Walden, And Civil Disobedience: Authoritative Texts, Background, Reviews, And Essays In Criticism

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Civil Disobedience can be a challenging read for high school students due to its rambling style. However, it is an excellent resource because of its importance in protest literature and also for the many historical themes it presents. A Teacher’s Guide to Henry David Thoreau’s Walden and Civil Disobedience SYNOPSIS OF THE ESSAY Nature of Government In the opening of Civil Disobedience, Thoreau expresses his opinion about government, its nature and legitimacy. Thoreau believes that government is an expedient that is usually inexpedient, saying “government is best which governs not at all” (p. 275). Thoreau argues that a standing government can abuse and pervert the will of the people in the same way a standing army can abuse and pervert freedom. Resistance to Civil Government, called Civil Disobedience for short, is an essay by American transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau that was first published in 1849. In it, Thoreau argues that individuals should not permit governments to overrule or atrophy their consciences, and that they have a duty to avoid allowing such acquiescence to enable the government to make them the agents of injustice. Thoreau was motivated in part by his disgust with slavery and the Mexican-American War (1846–1848).