

# Ralph Waldo Emerson's Nature

READING

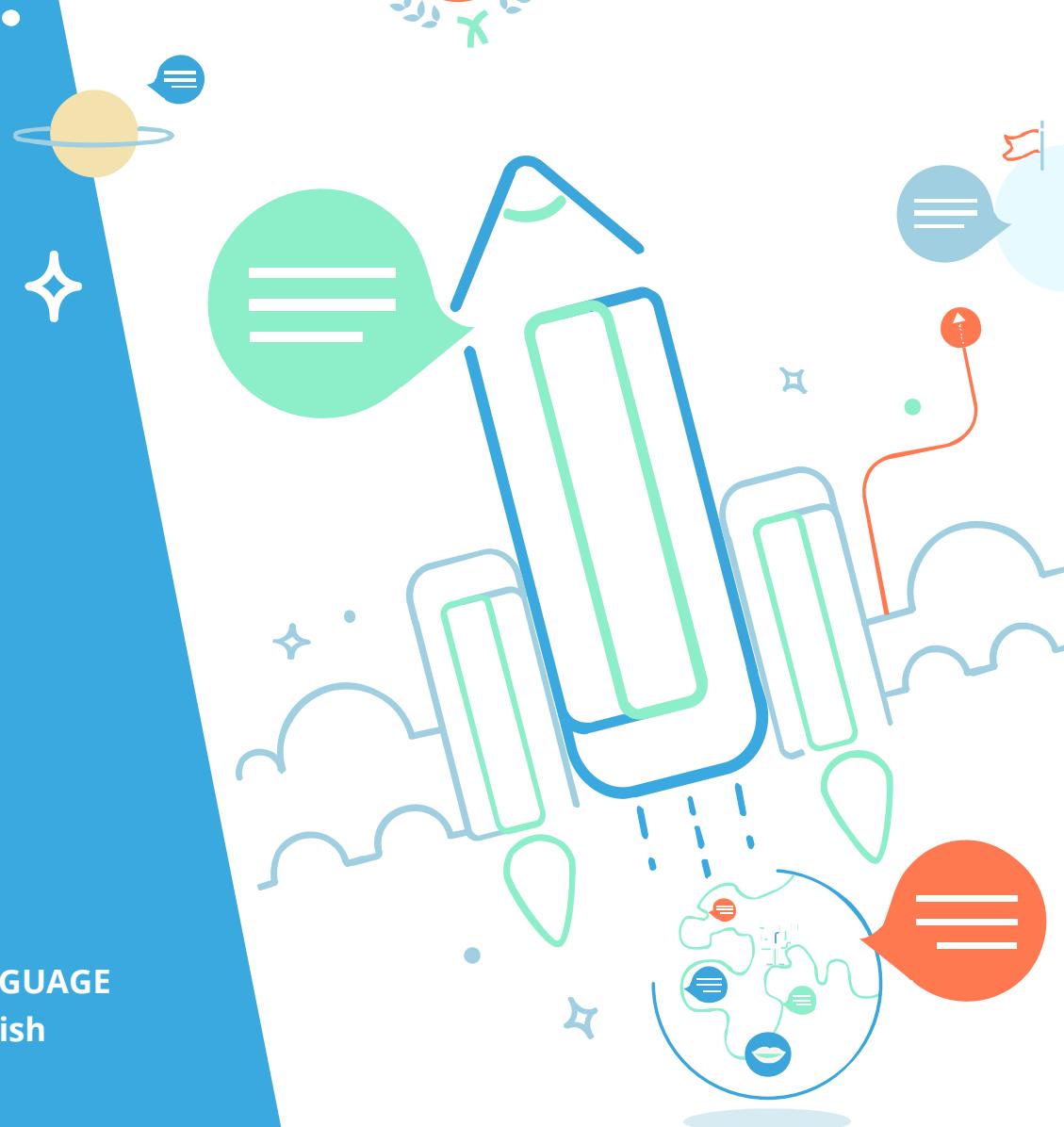
LEVEL  
Advanced

NUMBER  
C1\_3017R\_EN

LANGUAGE  
English



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## Goals

- Can read and understand an excerpt from Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay 'Nature'.
- Can draw comparisons to my own feelings and the themes of nature, inspiration and trascendence in his work.







