

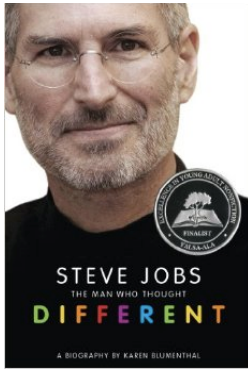
## EIGHT GREAT CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY NONFICTION AMERICAN TEXTS

*Steve Jobs: The Man Who Thought Different* by Karen Blumenthal

*Walden* by Henry David Thoreau

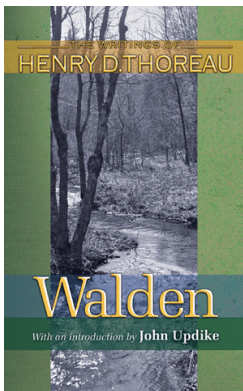
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“He could be volatile, screaming at associates, competitors, and reporters. He sometimes cried when things didn’t go his way and he regularly took credit for the ideas of others. He could be both charming and gratingly abrasive, sensitive and stunningly mean-spirited . . . He was both loved and hated, intensely admired and widely dismissed. People described him with the strongest words: Visionary. Showman. Artist. Tyrant. Genius. Jerk.”

—Karen Blumenthal, *Steve Jobs: The Man Who Thought Different*  
(New York: Feiweil and Friends, 2012)



“The real Thoreau was, in the fullest sense of the word, self-obsessed: narcissistic, fanatical about self-control, adamant that he required nothing beyond himself to understand and thrive in the world . . . *Walden* is less a cornerstone work of environmental literature than the original cabin porn: a fantasy about rustic life divorced from the reality of living in the woods, and, especially, a fantasy about escaping the entanglements and responsibilities of living among other people.”

—Kathryn Schulz, “Pond Scum: Henry David Thoreau’s Moral Myopia,”  
in *The New Yorker*, October 19, 2015

### Why pair these texts?

- Two men seen as visionaries and iconoclasts, who preached the virtues of simplicity
- Complexities and contradictions in each figure, which challenge us to complicate the way we think about them and people in general
- A chance to examine the difference between myth and reality in the stories we tell about our cultural heroes

### Connections between Jobs & Thoreau

#### *Seekers of beauty and simplicity*

- “Jobs . . . could look at a beige box and see beauty. He imagined a computer that was as graceful and elegant as it was useful, an intersection of technology and art that resulted in something truly special” (Blumenthal, p. 80).
- “A lake is the landscape’s most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth’s eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature” (Thoreau, p. 186).

### ***Talked and wrote about the principles that guided their thinking and living***

- “Money and Apple’s success made Jobs into something of a celebrity .... He didn’t mind the money ... but it wasn’t his focus and he refused to let it drive him. ‘The journey is the reward,’ he said. ‘It’s not just the accomplishment of something incredible. It’s the actual doing of something incredible, day in and day out ... ’ (Blumenthal, p. 98).
- “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived” (Thoreau, p. 90).

### ***Positioned in our cultural narratives as rebels against authority and the status quo***

- “The ad team ... concluded that Apple didn’t follow the rules that others did. It wasn’t like other companies. Fairly quickly, it came up with a tagline: ‘Think Different’” (Blumenthal, p. 190).
- “Thoreau endorses rebellion against societal norms, champions idleness over work, and gives his readers permission to ignore their elders” (Schulz, p. 44).

### ***Made contributions that inspired others***

- “Ultimately, he was like his products .... brilliant—and also flawed. But you could overlook the very real imperfections because the rest of the package was so amazing. Many executives and engineers stayed at Apple for years, enduring Jobs’s endless demands because they did great work under him, maybe better than they would have done otherwise” (Blumenthal, p. 266).
- “A century and a half after its initial publication, *Walden* has become such a totem of the back-to-nature, preservationist, anti-business, civil-disobedience mind-set and Thoreau so vivid a protester, so perfect a crank and hermit saint, that the book itself risks being as revered and unread as the Bible” (Updike, p. iv).

