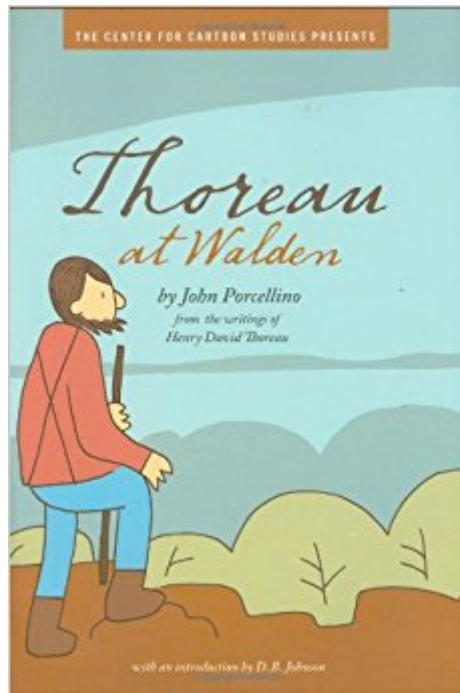




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# Thoreau At Walden



## Synopsis

“I am convinced, both by faith and experience, that to maintain one’s self on this earth is not a hardship, but a pastime, if we will live simply and wisely.” So said Henry David Thoreau in 1845 when he began his famous experiment in living on Walden Pond. In this graphic masterpiece, John Porcellino uses only the words of Thoreau himself to tell the story of those two years off the beaten track. The pared-down text focuses on Thoreau’s most profound ideas, and Porcellino’s fresh, simple pictures bring the philosopher’s sojourn at Walden to cinematic life. For readers who know Walden intimately, this graphic treatment will provide a vivid new interpretation of Thoreau’s story. For those who have never read (or never completed!) the original, it presents a contemporary look at a few brave words to live by.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The latest high-quality graphic-format book from folks associated with the Center for Cartoon Studies introduces another significant historical personage, Henry David Thoreau. Although the life and work of the nineteenth-century transcendental philosopher and protoenvironmentalist might seem an odd choice for adaptation into sequential art, Porcellino, alternative comics writer/artist and master of the minicomic, has found a way to translate Thoreau’s thinking into an involving read that exudes lightness and tranquility. Marrying his minimalist line work to Thoreau’s minimalist philosophy, Porcellino manages a striking unity of words and art that works as an effective ode to simplicity. Thoreau’s writings, excerpted out of chronological order, are recast into a narrative that moves from the philosopher’s self-ostracism from society and his time at Walden and into

the feeling of calm reverie he took from his experiences. This will be a difficult sell to casual readers, but budding philosophers and readers looking for an unusual work will be delighted. Extensive endnotes include explanations and attributions for the excerpts and a short bibliography. Grades 8-12. --Jesse Karp

Here's a perfect marriage of artist & subject, as the minimalist observer of everyday life/student of Zen Buddhism/autobiographical cartoonist with punk rock roots John Porcellino offers a beautifully simple (but never simplistic) adaptation of the Thoreau classic in graphic novel form. Porcellino is a natural for Thoreau, sharing much of the same bare-bones philosophy & communion with Nature as the different drummer of Walden Pond. This is a wonderful gift for any child, not only as a fine introduction to a voice that needs to be heard all the more now, but also as a reminder that comics embrace far more than the adolescent superhero fantasies currently dominating American culture. Using selected lines of Thoreau's original text, accompanied by his spare, not-a-a-single-line-wasted style of art, Porcellino captures & evokes the quiet but vigorous worldview of the book. And while it may be geared for children, any thoughtful adult will find much to love in its pages as well -- most highly recommended!

Thoreau at Walden by John Porcellino is a graphic treatment based on the writings of Henry David Thoreau. Using simple line drawings and selected excerpts from Thoreau's Walden, Porcellino retells the story of America's first environmentalist and his experiences living at Walden Pond. The book begins with an outstanding introduction by D.B. Johnson introducing Thoreau to readers. The body of the book is displayed comic-style with a mixture of captions and speech bubbles. Those who already know the story will enjoy picking out the famous quotes and anecdotes, while students new to Thoreau will be provided with an introduction that's likely to stimulate further reading. Although many of the famous quotes are included, many are left out. It's interesting to think about what you would include and exclude in creating this type of graphic interpretation. The last section of the book provided insights into the way Porcellino wove Thoreau's text throughout the book. It was particularly interesting to read passages by Thoreau that appear as wordless illustrations in the book. For instance, Thoreau's experience with an owl is told by Porcellino without the use of words. I envision teachers pairing this experience with the Henry series by D.B. Johnson including Henry Hikes to Fitchberg. It would also be interesting for young people to take a virtual visit to Walden Pond using Google Earth. Those interested in reading the entire works of Henry David Thoreau can read most of them at Websites online. This is one in a series of graphic biographies from The Center

for Cartoon Studies. Each book provides an interesting insight into a well-known person. I highly recommend Thoreau at Walden along with the other graphic biographies from The Center for Cartoon Studies.

