

# UU Identity & History

## Lesson 6: The Transcendentalist Turn

3.14.2021

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**Objectives:** Explore Transcendentalism as an encompassing framework.

**Materials:** \*Youth should have paper and a pen/pencil, teachers should download lesson plan and attachments onto their desktop.

**Time allotments:** Suggested for 60 minute online class.

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### 1. Zoom Welcome (as youth arrive into the breakout classroom)

- Teachers and youth are expected to log on to zoom at 11:15am (15 min before class begins at 11:30am) so that everyone can be organized into correct breakout classrooms. We want to make sure there is an attentive adult in each breakout classroom with youth.
- Greet youth and ask everyone to correct their display name as needed. Ask everyone to select “gallery view” to see everyone else.
- Staff will take attendance.
- Opening Discussion instead of Zoom Icebreaker

### 2. Opening Discussion on Nature (5 minutes, begin while waiting for everyone to arrive)

- Do you think it is important to protect the natural environment? If so, what are you doing to protect it? What should our church or society do?
- Why is protecting nature important?
- Is there something divine or spiritual about nature?

### 3. Chalice Lighting

Light a chalice at your home, invite youth to light their own chalices and say together:  
*“We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith, the light of truth and the warmth of love.”*

**Teacher reads:** (from Transcendentalist, Henry David Thoreau)

*“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”*

**4. Brief Check-in** (5 minutes)

Continue weekly ritual/check-in (e.g. sharing a joy or sorrow so that everyone feels present in class).

**5. Take the self-quiz: Are YOU a Transcendentalist?** (10 minutes)

(a) Ask youth to get paper and a pen/pencil.

(b) Instruct youth to number their paper 1-20.

(c) **Screen share** lesson attachment 6a (Are YOU a Transcendentalist?).

(d) Read aloud each statement and have youth make a mark when they AGREE with a statement. Their total number of marks is their score.

(e) Read aloud the score box and invite sharing.

**6. UU History and the Transcendentalist Club** (15 minutes)

**Screen share** lesson attachment 6b (UU Timeline) and invite volunteers to read the bolded events added to our historical timeline.

**Teacher says:** We have discussed Unitarianism and Universalism, which both started in Europe before coming to North America. Today, we turn to the Transcendentalist movement and the community of thinkers, writers, and leaders who lived in Concord, Massachusetts (near Boston).

*\*\*Teacher's note: Transcendentalism is a challenging philosophy to pin down for anyone, encompassing many strands of thought, beliefs, and values converging at this point in history. It's helpful to think of as cluster of ideas! Please take time to review this synopsis so you can articulate in your own words.\*\**

**Teacher summarizes:** First, let's review! In the early 1800s the Unitarians (and the Universalists) in New England were defining themselves apart from the Calvinist Congregationalist churches that had a very low view of human beings as "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." The early Unitarians rejected that image and emphasized instead the capacity for human goodness and perfectibility. They read the Bible carefully and decided there was no such thing as original sin.

*Remember the time traveling play we read aloud a few weeks ago? With Channing and Emerson?*

William Ellery Channing, in 1819, wrote a radical sermon called "Unitarian Christianity" that helped define Unitarians against the Calvinists. In the sermon, Channing had the audacity to say that the Bible was, "a book written for men, in the language of men" whose "meaning is to be sought in the same manner as that of other books," stressing self-culture and self-cultivation supported by a life of learning, reason, and freedom.

When the children of these early Unitarians grew up, they rebelled against their parents' intellectual religion declaring it cold and lifeless, rejecting social conformity for a more direct experience of truth and beauty.

- **Screen share** lesson attachment 6c (Key Transcendentalist Ideas and Figures)
- Invite volunteers to read aloud the biographies and key points.

**7. Core Tenets of Transcendentalism:** (25 minutes)

**Teacher says:** The boundaries that these figures and ideas transcended can be organized in six core tenets.

(a) **Screen share** lesson attachment 6d (Six Core Tenets of Transcendentalism).

(b) Briefly, ask youth to share what each word/phrase brings to mind.

(c) Write down responses in each box and save document.

(d) **Screen share** lesson attachment 6e (Quotes and Cartoons with a Transcendental Twist!).

(e) **Teacher says:** These core tenets of Transcendentalism have powerfully shaped American history and culture, and we can find their impact everywhere today.

(f) As a group, read and discuss each comic and quote, identifying relevant core tenets of Transcendentalism.

**Closing Questions for Discussion:**

- What tenets or values of Transcendentalism connect with your own beliefs and values?
- What connections do you see with our modern UU faith?

**8. Extinguish the chalice,** saying together: *“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”*

**9. Leave zoom breakout classroom:** wait until all youth have left, click “Leave” then “Leave Meeting.”