects the Transcendentalist philosophy. On of a single sheet of 8.5 x 11 paper, briefly describe the aspect of contemporary society/popular culture on the top half of the page (you may include lyrics, an image etc.) and then on the bottom half, briefly (in a short paragraph 200-300 words) explain the connection to Transcendentalism. **Be specific and detailed in your explanation. You must include quotations from specific Transcendentalist works. Highlight or underline the specific words or sentences in your contemporary example and your paragraph which reflect Transcendental values. Follow the format/example below.**

Contemporary Example: Song: “Ants Marching” by Dave Matthews Band



He wakes up in the morning
Does his teeth bite to eat and he's rolling
Never changes a thing
The week ends, the week begins

She thinks, “we look at each other
Wondering what the other is thinking
But we never say a thing”
These crimes between us grow deeper

Goes to visit his mommy
She feeds him well his concerns
He forgets them
And remembers being small
Playing under the table and dreaming



Take these chances
Place them in a box until a quieter time
Lights down, you up and die

Driving in on this highway
All these cars and up on the sidewalk
People in every direction
No words exchanged
No time to exchange

And all the little ants are marching
Red and black antennas waving
They all do it the same
They all do it the same way

Candyman tempting the thoughts of a
Sweet tooth tortured by the weight loss
Program cutting the corners
Loose end, loose end, cut, cut
On the fence, could not to offend
Cut, cut, cut, cut

Take these chances
Place them in a box until a quieter time
Lights down, you up and die



Clear topic sentence

Transcendental values clearly identified & underlined

Connection to Transcendentalism:

The song “Ants Marching” by Dave Matthews Band reflects several elements of the Transcendentalist philosophy, specifically those of Henry David Thoreau in *Walden*. Most notably, the overall theme of the song suggests that as human beings it is to our benefit to live in the moment and make the most of our lives. The song notes that if we do not “Take these chances” and instead keep putting them off “until a quieter time,” then the moment will pass and metaphorically speaking, “Lights down, you up and die.” In other words, we risk dying without having really lived. Likewise, in *Walden*, Thoreau suggests that our lives are “frittered away by detail” and thus we lose the opportunity to enjoy the important things because we are so concerned with the inconsequential details of daily living. Matthews’ song also relates to Thoreau’s warning in *Walden* of falling into thoughtless routines. Thoreau laments, “How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity.” Similarly, the song suggests that it is very easy to fall into a routine of “never changing a thing,” in which every week of our lives is the same. Finally, the song reflects Thoreau’s image in *Walden* of living “meanly, like ants,” marching in a mindless routine of conformity. In other words, we become human doings instead of human beings. The song states clearly that the ants “all do it the same way” because they practice blind obedience. It is clear that the philosophy of Transcendentalism is still relevant today and worth considering as our lives become even busier and more complex.

Connection made between contemporary example and transcendental work

Quotations for support