The exquisite combination of graphics and wording makes this an elegant gift for any age, children or adults and will prompt many discussions from all. The printing is beautiful and captures the essence of what Walden was all about. My parents may have given me my name based on his!!! Alden Cohen

the gift list.

Credit The Center for Cartoon Studies with this much; it isn't your everyday average run-of-the-mill comic book variety factory. I mean, any schlub can slap together a bunch of panels, paste in some vague dialogue and facts, and then create enough computer images to declare their product a graphic novel bio of such n' such a figure. It's much harder when you want to do something a little more original with your subject. When The Center produced *Satchel Paige: Striking Out Jim Crow* last year, they didn't make it some rote retelling of facts. Instead they created a story around their subject, placing Satchel at the center of the action rather than the story. I was curious to see how they'd tackle their next project: Henry David Thoreau. The result was not what I'd expected. Simplifying everything down to its most essential components, John Porcellino takes Thoreau's *Walden* and conveys ideas through the minimum words and images needed to tell his tale. Its success is dependent entirely on the reader's willingness to play along. Separated into four seasons, the reader follows Henry David Thoreau as he spends time living on his own alongside Walden Pond. Snatches of his writings from the time dot the text, with much of the attention paid to his quieter moments of pause and reflection. Watching an owl in a tree, standing in the rain, or sitting in the middle of a boat in the center of his pond, artist John Porcellino allows us the chance to experience the simple miracles of the everyday through Thoreau's eyes. With an almost minimalist style of cartooning, we see Porcellino recount the incident with the poll tax and other well-known moments, but for the most part this is a book that takes Thoreau's message to heart and seeks to present a book that conveys the message of Walden visually rather than with words. I was pleased to see that D.B. Johnson was responsible for the Introduction to this book. Best known for his Henry picture books (*Henry Hikes to Fitchburg*, *Henry Works*, etc.) starring a Thoreauized bear, Johnson delivers a beautiful summary of Thoreau's life, his ideas, and the way in which John Porcellino has

captured the his spirit with remarkably few lines. Says Johnson, "You may regret that not all of Thoreau's words are here, but I do not. His words are among the most quoted of any writer and are found everywhere today. What could not be found until now are the countless moments of silence that Thoreau experienced at Walden Pond." I see it this way; anyone can relay a person's words. It takes a special talent to relay a person's peace of mind. I would also say that Johnson's Introduction is essential reading before you start in on the story. If you don't understand that this is a book that hopes to capture the quiet moments between Thoreau's thoughts then you might be confused as to why not much happens in the story. As Porcellino says of his book, it is, "not a definitive or chronological account of Thoreau's stay at the pond, but rather an impression of his experience there." My husband was unconvinced of Porcellino's cartooning talent. And it would be fair to say that many people could pick up this book and see it as childlike and simplistic. But I suppose that Porcellino was paired specifically with Thoreau because the simplicity of his line echoes the simplicity of the text. I began to wonder if the story could have been improved it had been in color. Thus far the books created by The Center for Cartoon Studies have all been black and white. This cuts down on costs, but something about this book felt like it should have had color in it. Not gross shadings and undulating tones, but straightforward blues for the lake, greens for the trees, and the color of a huckleberry hanging off a bush. If any book deserved it, this one did. I know that when some people read in Johnson's Introduction that Porcellino has reduced Thoreau's words to a minimum, they're going to be concerned. To what extent do you trust a comic book artist to adapt an American philosopher? Porcellino's Afterword addresses the changes that he has made, and it certainly put my heart at ease to hear him describe what he did. "All the words in this book, with a few exceptions (noted below), come directly from Thoreau's published writings (though I've taken the liberty of altering punctuation when necessary, and combining, and rearranging the quotations to make the story flow." To account for all of this he has a complete list of Quotation Sources at the end of the book detailing each quote and where it can be found "in editions of Thoreau's work that are currently in print and easily available." The book's last few pages also contain a map, Panel Discussions, and a Bibliography of works about both Walden and Thoreau. Thoreau at Walden would pair beautifully with a high school or college course in which students had to read Walden on their own. I know that had I read this book (and its Introduction) when I was younger I might have been able to understand a lot more of what Thoreau was trying to say. Advocates of civil disobedience, environmentalism, simple living, vegetarianism, and more adore him. It only stands to reason that we should find ways to get his books into the hands of our children. And Thoreau at Walden is now the number one method of doing so.

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