ENG II Honors Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Transcendentalism Socratic Seminar**

*Thoroughly prepare your thoughts in response to each prompt. Thoughtful consideration of each prompt will enable you to engage in discussion throughout the seminar. You will likely need another sheet of paper to fully answer each question.*

Transcendentalism is a philosophy that was popular in New England during the 1830’s. Transcendentalists argued for trusting one’s own intuition above established authority, glorifying nature over industrialization, and following one’s conscience even if it meant breaking the law. Transcendentalists fought for women’s rights and the abolition of slavery just to name a couple of their causes. The writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau influenced such men as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi.

Answer first with your own opinion, then consider the opinions of Emerson and Thoreau. How do their transcendental beliefs complement or differ from your own ideas? Provide textual evidence to prove their positions and consider these positions in a broader, universally relevant context. In other words, how does this idea reflect a universal truth about the human condition?

1. What is the nature of humankind?
2. Who determines right and wrong for the individual?
3. What is the individual’s obligation to society?
4. At what point is it necessary to break the law?
5. Where is the individual closest to the divine?
6. How much of one’s values must one compromise to live in society?
7. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were two of the most influential American thinkers of the 19th century. Why is this?
8. These two men influenced future thinkers and created social change due to their writings. Identify at least three issues/leaders/social movements in society that can be tied to transcendental philosophy. Explain each in detail.
9. One of Emerson’s most profound claims is: “To be great is to be misunderstood.” How does he support this claim? Analyze the significance of this and consider it in a universal context.
10. Emerson claims “In the woods we return to reason and faith.” What does he mean by this?
11. Thoreau argues “That government is best which governs least.” What does this mean? How does this tie to transcendental philosophy?
12. What does Emerson mean when he says that "envy is ignorance and imitation is suicide"?
13. What does Emerson want each individual to recognize about him/herself? What does he say about "power" and "work"? Why/How are these messages still significant to us today?
14. Emerson sees society as the enemy of individuality. Why? Analyze this. Do you agree?
15. What is the role of nonconformity in society? What did that word mean to Emerson? To Thoreau? To you?