# The natural environment

Have you ever been enveloped in nature?

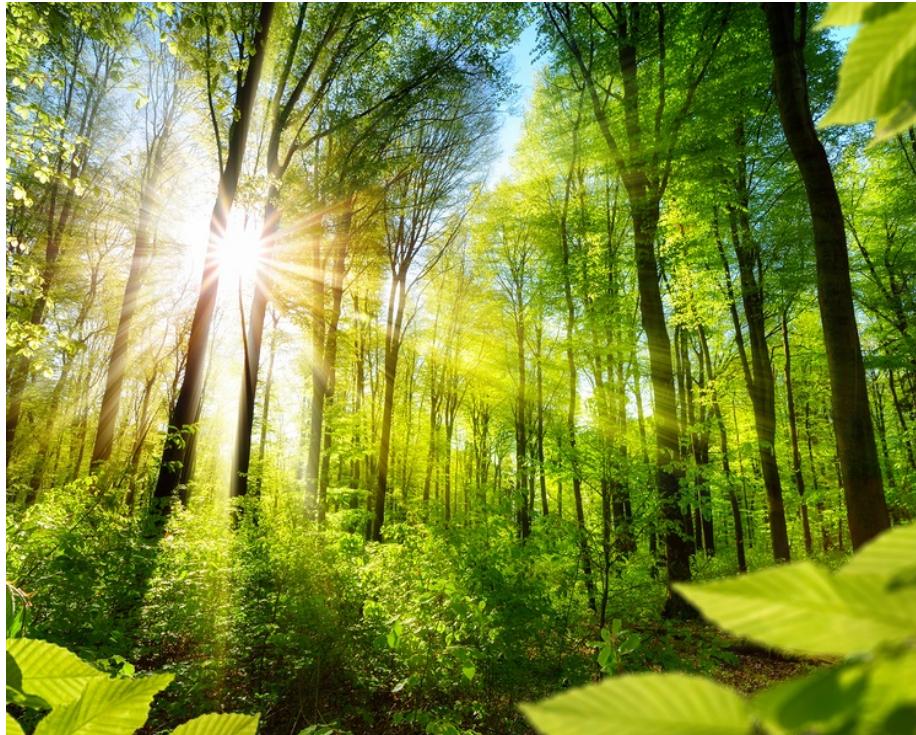
Describe the setting in each of the pictures.





## Nature

***Nature* is an essay written by Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1836. Emerson was a great admirer of the beauty of the natural world. What kind of themes could he be exploring in this essay?**





## Vocabulary



The party expressed shock when Peter came down the stairs in a **transparent** gown.



We spied a **solitary** tree on the horizon.



Our journey was sodden by **perpetual** rain.



He gave the coach an **admonishing** stare after hearing the whistle.



## Vocabulary



The young audience showed a sincere **reverence** during the ceremony.



Josie and Matthew are **kindred spirits**.



The scammer tried to **extort** money from his hapless victim.



I shrink in fear in **remembrance** of my violin teacher.



## Nature



To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not **solitary** whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds, will separate between him and what he touches. One might think the atmosphere was made **transparent** with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the **perpetual** presence of the sublime.



