

Question-and-Answer Session With Students at the Thoreau Institute in
Lincoln, Massachusetts
June 5, 1998

Writings of Henry David Thoreau

Participant. I'm Liz Coogan from Concord Middle School here in Massachusetts, and this question is for you, Mr. President and Mr. Henley. What do Thoreau's writings and Walden Woods mean to you?

The President. To me they mean two things. First, when I was very young and was first exposed to Thoreau's writings, he crystallized the feelings that I had when I was in nature and awakened in me a sense of profound obligation to respect and to preserve the natural environment.

The second thing that impressed me about Thoreau from the very beginning is how much he learned about himself and about human nature and society by living apart from it for a while, how much, in effect, he learned about life by being a solitary person living alone for an extended period of time.

It made a huge impression on me because most people wouldn't think that you could learn that much about life living alone. But when I saw what he wrote about solitude, for example, he persuaded me that you could learn quite a lot.

[At this point, musician Don Henley, founder of the institute, responded that Thoreau had helped him discover spirituality in nature, as well as a sense of place. Hillary Rodham Clinton said she also appreciated Thoreau's emphasis on the importance of nature, calling him one of the founding fathers of the Nation's environmental movement. Russian students at the Mu-

nicipal Children's Ecological Center in St. Petersburg, Russia, who participated by live video hookup, then presented Mrs. Clinton with a copy of an artwork they had previously presented to the Thoreau Institute.]

Environmental Issues Education

The President. I would just like to say that I very much appreciate the work that you're doing at the institute to teach the Russian children about the environment and how we have to preserve it.

Most adults in all industrial countries were raised to believe that in order to have a strong economy you have to destroy part of the environment, and we have to change that. We have to raise a whole generation of young people who believe that the only way to preserve the economy over the long run is to take care of the environment. And if we all work at it together, we'll be successful.

Russian Participant. I think, Mr. President, that we cannot only be hopeful that everything will be the way you said right now, but we can be positive that it is going to be like that in the future.

The President. *Spacibo* [Thank you].

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:34 p.m. in the Education Center. Participants present at the institute were students from Boston Latin School, Lincoln-Sudbury High School, and Concord Middle School. The Russian video participant spoke in Russian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks at the Grand Opening of the Thoreau Institute in Lincoln
June 5, 1998

Thank you; please sit down. Well, we've been here a long time in this beautiful setting, and if Thoreau were here, he would say we need more silence and less talk. But I have immensely enjoyed what has been said.

Senator Kerry has been a consistent, devoted supporter of the environment, and he was profoundly eloquent about it today. Senator Kennedy has worked so hard for projects like this one for so long now, but he has a way of telling a personal story that brings home to