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These notes were contributed by members of the GradeSaver community. We are thankful for their contributions and encourage you to make your own. Written by Timothy Sexton Henry is, of course, the legendary writer Henry David Thoreau. Here, then the contributed by members of the GradeSaver community. We are thankful for their contributions and encourage you to make your own. Written by Timothy Sexton Henry is, of course, the legendary writer Henry David Thoreau.
to conscience and it is Henry's conscience and his unrestrictive adherence to following the tenets of that conscience which make him both endearing and difficult to endure; sometimes simultaneously. Waldo is the equally legendary Transcendentalist writer, Ralph Waldo Emerson. Waldo was Henry's mentor and when asked what he wants to be,
Henry responds, "as much as possible like Ralph Waldo Emerson." Waldo asks the question to which Thoreau responds with the play's most famous line: "What are you doing out of jail?" Henry's brother, John, is a big believer in much of the ideas and concepts which have earned his brother the reputation of being something of a kook. What separates
John from being identified likewise is his reserve in acting upon the pangs of conscience. This should not be taken as a criticism that John is equipped with something his brother lacks: pragmatism in the face of unrestricted idealism. Both men pursue—are pursued by—Ellen Sewell. Beautiful
and intelligent, Ellen rejects Henry and John and later both men agree that what she really desires is both brothers. This is not to be, however, as she and—to a greater degree—her father's beliefs come into conflict with Transcendentalism. Ralph Waldo's wife. Her main purpose in life at this point seems to be to constantly match-make and convince
Henry that all those things which conspire to make people think he's something of a kook could be instantly solved by settling down with a good woman. Waldo and Lydian's son idolizes Henry. In fact, Edward often entertains wishes and fantastical
figure, but to the prolonged periods of absence from the home by Waldo due to the pressures of being one of America's first celebrity authors. Local religious zealot and head of the school board. He doesn't think Henry is a kook; he thinks he is a blasphemous blight and it is who starts the...ball...rolling to imprison Henry for failing to pay taxes.
Henry's cellmate, who has lingered in prison for months awaiting trial for burning down a barn. While in jail together, Henry teaches the illiterate Bailey to write his own name. Henry ultimately is able to convince the essentially kind-hearted Constable Staples to arrange for Bailey to finally receive a speedy trial. You can help us out by revising,
improving and updating this section. Update this section After you claim a section you'll have 24 hours to send in a draft. An editor will review the submission and either publish your submission or provide feedback. Next Section Glossary Previous Section The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail Summary Sexton, Timothy. "The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail Summary Sexton, Timothy."
Characters". GradeSaver, 28 February 2019 Web. Cite this page Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.
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warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. Henry is the defiant, young, Harvard-educated protagonist and the play's imaginative interpretation of the historical Henry David Thoreau
who was a leading thinker in the Transcendentalist tradition and wrote the book Walden. Henry is... read analysis of Henry David Thoreau Henry's mentor, whom Henry met while at Harvard. "Waldo" is a deeply respected and famous scholar and lecturer. Though he is intellectually deft and very insightful with respect to abstract concepts, Henry
argues that... read analysis of Ralph Waldo Emerson Henry's beloved brother. John, like Henry, is thoughtful and passionate, and the only person Henry seems to love with unbridled affection. John dies from an infection caused by a rusty razor blade, a death... read analysis of John Thoreau Minor Characters Bailey Henry's cellmate in the jail, an
uneducated man who is accused of arson and awaiting a trial. He is deeply impressed by Henry's intelligence. Henry eventually persuades Sam, the constable, to give Bailey a speedy trial. Mrs. Thoreau Henry's mother, who worries about her son getting into trouble more than anything else, and doesn't seem to have a moral compass. She fears shame
more than she fears wrongdoing. Lydian Emerson Waldo's wife. Lydian and Henry have a deep mutual affection for one another that approaches attraction, but they are both too loyal to Waldo is so often absent
as he travels and lectures. Deacon Ball The authoritarian and highly traditional head of the school board where Henry once taught. Ball and Henry butt heads over Henry's refusal to follow the school board's directions about education policy, including its insistence that Henry dole out corporal punishment to students. Ellen Sewell Ellen is a beautiful
young woman whom both Henry and John are attracted to. Though she is curious and fairly intelligent, she resists the Thoreau brothers and their thinking because her father disapproves of Transcendentalism. Sam Staples The constable who—unwillingly—takes Henry to jail. He follows orders even when he does not wish to. Though he is not a bad
man, he is a deeply compliant one. Henry Williams The freed slave whom Henry is forced to punish. Content Warning: The source text and this guide discuss enslavement and racism. Henry, the play's protagonist, is a
fictionalization of Henry David Thoreau. The stage descriptions describe him as a "young man—with a knife-like humor, fierce conviction and devastating individuality" (4). Henry's adherence to his principles is uncompromising, and he is willing to be jailed for his refusal to pay his poll tax. The characters who know him best describe him in
paradoxical ways—as "the saddest happy man" and the "happiest sad man" (5), and as someone who simultaneously wants nothing and too much—and these direct characterizations help to flesh out this fictional representation of a complex, flawed man. Henry believes that to enjoy true freedom, a person must cast off society's shackles, reject
materialism, and become self-reliant. Each person must "BE [their] OWN MAN," as he tells his students (28). Rather than following convention and working long hours to afford material things, he believes people should be free to pursue their real interests. If people choose to live simply, they can spend most of their time at leisure rather than
consumed by work. This work ethic explains Waldo's claim that "[Henry] worked on Sundays, and took the rest of the week off" (5). JEROME LAWRENCE AND ROBERT E. LEE 1971AUTHOR BIOGRAPHYPLOT SUMMARYCHARACTERSTHEMESSTYLEHISTORICAL CONTEXTCRITICAL OVERVIEW CRITICISMSOURCESFURTHER READINGThe Night
Thoreau Spent in Jail, by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, was first published in New York in 1971, during the Vietnam War. The play, which was a clear protest against the war, used a related incident from America's history to comment on the current war. In 1846, the writer, Henry David Thoreau, spent a night in jail for not paying his taxes.