## Nature

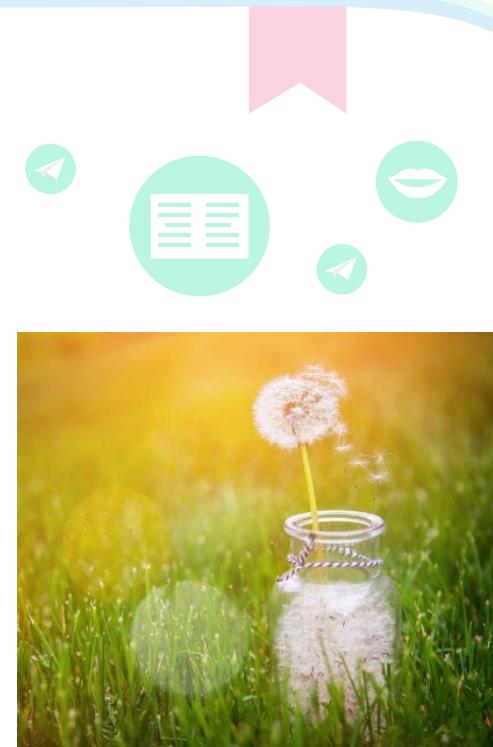


Seen in the streets of cities, how great they are! If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the **remembrance** of the city of God which had been shown! But every night come out these envoys of beauty, and light the universe with their **admonishing** smile.



## Nature

The stars awaken a certain **reverence**, because though always present, they are inaccessible; but all natural objects make a **kindred** impression, when the mind is open to their influence. Nature never wears a mean appearance. Neither does the wisest man **extort** her secret, and lose his curiosity by finding out all her perfection. Nature never became a toy to a wise spirit. The flowers, the animals, the mountains, reflected the wisdom of his best hour, as much as they had delighted the simplicity of his childhood.





## Rewrite the sentences using contemporary language

To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society.



People need to leave urban spaces to be truly alone.

One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime.



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The stars awaken a certain reverence, because though always present, they are inaccessible; but all natural objects make a kindred impression, when the mind is open to their influence.



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## Interpreting a text

**Discuss one of these statements with the teacher. What is your interpretation of Emerson's meaning? Try to explain using your own words.**



Nature never makes a mean appearance.

I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me.

Nature never became a toy to a wise spirit.



## Nature

When we speak of nature in this manner, we have a distinct but most poetical sense in the mind. We mean the **integrity** of impression made by manifold natural objects. It is this which distinguishes the stick of timber of the wood-cutter, from the tree of the poet. The charming landscape which I saw this morning, is indubitably made up of some twenty or thirty farms. Miller owns this field, Locke that, and Manning the woodland beyond. But none of them owns the landscape. There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet. This is the best part of these men's farms, yet to this their warranty-deeds give no title.



## Nature

To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very **superficial** seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth, becomes part of his daily food.



## Nature

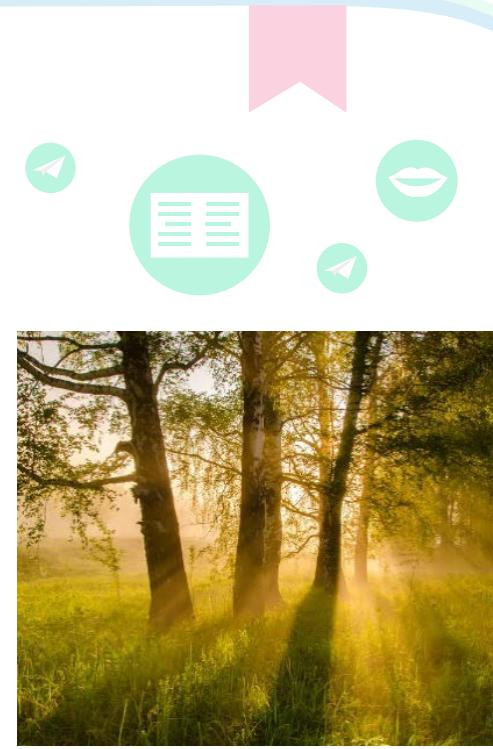


In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. Nature says, -- he is my creature, and maugre all his **impertinent** griefs, he shall be glad with me. Not the sun or the summer alone, but every hour and season yields its tribute of delight; for every hour and change corresponds to and authorises a different state of the mind, from breathless noon to grimdest midnight. Nature is a setting that fits equally well a comic or a mourning piece. In good health, the air is a cordial of incredible virtue. 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.



