

Civil Disobedience

Part 2

by Henry David Thoreau

Pre-Reading Vocabulary Practice

Optional Post-Reading Quiz Included

Practice words: abet, condescended, despondent, discretion, exorbitant, foist, impetuous, obstinacy, superfluous, transgress

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Vocabulary Preview 2

Answer Key — Preview 3

Caution: share only if self-checking

OPTIONAL POST-READING QUIZ

Vocabulary in Context 4

Answer Key — In Context 5

Caution: do not share with students

About the Pre-Reading Activity (open-dictionary; ungraded or completion grade):

Students preview 10 words from the upcoming reading, each in a sentence that supports understanding. They choose the best meaning from 3 choices.

About the Optional Post-Reading Quiz (use after reading, or skip):

Same words, now in real excerpts from the text, with questions that build reading and analytical skills.

Vocabulary Sections for this Essay:

Section 1 · Part 1 · Thoreau on government and conscience

Section 2 · Part 2 · Unjust laws and the duty to resist

Section 3 · Part 3 · The individual and the State

Bold = this section. Other sections are available at [verbalworkout.com](https://www.verbalworkout.com).



[verbalworkout.com](https://www.verbalworkout.com)

(all resources free)

Vocabulary Preview

Civil Disobedience

Part 2

by Henry David Thoreau

Name _____ Date _____ Period _____

Read each prompt. Then choose the best meaning for the bold word.

1. He agreed to **abet** the thieves in their scheme.

- A. to study and observe
- B. to help in wrongdoing
- C. to negotiate with

2. The famous actor **condescended** to chat with the new interns.

- A. was happy and willing to
- B. made a special effort to
- C. stooped beneath his dignity

3. She felt **despondent** after failing the exam a third time.

- A. angry and resentful
- B. dejected, without hope
- C. anxious and restless

4. The judge used her **discretion** when setting the sentence.

- A. the power to decide freely
- B. deep knowledge of the law
- C. careful, tactful behavior

5. The hotel charged an **exorbitant** price for a tiny room.

- A. odd and unexpected
- B. fixed and firm
- C. far too expensive

6. The salesman tried to **foist** a faulty phone on a trusting customer.

- A. to sell cheaply to someone
- B. to pass off on someone
- C. to lend briefly to someone

7. His **impetuous** decision to quit cost him dearly.

- A. rash and impulsive
- B. stubborn and firm
- C. bold and daring

8. His **obstinacy** kept him from ever admitting a mistake.

- A. stubbornness
- B. arrogance
- C. forgetfulness

9. The essay was full of **superfluous** words that added nothing.

- A. more than needed
- B. harsh or insulting
- C. vague and unclear

10. Anyone who dares **transgress** the curfew will be fined.

- A. to openly question
- B. to misread or mistake
- C. to break or violate

Reading Helpers

(Not quizzed — helpful for this text.)

counter-friction — a force that resists another force; here, Thoreau's metaphor for using one's life to obstruct the machinery of unjust government

lyceum — a local society hosting public lectures and debates for adults

poll tax — a fixed tax charged per person, regardless of income or property; in Thoreau's Massachusetts, it was an annual tax on most adult men, not specifically a tax required in order to vote

shire town — a county seat — where its courts and government are based.

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary Preview

Civil Disobedience

Part 2

by Henry David Thoreau

#	KEY
1	B
2	C
3	B
4	A
5	C
6	B
7	A
8	A
9	A
10	C

Vocabulary in Context

Civil Disobedience

Part 2

by Henry David Thoreau

Name _____ Date _____ Period _____ Score _____ / 10

Read each excerpt carefully. Then choose the best answer to each question.

1 “Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once?”

As it is used in the passage, the word “transgress” most nearly means...

- A. to revise and improve them
- B. to obey them under protest
- C. to defy and break them

2 “... he is put in prison for a period unlimited by any law that I know, and determined only by the discretion of those who put him there ...”

Which detail best supports the claim that the prisoner’s punishment follows no fixed law?

- A. his jailers set the term at will
- B. the law fixes a clear penalty
- C. a thief is soon set free

3 “... see if he can get over this obstruction to his neighborliness without a ruder and more impetuous thought or speech corresponding with his action.”

It can reasonably be inferred that a “more impetuous” response from the tax-gatherer would be...

- A. rash and impulsive
- B. deliberately insulting
- C. bitter and resentful

4 “... that State which is so anxious to foist the sin of slavery upon her sister ...”

The author describes the State as anxious to “foist the sin of slavery” in order to...

- A. describe a border dispute
- B. defend the State’s policy
- C. expose the State’s hypocrisy

5 “Under a government which imprisons unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison. The proper place today, the only place which Massachusetts has provided for her freer and less despondent spirits, is in her prisons ...”

The passage most strongly suggests that the “freer and less despondent spirits” are those who...

- A. have lost all hope of reform
- B. keep hope and resist the State
- C. quietly enjoy the State’s peace

6 “To such the State renders comparatively small service, and a slight tax is wont to appear exorbitant, particularly if they are obliged to earn it by special labor with their hands.”

According to the passage, those who own little property regard even a slight tax as...

- A. a fair, modest charge
- B. wildly excessive
- C. a wise investment

7 “It puts to rest many questions which he would otherwise be taxed to answer; while the only new question which it puts is the hard but superfluous one, how to spend it.”

It can reasonably be inferred that, for Thoreau, the rich man’s question of how to spend money is...

- A. genuinely difficult to solve
- B. morally troubling
- C. needless and unimportant

8 “However, at the request of the selectmen, I condescended to make some such statement as this in writing ...”

The ironic use of “condescended” best describes the speaker’s attitude toward complying as one of...

- A. sincere humility
- B. wry self-importance
- C. bitter resentment

9 “If others pay the tax which is demanded of me, from a sympathy with the State, they do but what they have already done in their own case, or rather they abet injustice to a greater extent than the State requires.”

Which statement is best supported by the passage?

- A. Paying another’s tax aids injustice.
- B. Paying the tax frees the prisoner.
- C. The State forces neighbors to pay.

10 “But one cannot be too much on his guard in such a case, lest his actions be biased by obstinacy or an undue regard for the opinions of men.”

Which choice best describes how the excerpt functions within Thoreau’s argument?

- A. a caution against mere stubbornness
- B. a final call to arms
- C. a summary of the tax dispute

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary in Context

Civil Disobedience

Part 2

by Henry David Thoreau

#	KEY	NOTE
1	C	
2	A	
3	A	
4	C	
5	B	Theme comprehension. 'Less despondent' inverts the word: these are the still-hopeful who, by Thoreau's logic, belong in prison.
6	B	
7	C	
8	B	Event comprehension. The wry tone follows the church-tax refusal — Thoreau mock-grandly 'stoops' to file a one-line disclaimer.
9	A	
10	A	

Teacher Context: Part 2

Thoreau argues that when a law makes you an agent of injustice you must break it, and presents his own refusal to pay the poll tax and his night in jail as a model of resistance. He develops the case for a 'peaceable revolution' achieved by individuals withdrawing their support from the State. The break falls where the essay turns from this experience to broader reflection on the individual's relation to the State.