

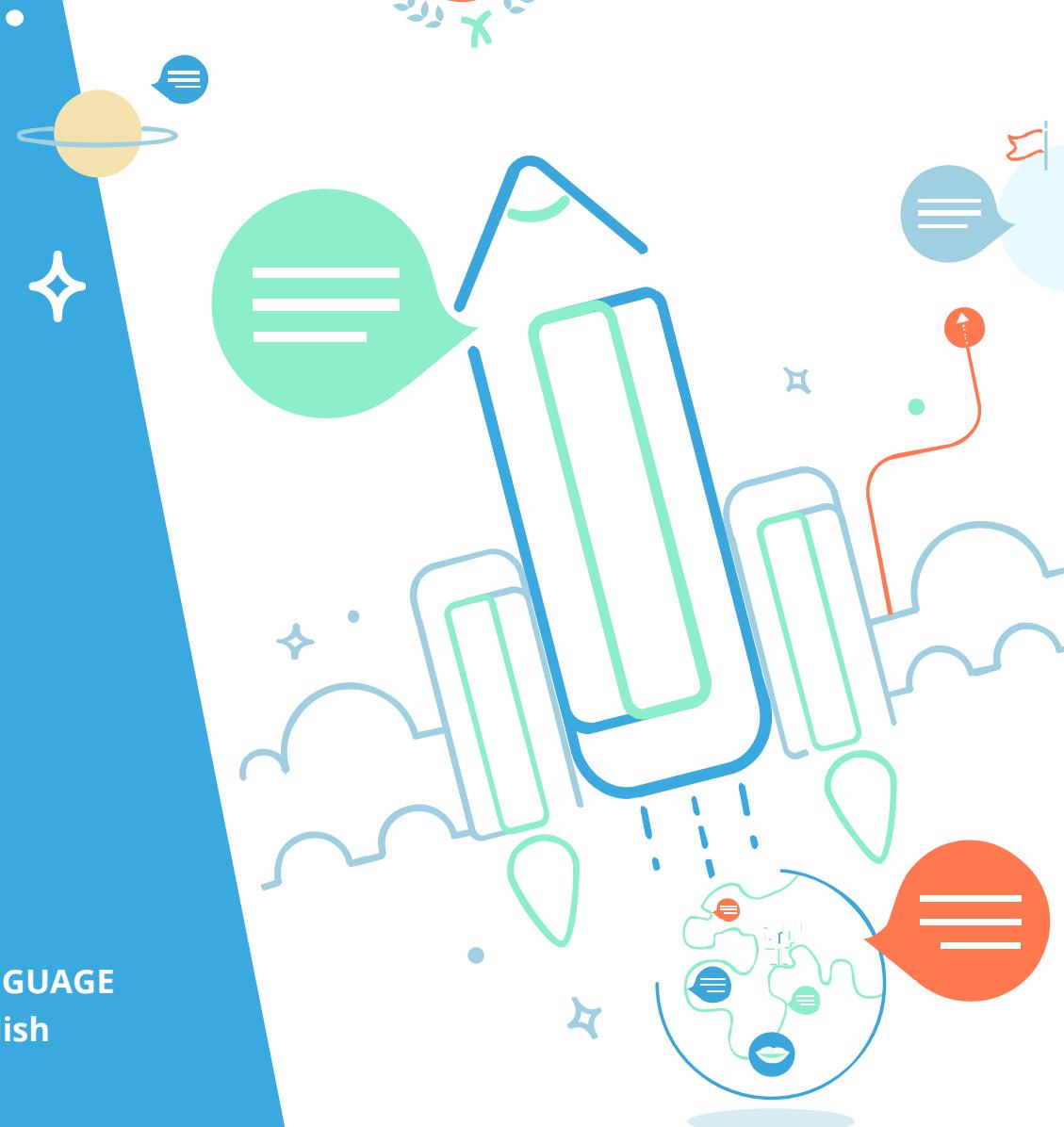
Walden

READING

LEVEL
Advanced

NUMBER
C1_2067R_EN

LANGUAGE
English

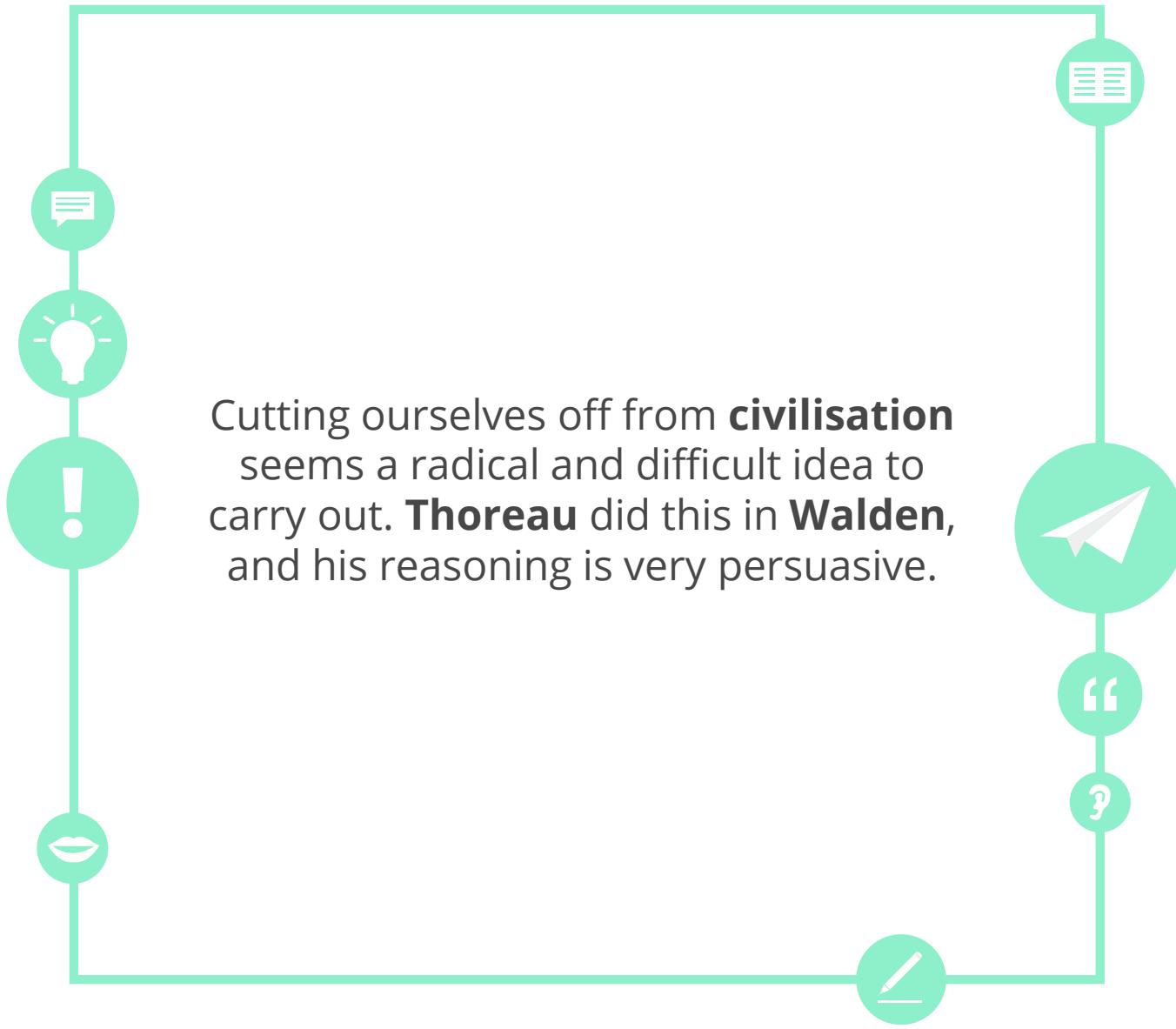




Goals

- Can read and understand a complex literary excerpt from Thoreau's 'Walden'.
- Can compare contemporary attitudes towards civilisation and those from the 19th century.







