Emerson's literary work is scattered in poems, essays, lectures, and even in the journals from which these published works grew. "This Book is my Savings Bank," he said in a journal entry before his literary career had begun, and for many years he deposited there the first formulations of the thoughts that would later be developed for lectures or for publication. That evolving body of thought, more than any individual expression of it, constitutes his literary achievement.

The fundamental call to the reader in Emerson's work is to the act of experiencing the world, and the most important single word in his writings is soul. The meanings he associated with soul, however, go beyond the narrow dictionary definition of a spiritual self that is distinct from the body. For Emerson, the soul is related to our intellectual perceptions, to our moral natures as individuals, and perhaps most of all to our sense of ourselves as organic beings who are at this moment alive in the world. The soul is the activator of these various parts of ourselves. When the soul is aroused, we perceive and evaluate life in a new way, but most especially we feel our existence with a new keenness. Early in his first book, Nature, Emerson records an instance from his own experience: "Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear." Such times of supreme aliveness, of joy in one's being so intense that it touches even the fear of nonbeing, are the work of the aroused soul. They do not depend upon favorable circumstances or personal good fortune, and they are not planned or prepared for. Instead, at such moments we are surprised by joy, seized unexpectedly by a vivid sense of being that is so much richer than our ordinary lives that Emerson could compare it only to waking from sleep. We all, he wrote in an early journal entry, "want awakening. Get the soul out of bed, out into God's universe, to a perception of its beauty, and hearing of its call, and your vulgar man, your ... selfish sensualist, awakes ... and is conscious of force to shake the world."

That force is spirit, at once the essence of our human being and of the world's being: "The world proceeds from the same spirit as the body of man." The double action of the soul is to open to us the hidden recesses of our own natures and so vastly to expand our sense of our lives, and at the same time to teach "the perception that the world was made by a mind like ours." The vital center of Emerson's call to experience is the promise that we can be more fully, both in ourselves and in the world. When the soul is active, "Man is conscious of a universal soul within or behind his individual life," as he put it in one place; at such times, as he said in another, "I am not alone or unacknowledged."

If we have the potential to be changed so dramatically through the soul's powers, to find in ourselves intellectual and moral capacities and a joy of being that in ordinary circumstances we do not even suspect, the obvious question is why this transformation is so little evident in individual lives ("in a century, ... one or two approximations to the right state of every man," Emerson estimated) or in the broad sweep of human history. For the individual, the chief obstacles to change are personal comfort and the safety of tradition, which prevent us from investigating our own natures with such intensity: "God offers to every mind its choice between truth and repose." But for humanity as a whole Emerson required a more elaborate answer. He gave part of it in the introduction to Nature, where he argues that habit and tradition have become a wall against the soul's insights.

Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchers of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? Embosomed for a season in nature, whose floods of life stream around and through us, and invite us, by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature, why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe? The sun shines today also. There is more wool and flax in the fields. There are new lands, new men, pew thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship. —Nature

Nature itself draws us from dependence upon the past and invites us to a richer state of being. In nature we are restored to "reason and faith," freed from "all mean egotism," and opened to the soul's perception of those "currents of the Universal Being" that underlie our lives and to the wondrous beauty of a creation that reflects our own spirit.

In the woods is perpetual youth. Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he
should tire of them in a thousand years. In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life—no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball. I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God. The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental: to be brothers, to be acquaintances, master or servant, is then a trifle and a disturbance. I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature.

This call for a revolution in thought and attitude is followed by a radical inquiry into subjects that have remained of interest—and often still mysterious—since Emerson’s time: the meaning of physical facts in nature as an expression of an original design and, especially, their relation to a corresponding sense of design in the human mind; a new understanding of the aesthetic faculty that makes us value beauty in persons, in natural objects, and in art; the origins of language and the way they express a “radical correspondence between visible things and human thoughts”; and nature, in the form of science, as a discipline of the mind in the universal laws that underlie both nature and mind.