### ***Spartan eating habits: living not simply, but purely***

- “Jobs chided friends for eating bagels, dropped cereal from his personal menu, and began to subsist only on fruits and vegetables. He experimented with fasts that lasted from days to a couple of weeks and then were broken with water and leafy vegetables. At one point, he ate so many carrots, his friends said, that his skin turned ‘the color of an early sunset’” (Blumenthal, p. 42).
- “Food was bad, drink was bad, even shelter was suspect, and Thoreau advised keeping it to a minimum” (Schultz, p. 41).

### ***Poor treatment of other people***

- “Jef Raskin [a Macintosh product design team member] called Jobs ‘a dreadful manager,’ noting that he regularly missed appointments, acted without thinking, and didn’t give credit where credit was due” (Blumenthal, p. 105).
- “For Thoreau, his fellow-humans had the same moral status as doormats” (Schulz, p. 42).

### ***Disdain for philanthropy***

- “With *Forbes* estimating his net worth at more than \$3 billion and growing, thanks to Pixar and the iPod, he could have spent at least some of his time thinking about philanthropy and how he might contribute his enormous wealth. But Jobs had never been interested in giving money away. He briefly set up a foundation after he left Apple, but shut it down after about a year” (Blumenthal, p. 232).
- “‘I confess that I have hitherto indulged very little in philanthropic enterprises,’ Thoreau wrote in *Walden*. He had ‘tried it fairly’ and was ‘satisfied that it does not agree with my constitution’” (Schultz, p. 42).

### ***Belief that the law did not apply to them***

- “He drove his car without a license plate and regularly parked in Apple’s handicapped spots. He would quote totally made-up statements as fact, expect results on unrealistic schedules, or set impossibly high goals. People would believe him when he was around and only come to their senses after he left” (Blumenthal, p. 107).
- “Like his fellow-transcendentalists, he was suspicious of tradition and institutions, and regarded personal intuition and direct revelation as superior foundations for both spiritual and secular beliefs. Unlike his fellow-transcendentalists, he also regarded his own particular intuitions and revelations as superior to those of other people” (Schultz, p. 43).

### ***Creators of “reality distortion”***

- “Bud Tribble [a member of the Mac product development team] defined a unique Jobs trait that the Mac team ... could never figure out how to turn off. Tribble dubbed it Jobs’s ‘reality distortion field,’ a term he took from the *Star Trek* television series. ‘In his presence, reality is malleable,’ he explained. ‘He can convince anyone of practically anything. It wears off when he’s not around’” (Blumenthal, p. 107).
- “Only by elastic measures can *Walden* be regarded as nonfiction. Read charitably, it is a kind of semi-fictional extended meditation featuring a character named Henry David Thoreau. Read less charitably, it is a kin to those recent best-selling memoirs whose authors turn out to have fabricated large portions of their stories” (Schulz, p. 44).

### ***Can be seen as hypocritical***

- “Jobs recruited Wozniak to figure out the chips and design, promising he would split the \$700 he was being paid for the project .... Bushnell [founder of Atari] was so pleased with the design he paid Jobs a bonus, reported to be \$5000 ... Jobs paid Woz—but just the \$350 he was promised at the start ... When the amount of the bonus Bushnell gave Jobs was disclosed in a book about Atari’s history ten years later, long after the pair had founded Apple, Wozniak was truly hurt. He felt his good friend hadn’t been honest and had betrayed him” (Blumenthal, p. 52).
- “The hypocrisy is that Thoreau lived a complicated life but pretended to live a simple one. Worse, he preached at others to live as he did not, while berating them for their own compromises and complexities” (Schulz, p. 44).

## Teaching ideas

### *Visual analysis of Apple advertisements such as the Think Different campaign*

#### **Begin with Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS) Protocol:**

Directions for students: We are going to use our powers of observation to investigate this advertisement. Take one minute to look quietly at this ad. After that minute, I will ask you a series of questions to help guide our thinking.

