

# 06/07 NOVEMBER 2016



The "transparent eyeball," caricature by Christopher Cranch.

image from <http://www.assumption.edu/users/ady/HHRomanticism/HHEmerson/Emersontrans.GIF>

Greetings, Sojourners in American Literature—

It appears that a transparent eyeball is now stalking us.

As we recover from our recent test experience, here's today's plan:

**1. Return to the Previous WEDGE Prompts for Another Go!**—Old Ralph Waldo, no matter what you may think of him, is flat-out one of the most provocative American writers of all time. Consider the following aphorisms, some of which should sound recently familiar:

- Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string.
- Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members.
- Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist.

- What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think.
- A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do.
- It is easy to see that a greater self-reliance must work a revolution in all the offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits; their modes of living; their association; in their property; in their speculative views.
- Travelling is a fool's paradise.
- Insist on yourself; never imitate.
- Society never advances. It recedes as fast on one side as it gains on the other.
- The civilized man has built a coach, but has lost the use of his feet.
- Society is a wave. The wave moves onward, but the water of which it is composed does not.
- And so the reliance on Property, including the reliance on governments which protect it, is the want of self-reliance.
- Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.

Choose any one of the aphorisms, but not an aphorism to which you have already responded in writing, and relying solely upon yourself, WEDGE for roughly ten minutes.

**2. A Slow Consideration of Emerson's "The American Scholar"**—While we're all eager to talk about the content of the Emerson readings, the density of Emerson's style suggests that it makes sense to slow down and take a look at a bigger chunk of text.

We'll try to imagine ourselves as Harvard students on August 31, 1837. Emerson has been invited to address the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Cambridge, Massachusetts. Emerson's invitation resulted in recognition of his groundbreaking work, "Nature," published a year earlier. Keep in mind that sixty years after declaring independence, American culture was still heavily influenced by Europe. Emerson attempts to provide a visionary philosophical framework for escaping European influence to build a new, distinctly American cultural identity. Oliver Wendell Holmes later described this address as America's "Intellectual Declaration of Independence."

**3. Toward a Definition of Transcendentalism**—Thank goodness we have a handout. As a bonus, it includes a poem by a famous caricaturist!

Tappa! Tappa! Tappa!—  
Mr Leo

**Homework:** Actively read the Emerson poems. If your English teacher somehow confused you (and himself) about the prior reading assignment and you've already completed this assignment, go out in Nature and reflect on your place in the universe.