Throughout Nature, Emerson is of course implicitly calling for practical reform and renewal. "We want men and women," as he said elsewhere, "who shall renovate life and our social state...." But the primary emphasis of this first book is that the great secrets of nature and of our own human nature are one, and that we have in us a capacity for being and for growth of which we have scarcely dreamed. Once we truly ask the reason and purpose of the world,

many truths arise to us out of the recesses of consciousness. We learn that the highest is present to the soul of man; that the dread universal essence, which is not wisdom, or love, or beauty, or power, but all in one, and each entirely, is that for which all things exist, and that by which they are—, that spirit creates; that behind nature, throughout nature, spirit is present; one and not compound it does not act upon us from without, that is, in space and time, but spiritually, or through ourselves: therefore, that spirit, that is, the Supreme Being, does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old. As a plant upon the earth, so a man rests upon the bosom of God; he is nourished by unfailing fountains, and draws at his need inexhaustible power. Who can set bounds to the possibilities of man? —Nature

In the year following Nature, 1837, Emerson was invited to address Harvard's Phi Beta Kappa Society, the best scholars at the college. His lecture, "The American Scholar," was a call not only to a love of ideas but to action and "the conversion of the world." The young men in his audience felt they were listening to a new Declaration of Independence, this time of intellectual independence. "Our day of dependence," Emerson said, "our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close." Before that can be completed, however, we must adopt a new idea of the American scholar to fit the new facts of a democratic culture. Our scholar will not be the aloof "thinker" of older societies, where the class role defines the person. Instead, the American scholar will simply be "Man Thinking," the intellectual function of the individual in a culture which values the individual above all: "The main enterprise of the world ... is the upbuilding of a man."

The most important influence in shaping the mind and character of this future scholar, stronger even than books, will be nature, "this web of God" that surrounds every life. From the first hint that nature "resembles his own spirit," the young scholar will learn "to worship the soul" and through study to discover "that nature is the opposite [the mirror image] of the soul, answering to it part for part." The ancient advice, "Know thyself," and the modern scientific precept, "Study nature;" lead to the same end. "The world—this shadow of the soul, or other me—lies wide around. Its attractions are the keys which unlock my thoughts and make me acquainted with myself."

Armed with this insight—and the discipline that results from it—the scholar will acquire the self-trust, freedom, and bravery necessary to his high office. His duties are "to cheer, to raise, and to guide men by showing them facts amidst appearances." The central fact beneath the world's appearances is that "the one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul," which gives value both to the world
and to life. Once we conceive the "boundless resources of the soul," we see a similarly unlimited potential for change in society, in humanity, even in nature.

It is a mischievous notion that we are come late into nature; that the world was finished a long time ago. As the world was plastic and fluid in the hands of God, so it is ever to so much of his attributes as we bring to it. To ignorance and sin, it is flint. They adapt themselves to it as they may; but in proportion as a man has any thing in him divine, the firmament flows before him and takes his signet and form. Not he is great who can alter matter, but he who can alter my state of mind .... The great man makes the great thing.... The unstable estimates of men crowd to him whose mind is filled with a truth, as the heaped waves of the Atlantic follow the moon.

For this self-trust, the reason is deeper than can be fathom'd—darker than can be enlightened. I might not carry with me the feeling of my audience in stating my own belief. But I have already shown the ground of my hope, in adverting to the doctrine that man is one. I believe man has been wronged; he has wronged himself. He has almost lost the light that can lead him back to his prerogatives. Men are become of no account. Men in history, men in the world of today, are bugs, are spawn, and are called "the mass" and "the herd."

—The American Scholar

Despite this loss of individualism in the modern world, Emerson could already see hopeful signs of change in the America of his time. One was the increasing democracy in the arts, especially in literature, which was taking new interest in the lives "of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life.... It is a great stride. It is a sign—is it not?—of new vigor... I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic; what is doing in Italy or Arabia.... I embrace the common." Only a truly democratic culture, he knew, could foster the full development of every individual that was the ultimate promise of American society:

Another sign of our times ... is the new importance given to the single person. Every thing that tends to insulate the individual—to surround him with barriers of natural respect, so that each man shall feel the world is his, and man shall treat with man as a sovereign state with a sovereign state—tends to true union as well as greatness.... The scholar is that man who must take up into himself all the ability of the time, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future. He must be an university of knowledges. If there be one lesson more than another which should pierce his ear, it is, The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature, . . . in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all; it is for you to dare all. Mr. President and Gentlemen, this confidence in the unsearched might of man belongs, by all motives, by all prophecy, by all preparation, to the American Scholar. We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame. Public and private avarice make the air we breathe thick and fat. The scholar is decent, indolent, complaisant. See already the tragic consequence. The mind of this country, taught to aim at low objects, eats upon itself. There is no work for any but the decorous and the complaisant. Young men of the fairest promise, who begin life upon our shores, inflated by the mountain winds, shined upon by all the stars of God, find the earth below not in unison with these but are hindered from action by the disgust which the principles on which business is managed inspire, and turn drudges, or die of disgust, some of them suicides. What is the remedy? They did not yet see, and thousands of young men as hopeful now crowding to the barriers for the career do not yet see, that if the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him. Patience—patience; with the shades of all the good and great for company; and for solace the perspective of your own infinite life; and for work the study and the communication of principles, the making those instincts prevalent, the conversion of the world.... We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds.... A nation
of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men. —The American Scholar

The next year, 1838, Emerson again carried his message to Harvard, this time to the graduating class of young ministers at the Divinity School. Soon after his lecture Emerson had reason to remind himself of the scholar's necessary self-trust and bravery. "The Divinity School Address" evoked a storm of outraged protest (Emerson re- ferred to it, ironically, as "this storm in our washbowl") in which he was attacked for "infidelity" and even "atheism." His criticism of religious tradition and conformity was taken as an attack upon Christianity itself, but in fact Emerson was seeing in Christ the fulfillment of the human potential that the soul promised.

Jesus Christ belonged to the true race of prophets. He saw with open eye the mystery of the soul. Drawn by its severe harmony, ravished with its beauty, he lived in it, and had his being there. Alone in all history he estimated the greatness of man. One man was true to what is in you and me. He saw that God incarnates himself in man, and evermore goes forth anew to take possession of his World. —The Divinity School Address

As this passage indicates, Emerson found in religion, as in nature, a continuing revelation of the truth that God has infused into the human soul.

We have contrasted the Church with the Soul. In the soul then let the redemption be sought. Wherever a man comes, there comes revolution. The old is for slaves. When a man comes, all books are legible, all things transparent, all religions are forms.... The stationariness of religion; the assumption that the age of inspiration is past, that the Bible is closed; the fear of degrading the character of Jesus by representing him as a man; indicate with sufficient clearness the falsehood of our theology. It is the office of a true teacher to show us that God is, not was; that He speaketh, not spake. The true Christianity—a faith like Christ's in the infinitude of men—is lost. None believeth in the soul of man, but only in some man or person old and departed. —The Divinity School Address

In a journal entry a few weeks later, Emerson observed that his attackers believed that "the religion of God, the being of God, ... [is] dependent on what we say of it, ... the natural feeling in the mind whose religion is external.... The aim of a true teacher now would be to bring men back to a trust in God and destroy before their eyes these idolatrous propositions: to teach the doctrine of the perpetual revelation." A doctrine of "perpetual revelation" of course promises revolution, radical change, and it was this that the Harvard faculty heard in Emerson's address. He would be banned from speaking at Harvard for more than twenty years.

The reaction to "The Divinity School Address" is part of the back- ground of Emerson's most famous essay, "Self-Reliance." "For non- conformity the world whips you with its displeasure." he said there, remembering the displeasure which his own nonconformity had aroused. "Self-Reliance" is a distillation of his ideas up to this point in his life, complicated thoughts boiled down into short sentences. But the essay has a harsh new edge of criticism directed against society and social institutions, which, as he now had reason to know, both resist reform and scorn the reformer. "Self-Reliance" is our most famous statement of American individualism, as it is the source of the best-known quotations from Emerson. But as these quotations remind us, Emerson now sees individualism in sharp, even deadly conflict with society. The effect of "society" is not to strengthen the individual but to breed conformity and fear:

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string.

Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members.

The virtue in most request is conformity.

Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist.

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds ...

To be great is to be misunderstood.
We are afraid of truth, afraid of fortune, afraid of death, and afraid of each other.

Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind.

But such criticisms of society are finally less important in "Self-Reliance" than the powers—of perception, of virtue, most of all of "the sense of being"—that are opened to the individual through the active soul.