Walden

Have you heard of the text *Walden*
by Henry David Thoreau?

It is a book about moving away
from civilisation. Have you read
any similar books, or seen any
films which share this theme?



Discuss the differences

Discuss how life might be different living in these two places.
Which would you prefer?





Walden

We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor. It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts. Every man is tasked to make his life, even in its details, worthy of the contemplation of his most elevated and critical hour. If we refused, or rather used up, such paltry information as we get, the oracles would distinctly inform us how this might be done.



Walden

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. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God, and have *somewhat hastily* concluded that it is the chief end of man here to "glorify God and enjoy him forever."



New vocabulary

Thoreau wrote *Walden* in the nineteenth century, so many of the words he uses may be unfamiliar to you, though we do still use them today. Check what these words mean with your teacher and what Thoreau was referring to when he used them.





Thoreau's expectations

What expectations did Thoreau have for his stay in the wilderness?





Quotations

Here are two quotations from what you just read. Can you explain to your teacher what you think they mean?

“

suck out all the marrow of life

”

“

to cut a broad swath and shave close

”



Walden

Still we live meanly, like ants; though the fable tells us that we were long ago changed into men; like pygmies we fight with cranes; it is error upon error, and clout upon clout, and our best virtue has for its occasion a superfluous and evitable wretchedness. Our life is frittered away by detail. An honest man has hardly need to count more than his ten fingers, or in extreme cases he may add his ten toes, and lump the rest. Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail. In the midst of this chopping sea of civilized life, such are the clouds and storms and quicksands and thousand-and-one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live, if he would not founder and go to the bottom and not make his port at all, by dead reckoning, and he must be a great calculator indeed who succeeds. Simplify, simplify.



Walden

Instead of three meals a day, if it be necessary eat but one; instead of a hundred dishes, five; and reduce other things in proportion. Our life is like a German Confederacy, made up of petty states, with its boundary forever fluctuating, so that even a German cannot tell you how it is bounded at any moment. The nation itself, with all its so-called internal improvements, which, by the way are all external and superficial, is just such an unwieldy and overgrown establishment, cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own traps, ruined by luxury and heedless expense, by want of calculation and a worthy aim, as the million households in the land; and the only cure for it, as for them, is in a rigid economy, a stern and more than Spartan simplicity of life and elevation of purpose. It lives too fast.



Walden

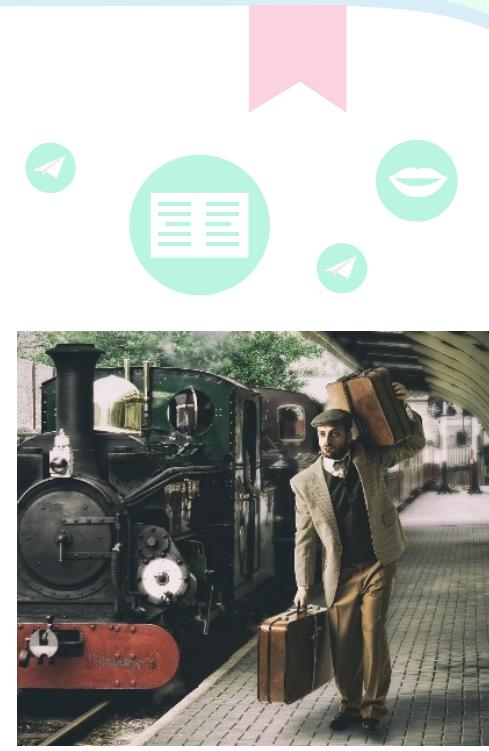
Men think that it is essential that the *Nation* have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph, and ride thirty miles an hour, without a doubt, whether *they* do or not; but whether we should live like baboons or like men, is a little uncertain. If we do not get out sleepers, and forge rails, and devote days and nights to the work, but go to tinkering upon our *lives* to improve *them*, who will build railroads? And if railroads are not built, how shall we get to heaven in season? But if we stay at home and mind our business, who will want railroads? We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us. Did you ever think what those sleepers are that underlie the railroad? Each one is a man, an Irishman, or a Yankee man.





