

Module 6: The Power of the Mind in the Romantic Era

Topic 4 Content: Tenets of Transcendentalism


Introduction

Tenets of Transcendentalism

- Non-Conformity
- Social Improvement
- Self-Reliance
- Civil Disobedience
- Nature
- Natural Order Versus Social Order
- The Over-Soul

Introduction

Though they held many different beliefs and championed a variety of causes, Transcendentalists widely shared the following tenets. Click on each of the tabs to examine seven tenets of Transcendentalism.



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Non-Conformity

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Transcendentalists believed they should avoid following the crowd or societal standards and called on people to find their own voice, path, and belief system.



Social Improvement

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Social Improvement

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Social Improvement



Transcendentalists believed in improving education and abolishing slavery. They lamented the treatment of Native Americans and sought to make conditions better for people who have mental or physical disabilities.

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Self-Reliance

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Self-Reliance



Self-reliance is the belief that an individual should be independent and self-sufficient. Transcendentalists interpreted this concept differently. For example, Ralph Waldo Emerson, the author of "Self-Reliance," believed that people should think for themselves and rely on personal experience over collective knowledge, even at the risk of facing disapproval from society.

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Civil Disobedience

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Civil Disobedience

The Transcendentalists had a rebellious side. They challenged the government and believed in rights for all people and demonstrated this with their support of the abolitionist movement. However, they resisted in a non-violent manner. The writings of Henry David Thoreau inspired famous world leaders.



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Nature

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Nature



Nature was very important to the Transcendentalists. They believed one way to find answers to life is to turn to the power of nature. Additionally, they believed the individual can connect with God through nature. They were the original environmentalists.

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Natural Order Versus Social Order

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Natural Order Versus Social Order



This aspect of Transcendentalism deals with respecting the natural order, or what would happen organically without interference from humanity. Transcendentalists believed in a more simplistic lifestyle without the distraction of materialism and developments of the Industrial Revolution.

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The Over-Soul

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The Over-Soul



While the Transcendentalists may not have been particular to any one kind of religion, they did believe in God. Emerson believed in one overarching presence connecting everything in existence: human beings, plants, rivers, oceans, stars, etc. He called this the Over-Soul: "that great nature in which we rest ... that Unity within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other."

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