## Nature

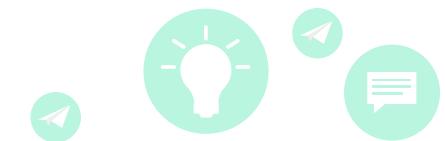
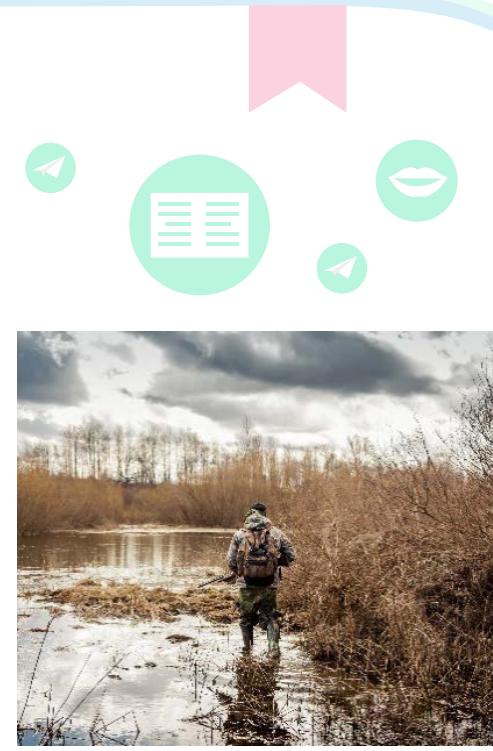
In the woods too, a man casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period 'soever of life, is always a child. In the woods, is **perpetual** youth. Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire 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.





## Nature

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 eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle 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 wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature.





## New words

### integrity

He stood proudly with a deep conviction and **integrity**.

### exhilaration

Laura reached the top of the mountain with a sigh of **exhilaration**: happy, but exhausted from her efforts.

### superficial

Jane came to Bali for the beach and the sun – she had only a **superficial** interest in the culture.

### impertinent

He shrugged off the suggestion with an **impertinent** wave of his hand.



## Refuge

Read the quotations from the essay below. How does Emerson feel about spending time in the woods? Where do you go in your life to get a similar feeling?



"In the woods, is **perpetual** youth."

"There I feel that nothing can befall me in life - no disgrace, no calamity..."

"Within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign..."

"In the woods, we return to reason and faith."



# Camping

**"In the tranquil landscape...man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature."**  
**Many people are fans of camping and escaping into the wilderness. Write some sentences to your teacher describing your attitude to camping. Consider the opinions below.**



"I absolutely love escaping from the city and immersing myself in nature for a few days. I go a little crazy when I don't get the chance to go camping."



"I really don't understand people who go camping. Who wants to be cold, dirty and stuck in the middle of nowhere? Don't get me started on the spiders and mosquitos!"



"My husband and I try to go camping each year because we think being outdoors is very good for our kids. It gets them away from the computer and into the real world."



"Going camping is a great inexpensive way to have a holiday. Nothing is as beautiful and relaxing as being away from the noise of the city."



Which words accurately describe Emerson's feelings towards the natural world?

**curious**

**tempted**

**overwhelmed**

**awestruck**

**refined**

**sensitive**

**beautiful**

**inspiring**

**indifferent**

**fascinated**

## transcendent

A feeling that is **transcendent** is beyond ordinary or everyday perceptions.



The music from the stage was **transcendent**; John was suddenly far away from his ordinary cares and concerns.



## Transcendence

**"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."**

1. Talk to your teacher about how being in nature makes Emerson feel.
  
2. Overwhelmed by the beauty of nature, Emerson describes a spiritual feeling where he rises above normal human anxieties and problems. When have you felt **transcendent**?

Music or  
cinema?

Dancing?

Sports?

Beauty?





## Purpose

**What might Emerson's purpose be in writing an essay like *Nature*?  
Discuss your ideas with the teacher.**

Passion?

Education?

Communication?



## Nature



The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister, is the suggestion of an **occult** relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them. The waving of the boughs in the storm, is new to me and old. It takes me by surprise, and yet is not unknown. Its effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right.



