

Henry Hikes to Fitchburg

by D. B. Johnson

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A Reading and Discussion Guide

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SUMMARY:

Excerpted from Houghton Mifflin Company “Teacher’s Guide”

http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/readers_guides/henry/hikes.shtml

Henry David Thoreau would maintain that going to Fitchburg was more important than getting to Fitchburg. He wrote, "Live each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influence of each." He believed that we should take advantage of every opportunity, every moment, and that we should enjoy our journeys, not just our destinations

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES:

Excerpted from Designs for Learning by Peggy Sharp: <http://www.peggysharp.com>

1. Students can suggest how long it might have taken Henry to hike the nearly thirty miles to Fitchburg.

They can walk around a track once, and time how long it takes them to make the lap. Remind them to walk at a brisk pace, and that they are not to run. After completing their lap, they multiply the time it took them to walk around the track by 120, because a track lap is 1/4 mile long. Based upon their information, discuss whether it is realistic that Henry walked to Fitchburg in a single day.

2. Henry's friend earned money for train fare. Students can determine how much money his friend earned.

Based upon the information they have about how long it might have taken Henry to make the walk (see above), students can suggest how many hours Henry's friend worked, and how much he earned per hour. Compare his hourly wage with the average wage earned by people today. Next, students can compare the cost of the train ticket to the fare for a similar trip today. Based upon this information,

- students can suggest whether it was worth Henry's friend's time to earn the money to take the train.
3. Students can list the positive and negative aspects of each friend's trip to Fitchburg. Based upon their comparisons they can suggest whether walking or taking the train was the best way to get to Fitchburg. Which route would they take?
 4. Henry's friend earned money from some well-known people in the literary world of Concord. Share some of the writings of Alcott, Emerson, Hawthorne, and Thoreau and discuss any similarities in their topics, style, etc.
 5. The author shares information about Thoreau and his book, *Walden*, at the conclusion of the story. The author indicates that he was inspired by the section of the book to write this story. Students can learn more about Thoreau's life at Walden Pond and suggest how the author has incorporated the Walden experience into this story.
 6. It is clear that Henry and his friend have different views of the world. Students can discuss what the two friends seem to consider important in life and how their actions reflect these beliefs. Students can then suggest which of the friends has a view of life that most closely resembles their own.
 7. Thoreau suggested that the simple life was better. Students can identify the things in their life that they could and could not live without. After making their lists, discuss which of their "must-haves" reflect a simple life and which are part of a material world.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Excerpted from D.B. Johnson Art: <http://www.henryhikes.com>

"Summers meant family picnics and relatives from the city:

With them we flew kites and balsa airplanes in the field across the road. Every year Uncle Herb brought a box of paper left over from a year's worth of jobs at his print shop. My Uncle Bud, an architect, drew wild characters he dreamed up on the spot. Once he gave us a Walter Foster drawing book. That year I used hundreds of sheets of paper copying his crazy faces and adding others from the drawing book. Every summer after that, I dived into that big box of paper and drew some more.

All that drawing got me a lot of friends. In school I became the "class artist," but I didn't take art very seriously. Mostly I roamed the woods and fields up and down our road. I loved the mile walk to the two room schoolhouse.

In high school when I read Henry David Thoreau's book *Walden*, I was surprised to hear the words of someone who loved the earth as much as I did. Later when I studied history and government in college, I read Thoreau's words again. This time I understood, not just his ideas about nature but also his ideas about how to live. If people weren't working so hard to buy stuff, he said, they could spend more time doing what they love. That was an important idea.

I decided to spend my life doing art:

And so I have. More than thirty years ago, after we got married, my wife and I moved back to my small New Hampshire town. Here I worked for the local newspaper drawing cartoons for the letters page. Those cartoons were both funny and serious. Over the years my art became more illustration than cartoon, and it was printed in newspapers and magazines all over the United States.

From the beginning my wife and I made decisions about our family's way of life that had nothing to do with money. Artists don't get paid a lot, so we had to think about what kind of life we wanted and not what kinds of thing we would buy. I worked at home all day drawing pictures. My children could come into the studio any time to talk or to draw. In our home there was no television, but there were library books, and we read aloud to our kids until they were almost teenagers." -DBJ

HELPFUL LINKS:

Teacher's Guide from Houghton Mifflin Company:

http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/readers_guides/henry/hikes.shtml

D.B. Johnson Art: <http://www.henryhikes.com>

Take a Hike with Henry activity: <http://www.cyberbee.com/henryhikes/henry.html>



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