Walden

The rails are laid on them, and they are covered with sand, and the cars run smoothly over them. They are sound sleepers, I assure you. And every few years a new lot is laid down and run over; so that, if some have the pleasure of riding on a rail, others have the misfortune to be ridden upon. And when they run over a man that is walking in his sleep, a supernumerary sleeper in the wrong position, and wake him up, they suddenly stop the cars, and make a hue and cry about it, as if this were an exception. I am glad to know that it takes a gang of men for every five miles to keep the sleepers down and level in their beds as it is, for this is a sign that they may sometime get up again.



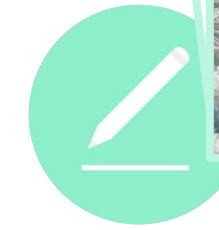


Similes and metaphors

Look back through the text you have read so far and identify as many similes and metaphors as you can. Place each in its corresponding list.

simile

metaphor





Fill in the gaps

Fill in the gaps with the words below. Then, ask and answer the questions with your teacher.

tinkering

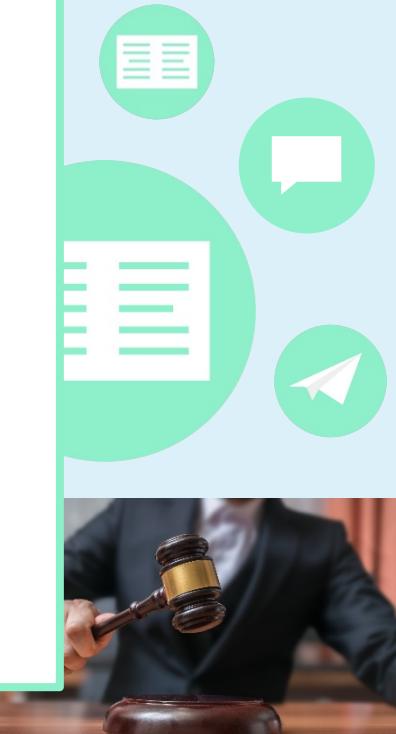
superfluous

fritter

unwieldy

petty

1. Do you think that you _____ away your money on unnecessary things?
2. What have you bought recently that is really _____ to your existence?
3. Do you believe, as Thoreau does, that the nation state is too large and _____?
4. If you could go _____ upon your life, what small change would you make first?
5. Can you think of any _____ rules or laws in your country that you would like to change?





What is civilisation?

What constitutes civilisation for Thoreau? Do your conceptions of civilisation differ from those of Thoreau?



the nation state

transportation

communication



Simplicity

One of the main tenets of Walden is 'Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity.' How do you think you could simplify your life? Do you think your ideas are similar to Thoreau's?





Walden



Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life? We are determined to be starved before we are hungry. Men say that a stitch in time saves nine, and so they take a thousand stitches today to save nine tomorrow. As for work, we haven't any of any consequence. We have the St. Vitus' dance, and cannot possibly keep our heads still.



Walden



If I should only give a few pulls at the parish bell-rope, as for a fire, that is, without setting the bell, there is hardly a man on his farm in the outskirts of Concord, notwithstanding that press of engagements which was his excuse so many times this morning, nor a boy, nor a woman, I might almost say, but would forsake all and follow that sound, not mainly to save property from the flames, but, if we will confess the truth, much more to see it burn, since burn it must, and we, be it known, did not set it on fire—or to see it put out, and have a hand in it, if that is done as handsomely; yes, even if it were the parish church itself.



Walden



Hardly a man takes a half-hour's nap after dinner, but when he wakes he holds up his head and asks, "What's the news?" as if the rest of mankind had stood his sentinels. Some give directions to be waked every half-hour, doubtless for no other purpose; and then, to pay for it, they tell what they have dreamed. After a night's sleep the news is as indispensable as the breakfast. "Pray tell me anything new that has happened to a man anywhere on this globe"—and he reads it over his coffee and rolls, that a man has had his eyes gouged out this morning on the Wachito River; never dreaming the while that he lives in the dark unfathomed mammoth cave of this world, and has but the rudiment of an eye himself.