## Nature

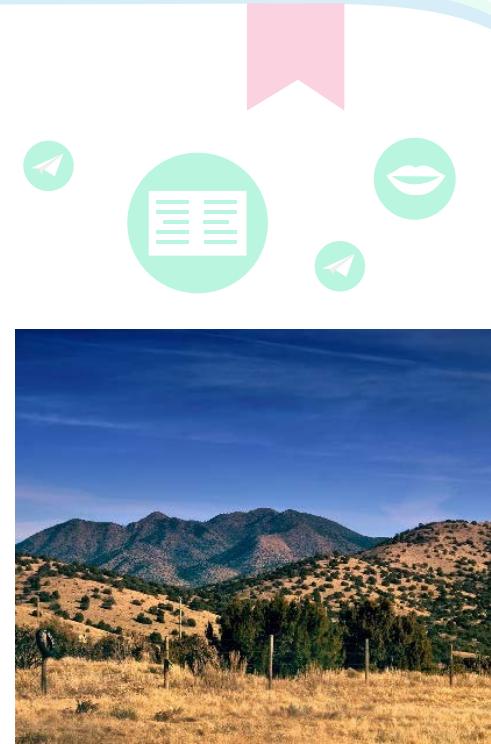


Yet it is certain that the power to produce this delight, does not reside in nature, but in man, or in a harmony of both. It is necessary to use these pleasures with great temperance. For, nature is not always tricked in holiday **attire**, but the same scene which yesterday breathed perfume and glittered as for the frolic of the nymphs, is overspread with **melancholy** today.



## Nature

Nature always wears the colors of the spirit. To a man laboring under **calamity**, the heat of his own fire hath sadness in it. Then, there is a kind of contempt of the landscape felt by him who has just lost by death a dear friend. The sky is less grand as it shuts down over less worth in the population.





## New words

**occult**

Aleister Crowley was interested in magic and the **occult**.

**attire**

Look at you in your fancy business **attire**!

**melancholy**

I felt blue and **melancholy** on the rainy afternoon.

**calamity**

The earthquake was a natural **calamity** which resulted in untold damage to the city.



## Inspiration

**"Its effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right."**

**In this passage, Emerson talks about the feeling of inspiration he gets when in nature. What activities make you feel inspired?**

Going for a walk

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## Match the descriptive vocabulary to the image and complete the sentences.

1. ...lay waiting in still silence.

2. ...furiously crashed down the mountain.

3. ...lay attractively under the sun.

4. ...raged against the cliff-face

5. ...stood imperiously on the horizon.

6. Rose with a...

7. Bloomed eagerly with new life.

8. ...lay snug under...

A



C



E



G



B



D



F



H





## Pathetic fallacy

**"Nature always wears the colors of the spirit": pathetic fallacy is a term that means human feelings being reflected in nature.**  
**Imagine you are very angry. Write a description of a landscape using emotive and descriptive language.**

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The clouds  
loomed dark and  
violent  
overhead...





## Reflect on the lesson

Take a moment to review any new **vocabulary, phrases, language structures** or **grammar points** you have come across for the first time in this lesson.