Question 1: What is going on here?

→ After student shares ideas, point and paraphrase

Question 2: What do you see that makes you say that?

→ Ask this if the student makes a claim that requires evidence

→ Point and paraphrase

Question 3: What more can we find?

→ Call on another student and the cycle begins again.

**\*\*Be sure to use ample wait time with this protocol. It sometimes takes a few minutes for the students to get rolling.\*\***



#### **Questions for guided looking after VTS:**

What is the role of the following in these images? Which of the following stand out to you? What story do they tell?

- Color (or lack thereof)
- Lines
- Shapes (especially consider the Apple logo)
- Text (“Think Different”)
- Composition (how are the images arranged in space?)
- Size (what is large and what is small?)
- The medium (photography)

**\*\*Would work well to assign each pair or small group of students one of the above categories to focus on and then share out\*\***

### **Synthesis Questions:**

- What contradictions did you find in the Think Different ads? In what ways is Steve Jobs' own personality contradictory? Despite these contradictions, why do you think they were both so successful?
- What story are these images telling? What story are these images telling about Apple? How do the style elements we discussed (color, line, etc.) convey this story?
- Do these images remind you of any books, movies, or other art you've seen? Why?
- What audience do you think these images would appeal to the most? Why? What audience do you think they are excluding or leaving out?
- How would you describe the relationship between the slogan "Think Different" and the visual of the ad? What does the visual convey that the slogan does not and vice versa?
- How do these ads make you feel and *why*?

\*\*These would work well as a freewrite, a more processed writing piece, or woven into a Socratic seminar/classroom discussion.\*\*

### ***Socratic seminar*** **Questions to discuss**

- How are the contributions of innovators and visionaries shaped by the time in which they lived, specific cultural contexts, and their relationships with others?
- Why do we idealize our heroes? What changes when we acknowledge their flaws? What is the danger of exploring those flaws? Of ignoring them?
- What ethical dilemmas do we face when writing about the lives of others? How do we discover the "truth" of a person when we research his or her life? What responsibility do we have to create complex portraits instead of simple ones?

### ***Nonfiction genre study*** **Questions to discuss and features to examine**

- Authors of nonfiction have the tough job of taking their research and shaping it into a story. Below is a list of some common structures for nonfiction writing:
  - Problem/Solution
  - Cause/Effect
  - Compare/Contrast
  - Description/List
  - Time order/Sequence

Do you see any of these structures in Blumenthal's book on Steve Jobs? What is her primary structure? Are there certain sections or chapters that follow a different structure? What is the effect of these structuring devices for the reader?

- Thoreau includes several detailed lists in *Walden* and also a map of Walden Pond. What do the inclusion of these other genres add to the text of *Walden*? What do you think Thoreau's intention was in including these other genres?
- Blumenthal also includes features in her book other than expository text. What are some of the nonfiction features she includes? What purposes do these features serve?
  - Glossary
  - Bibliography
  - Timeline
  - Notes
  - Index
  - Author's Note
  - Photo Credits
  - Photography
  - Sidebars/Text boxes
  - Table of Contents
- How do the purposes of the nonfiction text features in *Steve Jobs* and *Walden* differ? What do they add to each story?
- Both *Walden* and *Steve Jobs* are categorized as nonfiction. Based on our examination of the two texts and their additional features, which one do you think fits the nonfiction category better? Why?

### ***Texts for further pairing and related reading***

Darbyshire, G. (Producer), & Gibney, A. (Director). (2015). *Steve Jobs: The man in the machine* [motion picture]. United States: Magnolia Pictures.

Hartland, J. (2015). *Steve Jobs: Insanely great. A graphic biography*. New York: Schwartz and Wade Books.

Isaacson, W. (2011). *Steve Jobs*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

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Schulz, K. (2015, October 19). Pond scum: Henry David Thoreau's moral myopia. *The New Yorker*, 91, 40-45.

Updike, J. (2003). Introduction. In H.D. Thoreau, *Walden* (ix-xxiv). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.