The magnetism which all original action exerts is explained when we inquire the reason of self-trust. Who is the Trustee? What is the aboriginal Self, on which a universal reliance may be grounded? What is the nature and power of that science-baffling star, without parallax, without calculable elements, which shoots a ray of beauty even into trivial and impure actions, if the least mark of independence appear? The inquiry leads us to that source, at once the essence of genius, of virtue, and of life, which we call Spontaneity or Instinct. We denote this primary wisdom as Intuition, whilst all later teachings are tuitions. In that deep force, the last fact behind which analysis cannot go, all things find their common origin. For the sense of being which in calm hours rises, we know not how, in the soul, is not diverse from things, from space, from light, from time, from man, but one with them and proceeds obviously from the same source whence their life and being also proceed. We first share the life by which things exist and afterwards see them as appearances in nature and forget that we have shared their cause. Here is the fountain of action and of thought. Here are the lungs of that inspiration which giveth man wisdom and which cannot be denied without impiety and atheism. We lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us receivers of its truth and organs of its activity. When we discern justice, when we discern truth, we do nothing of ourselves, but allow a passage to its beams. If we ask whence this comes, if we seek to pry into the soul that causes, all philosophy is at fault. Its presence or its absence is all we can affirm. Every man discriminates between the voluntary acts of his mind and his involuntary perceptions, and knows that to his involuntary perceptions a perfect faith is due. He may err in the expression of them, but he knows that these things are so, like day and night, not to be disputed. —Self-Reliance

Emerson was also coming to recognize, even as he was losing hope for social progress, how revolutionary a true individualism would be: "It is easy to see that a greater self-reliance must work a revolution in all the offices and relations of men; in their religion; in their education; in their pursuits; their modes of living. . . ."

As it turned out, this revolution was continually postponed. Society did not improve: "Our young people have thought and written much on labor and reform, and for all that ... neither the world nor them- selves have got on a step." For all the fervor of the abolitionists, including his own, slavery continued, and the country stumbled toward inevitable civil war. Emerson was deeply depressed by the Fugitive Slave Law, which required the free states to hunt down escaped slaves and send them back into slavery. But he could do nothing but express his rage in his journal: "this filthy enactment was made in the nineteenth century by people who could read and write. I will not obey it, by God." Even western expansion did not, as he had once hoped, lead to a corresponding expansion of the national mind and character. "Great country, diminutive minds," he noted in his journal. Nor did civil war itself bring evident renewal: "We hoped that in the peace, after such a war, a great expansion would follow in the mind of the country; grand views in every direction, true freedom in politics, in religion, in social science, in thought. But the energy of the nation seems to have expended itself in the war...."

Disappointed by this lack of true social progress, Emerson was thrown back upon his hopes for the individual—and the undoubted powers of the soul. He reminded himself that if life has many slack hours of discouragement, of the dead-alive feeling when the soul is inactive, still there is another, truer measurement of time: "We must be very suspicious of the deceptions of the element of time. It takes a good deal of time to eat or to sleep, or to earn a hundred dollars, and a very little time to entertain a hope and an insight which be- comes the light of our life." We must "learn to look for the permanent in the mutable and fleeting," to hold to the soul's knowledge amid the distractions of the body's necessities: "I affirm the divinity of man; but ... I know how much is my debt to bread and coffee and flannel and heated room... ." "Man," as he would say now, "lives by pulses," and true life is measured out not in its duration but its intensity: "...in seeking to find what is the heart of the day, we come to the quality of the moment... It is the depth
at which we live that imports. We pierce [in those deeper moments] to the eternity," and then life seems of "vast duration." He was glad to remember an old French saying, that God works in moments.

Even nature, although it remained the physical expression of universal spirit, changed for Emerson over the years and no longer seemed so simply beneficial. "The way of Providence is a little rude," he said in "Fate," a late essay. An earthquake in Italy had recently crushed "ten thousand persons" in seconds, and lesser natural catastrophes are the material of daily news. Our own "western prairie shakes with fever andague," and nature everywhere, in a memorable phrase, has its "reapers and bloody jumpers" and the sound of "the crackle of the bones of [their] prey...." This bloody preying of creature upon creature, one species "living at the expense" of others in a nature red in tooth and claw, was now for Emerson the inescapable "system" of the natural world. And, he reminded his readers, "our habits are like theirs." Humanity is in fact the most "expensive" species in this chain of eating, "however scrupulously the slaughterhouse is concealed" from the dinner table.