Walden



Shams and delusions are esteemed for soundest truths, while reality is fabulous. If men would steadily observe realities only, and not allow themselves to be deluded, life, to compare it with such things as we know, would be like a fairy tale and the Arabian Nights' Entertainments.



Walden

If we respected only what is inevitable and has a right to be, music and poetry would resound along the streets. When we are unhurried and wise, we perceive that only great and worthy things have any permanent and absolute existence, that petty fears and petty pleasures are but the shadow of the reality. This is always exhilarating and sublime. By closing the eyes and slumbering, and consenting to be deceived by shows, men establish and confirm their daily life of routine and habit everywhere, which still is built on purely illusory foundations. Children, who play life, discern its true law and relations more clearly than men, who fail to live it worthily, but who think that they are wiser by experience, that is, by failure.



Walden

I perceive that we inhabitants of New England live this mean life that we do because our vision does not penetrate the surface of things. We think that that *is* which *appears* to be. If a man should walk through this town and see only the reality, where, think you, would the "Mill-dam" go to? If he should give us an account of the realities he beheld there, we should not recognize the place in his description. Look at a meeting-house, or a court-house, or a jail, or a shop, or a dwelling-house, and say what that thing really is before a true gaze, and they would all go to pieces in your account of them.



Walden



Men esteem truth remote, in the outskirts of the system, behind the farthest star, before Adam and after the last man. In eternity there is indeed something true and sublime. But all these times and places and occasions are now and here.



Walden



God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages. And we are enabled to apprehend at all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us. The universe constantly and obediently answers to our conceptions; whether we travel fast or slow, the track is laid for us. Let us spend our lives in conceiving then. The poet or the artist never yet had so fair and noble a design but some of his posterity at least could accomplish it.



Extracts

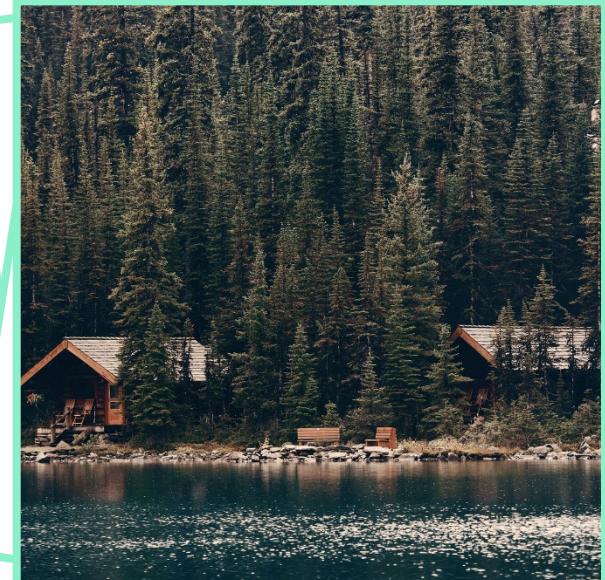
Here are five extracts taken from what you have just read. Discuss with your teacher what Walden meant by them, and if you see a parallel in the modern world.

1. A stitch in time saves nine.
2. After a night's sleep the news is as indispensable as the breakfast.
3. Shams and delusions are esteemed for soundest truths.
4. We think that that *is* which *appears* to be.
5. Whether we travel fast or slow, the track is laid for us.



Thoreau's goals

Give an overview of what you think Thoreau's goals were in cutting himself off from society? Do you think these goals were achievable?





Answer the questions

Answer the questions below with your teacher.



1

Do you think it would be possible to do what Thoreau did in today's world? Where?

2

What do you think would be the positives of cutting yourself off from society?

3

What would be the negatives?



About you

**Would you want to
do what Thoreau did
and live cut off from
civilisation for some
time?**



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!

