

HENRY DAVID  
*Thoreau*  
for Kids

*His Life and Ideas*

WITH  
21  
ACTIVITIES

Corinne Hosfeld Smith

boyhood, and “saunters” around Walden Pond. By delivering an accurate history and establishing clear connections for Thoreau’s writing and stay at Walden, *Thoreau for Kids* paints an accessible portrait of Thoreau as naturalist, poet, reformer, surveyor, and more. Children will learn about how Thoreau “watched what the government and people around him were doing,” while Smith introduces students to Thoreau’s fight for civil rights and social reforms (37). Thoreau’s travels and scientific excursions are also detailed, and learners will be engrossed by stories about his nature studies and the environment. Young readers will certainly connect with Thoreau as they learn about his life and examine material delivered

## A Review of *Henry David Thoreau for Kids*

By Colleen Ruggieri

Smith, Corinne Hosfeld. *Henry David Thoreau for Kids: His Life and Ideas*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2016. 118 p.

The United States Department of Education reports that more than 50 million students attend public and private schools in America. In examining the factory model of education that still anchors some modern pedagogical practice, one is apt to wonder if Thoreau’s ideas might be lost on children who are far too often desk bound and worksheet driven in their learning. Schools exist within the parameters of paradox; on the one hand, compulsory education is a blessing that affords universal access to learning. The texts, curriculum, and assessments sometimes used in classrooms, however, are removed from Thoreau’s vision of *real* learning. How many elementary children already feel a sense of dread when they get up in the morning and begin their school day? How many high school students are too lost in the system to even listen to the tenets of Transcendentalism as presented in a secondary English class?

*Henry David Thoreau for Kids: His Life and Ideas* by Corinne Hosfeld Smith provides an instructional biography that is the perfect antidote to instances of upper elementary and middle school apathy. Making an author come to life for aspiring scholars is essential, and Smith succeeds in sharing Thoreau’s world through a timeline and narrative that describes his hometown,

from primary sources.

What separates this book from other texts for kids is the injection of active learning projects. Each biographical section offers a hands-on connection to Thoreau’s life and work. The first suggestion is to keep a daily journal, a seemingly basic notion that can prove to be a powerful reflection tool for elementary and middle school students. There are science-based lessons such as measuring the depth of water and studying grains of sand, and there are calls for activism as students are challenged to volunteer with a local charity or write a letter to the editor of a newspaper. These excellent interactive extensions create opportunities for engaged learning about Thoreau and his work, and they cultivate meaningful studies that will deepen learning.

Reading, writing, speaking, and listening (all included in today’s learning standards) would have been in Thoreau’s teaching toolbox. Sometimes lost in translation, however, is his belief that an *engaged* response deepens and extends the learning process beyond a book or a test question. Ultimately, a final grade should not be the goal or end to education; it should really be the beginning. Indeed, it was Thoreau’s engagement in life that created such a lasting legacy. School-aged children are more than a century-and-a-half removed from Thoreau’s time, but Smith’s book provides a path to studying his life and his work.

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