Such thoughts were part of Emerson's growing understanding of nature in terms of evolution and of human life as a part of the natural history of the earth. Nature now meant limitation. "Nature is what you may do. There is much you may not." Human nature is what evolution has made it, a limitation upon the present powers of the soul. If, earlier, Emerson had emphasized human freedom and the potential for change, now he fully recognized the "negative power" of circumstance and of all that "hints of the term by which our life is walled up," from the accidents of nature and the faults of our individual temperaments to the universal fact of mortality.

Emerson was not made pessimistic by these new perceptions. Nor did he lose faith in the soul's insights and powers. But his earliest optimism was tempered in these later years by a realistic assessment of all there is in both the world's nature and our human nature that stubbornly resists the soul's idealism.

In "Fate," his strongest essay of this period, life is precariously poised between the expansive freedom promised by the soul and the "fate" imposed by the natural and historical circumstances that surround every individual life. The conditions of our times and of ourselves everywhere wall us in, and a certain determinism in life cannot be denied. But a famous passage in that essay works out at length what Emerson meant by saying, "So far as a man thinks, he is free." Opposing fate is the "power" of the soul, the God within. Man, strangely, is a "stupendous antagonism," a part of "the order of nature" but not wholly, for he sees and comprehends that order and in that way transcends it. He is himself a creature, one that even physically betrays his connections with the lower animals. Yet he is not just creature, for he perceives his "creatureliness" as no true creature can. Within the apparently blind forces of nature, man is the conscious agent, part of "the spirit which composes and decomposes nature...." As Emerson said elsewhere, "he who sees through the design, presides over it...." Human freedom is a necessary component of fate.

Thus we trace Fate in matter, mind, and morals; in race ... and in thought and character as well. It is everywhere bound or limitation. But Fate has its lord; limitation its limits—is different seen from above and from below, from within and from without. For though Fate is immense, so is Power, which is the other fact in the dual world, immense. If Fate follows and limits Power, Power attends and antagonizes Fate. We must respect Fate as natural history, but there is in re than natural history. For who and what is this criticism that pries into the matter? Man is not order of nature, sack and sack, belly and members, link in a chain, nor any ignominious baggage; but a stupendous antagonism, a dragging together of the poles of the Universe. He betrays his relation to what is below him—thick-skulled, small-brained, fishy, quadrumanous, quadruped ill-disguised, hardly escaped into biped—and has paid for the new powers by loss of some of the old ones. But the lightning which explodes and fashions planets, maker of planets and suns, is in him. On one side elemental order, sandstone and granite, rock ledges, peat bog, forest, sea and shore; and on the other part thought, the spirit which composes and decomposes nature—here they are, side by side, god and devil, mind and matter, king and conspirator, belly and spasm, riding peacefully together in the eye and brain of every man.

Nor can he blink the free will. To hazard the contradiction—freedom is necessary. If you please to plant yourself on the side of Fate, and say, Fate is all; then we say, a part of Fate is the freedom of man. Forever wells up the impulse of choosing and acting in the soul. Intellect annuls Fate. So far as a man thinks, he is free. —Fate
Perhaps as much as his specific ideas it is this conviction that the human spirit always transcends its circumstances that accounts for Emerson's enormous and still continuing influence upon American literature. He is a constant reminder that the truest dimensions of our lives are the inner ones: "What is life but what a man is thinking all day?" He believed, as the artist must, that the clearest path to the inner recesses of the human spirit is through the imagination, and so he assures all artists of the worth of their endeavors. But he understood also that, for everyone, the imagination is that absolute human freedom which must be preserved within whatever fatalities of life. It should be said of him as he said of his friend and fellow writer Henry David Thoreau at Thoreau's death: "He knew the worth of the Imagination for the uplifting and consolation of human life. . . ."