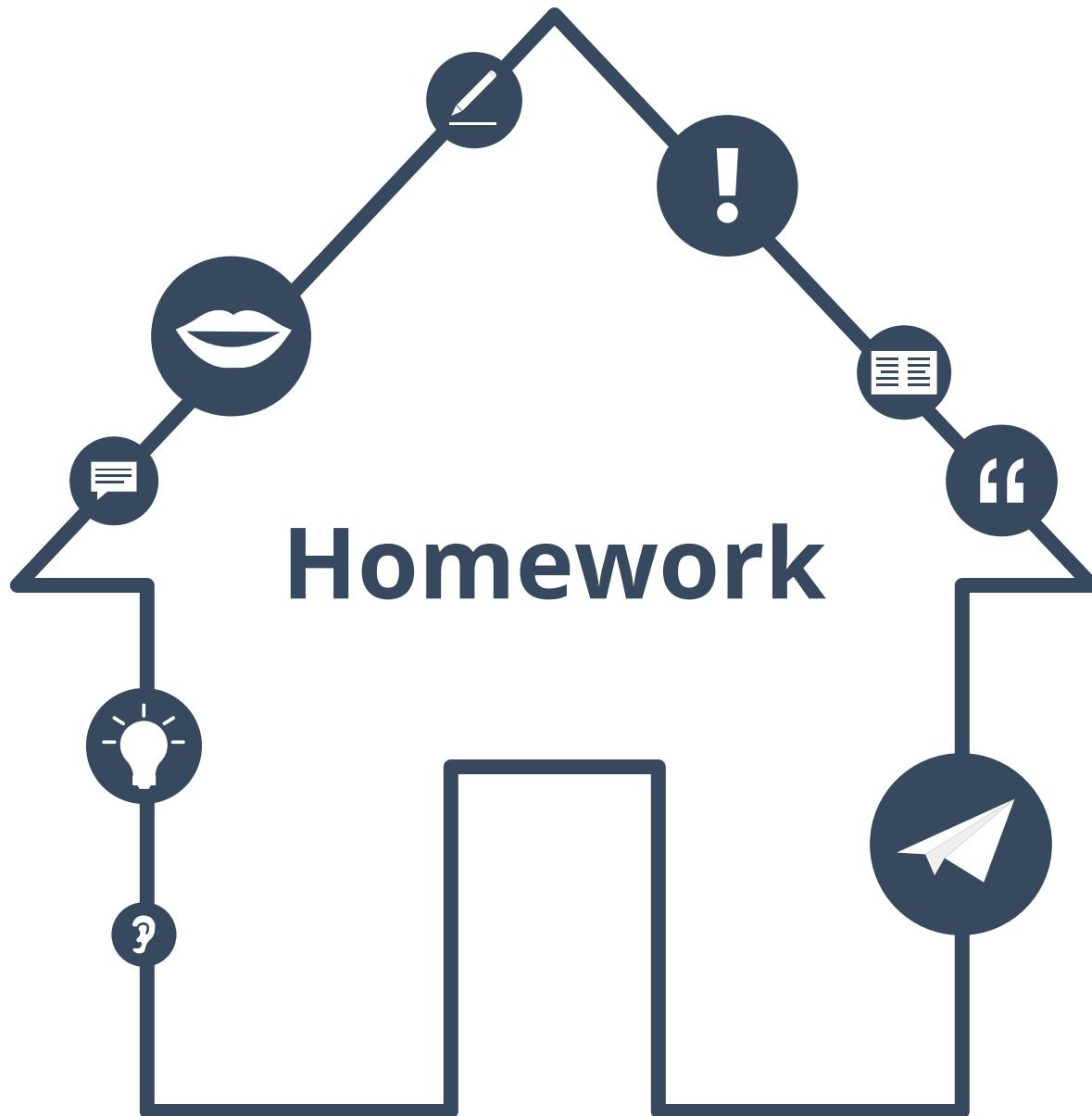




Answer key

Exercise p. 16

1. fritter, 2. superfluous, 3. unwieldy, 4. tinkering, 5. petty





Make 2 lists

Make a list of arguments for and against living cut off from civilisation for a time.

For

Against



Writing

Write a text of about 150 words about whether you would or would not want to live cut off from society for some time.

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