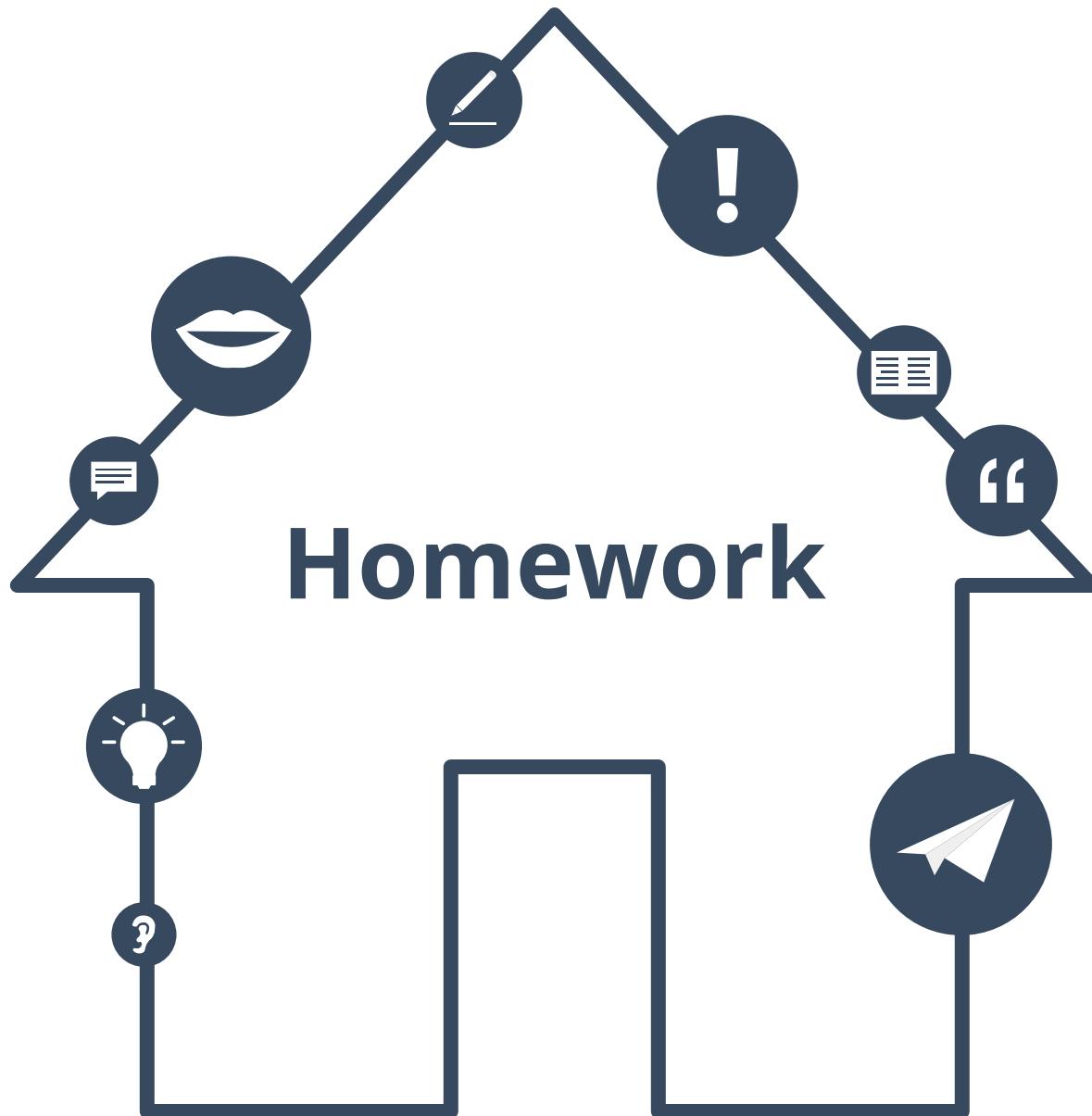
Review them with your teacher one more time to make sure you don't forget!





## Answer key

Activity P. 30 1C, 2B, 3D, 4H, 5A, 6E, 7F, 8G





## Match the sentences from the extract

1. To go into solitude...
2. Yet it is certain that the power to produce this delight, does not reside in nature...
3. The stars awaken a certain reverence, because though always present, they are inaccessible...
4. Standing on the bare ground, my head bathed by the blithe air...

- a. ...and uplifted into infinite space, all mean egotism vanishes.
- b. ...;but all natural objects make a kindred impression, when the mind is open to their influence.
- c. ... a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society.
- d. ....,but in man or in a harmony of both.



## Describe an experience

Recall a transcendent experience you have had in nature before. Try and make use of the vocabulary introduced in this lesson.

reverence

transparent

perpetual

remembrance

solitary

melancholy

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## Homework answer key

Homework task p. 30  
1C, 2D, 3B, 4A



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