To his disappointment, Emerson never became the poet whose creative imagination readily finds the forms and words that uplift and console others. Instead, his literary legacy is in the lectures and essays by which the scholar seeks "to cheer, to raise, and to guide men...." Even his essays are less valued as wholes than for individual sentences and insights. Yet those sentences and ideas have hooked themselves deeply into the American consciousness. Emerson's hope that a democratic culture can truly foster the development of every person remains a hope still, the necessary promise of political democracy. His belief that the soul's perceptions can provide a moral principle for our existence, serve as a spur to fundamental change, and lead us to realize our full potential as individuals remains a tantalizing ideal.

Most of all, perhaps, Emerson's legacy has been his faith in the soul's powers-to invigorate and expand our sense of being alive, to "reattach the deeds of everyday to the holy and mysterious recesses of life," to make us truly at home in our momentary existence as organic beings in a world that is intimately related to us because the same spirit made both. "In some sort," Emerson observed, "the end of life is that the man should take the universe up into himself"—that is, should come to feel so completely in his life that the whole outer universe would seem a familiar part of his own consciousness. The world's being and his own would then seem indistinguishable. How infinite was Emerson's belief in the human spirit may be guessed from an almost casual remark in his journal: "A great deal of God in the Universe but not valuable to us until we can make it up into man." Short of that ultimate sharing of the divine consciousness, however, we must have a foundation for our identity as individual human beings who live in the world.

Emerson supplies one in a reassuring sentence that could serve as the bedrock of all his work: "The soul's emphasis is always right." Emerson's concern is always with the fundamental questions of meaning in the world and understanding in us. Nothing could be more human. The appropriate summation of his thought may therefore be a passage that speaks of a "region of destiny, of aspiration, of the unknown" in our deepest selves that cannot be "inventoried" in our outward lives; of the understandings that glimmer just beyond the reach of our minds; of the awe-inspiring "Life" of spirit that underlies our transitory individual lives. As it happens, the passage is not from a lecture or published essay. It is just Emerson, a man always interested in the thoughts that pass through his mind, speaking his mind—and heart—to himself in the privacy of his journal. He is attesting, as always, to his faith that the human being is not a completed creature but a "golden possibility" of intellectual, moral, and spiritual development. It is a faith that a democratic culture can never afford to lose.

It is the largest part of a man that is not inventoried. He has many enumerable parts: he is social, professional, political, sectarian, literary, and is this or that set and corporation. But after the most exhausting census has been made, there remains as much more which no tongue can tell. And this remainder is that which interests. This is that which the preacher and the poet and the musician speak to. This is that which the strong genius works upon; the region of destiny, of aspiration, of the unknown. Ah, they have a secret persuasion that as little as the y pass for in the world, they are immensely rich in expectancy and power. Nobody has ever yet dispossessed this adhesive self to arrive at any glimpse or guess of the awful Life that lurks under it.

Far the best part, I repeat, of every mind is not that which he knows, but that which hovers in gleams, suggestions, tantalizing, unpossessed, before him. His firm recorded knowledge soon loses all interest for him. But this dancing chorus of thoughts and hopes is the quarry of his future, is his possibility, and teaches him that his man's life is of a ridiculous brevity and meanness, but that it is his first age and trial only of his young wings, that vast revolutions, migrations, and gyres on gyres in the celestial societies invite him. —The Journals
Study and Discussion Questions

1. The first selection from *Nature* (page 1) builds toward the “new”—“new lands, new men, new thoughts.” How does Emerson characterize the “old,” the past?

2. In the third selection from *Nature* (page 2), Emerson argues that the spirit which created the universe also created us and is the soul in us. How should we understand the proposition that spirit “does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us”?

3. In the first selection from “The American Scholar” (page 3), “self-trust” is clearly the highest kind of individualism. What is contrasted with this “self-trust”?

4. The second selection from “The American Scholar” (pages 3-4) develops a contrast between the scholar of the present and the American scholar of the future. a. What are the essential differences between them? b. What part does the “Divine Soul” play in all this?

5. The passage from “Self Reliance” (page 5) sums up views that we have seen in earlier Emerson essays. a. If all that is taught to us by others may be called “tuitions,” what kind of knowledge is classified as “intuition”? b. Where else in Emerson have we seen this idea?

6. The passage from “Fate” (pages 5-6) works out a complex relationship between fate and freedom in human life. In what sense is it true for Emerson that “a part of Fate is the freedom of man”?