Thoreau refused to pay money that would support the war that was currently being waged against Mexico. This incident later provided the basis for Thoreau's popular essay, "Civil Disobedience." Lawrence and Lee's immensely popular essay. Lawrence and Lee's immensely popular essay and the Lee's immensely popular essa
Vietnam-era audiences. In fact, the play was so relevant to the times that it was temporarily shut down shortly after its first performances in 1970, when another anti-Vietnam protest—at Kent State University—resulted in the death of several students. Despite the lack of critical commentary, the play continues to be one of the most popular works by
Lawrence and Lee, a writing team that enjoyed a fifty-two-year collaboration, and who also wrote the immensely popular play, Inherit the Wind. In The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail, time and setting are shifted between each episodic scene without indication or explanation, forcing the audience or reader to pay close attention. These dream-like effects
serve to highlight the main themes of the play—rebelling against authority and expressing one's individuality—universal themes that have appealed to many audiences, both nationally and internationally, since the play's first production. The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail was published in a reissue edition in 1992, which is available from Bantam
Books.AUTHOR BIOGRAPHYJerome Lawrence was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on July 14, 1915. Robert E. Lee was born in Elyria, Ohio, on October 15, 1918. Although both men grew up in the same region of Ohio, attended Ohio universities, and worked in commercial radio, they did not meet each other until 1942, when they met in New York and
immediately became writing partners with their production of Inside a Kid's Head, a radio play. The two men, who had already lived somewhat parallel lives, continued this trend when they both entered the armed forces that summer. They both served in the war until 1945, and together, they co-founded the Armed Forces Radio Service (1942), where
they created and produced radio programs. Following World War II, Lawrence and Lee continued to concentrate mainly on writing, producing, and directing scripts for radio shows, including The Frank Sinatra Show and The Railroad Hour. In 1955, when the advent of television reduced the amount of radio-show programming, they produced their
first stage production, Inherit the Wind. The play, which has proved to be their most successful work, also introduced a technique that Lawrence and Lee would use in most of their plays—staging an historical incident to comment on a current situation. In the case of Inherit the Wind, the dramatized incident was the famous Scopes trial of 1925, in
which a high-school biology teacher was put on trial for attempting to teach evolution. The play was an obvious commentary on the War in Vietnam. Lawrence and
Lee produced several more plays together from the 1970s until the 1990s, during which time they were recognized by many regional and national awards within the dramatic community. In 1990, they were both named to the Theatre Hall of Fame. Three years later, in 1993, Lawrence's Malibu home was destroyed by the fires that were raging
through California. Although many of his personal literary and art collections were lost, he was able to escape with the latest draft of Whisper in the Mind (1994), the last play that Lawrence and Lee produced in their fifty-two-year collaboration. Lee died on July 8, 1994, in Los Angeles, California, shortly before the publication of The Selected Plays of
Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, their final collaborative work. Lawrence currently lives in Malibu, California. PLOT SUMMARYAct 1The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail takes place are awash here." The play starts in one time period, and then abruptly
who was his best friend. With this realization, the action shifts to Henry's jail cell, when the writer is a young man. Henry's mother asks Henry why he is in jail, and he gives vague answers, a tactic that he uses throughout the play. Henry shows what his mother calls his strangeness, by questioning the order of the alphabet. Henry's brother, John
comes into the jail cell and their mother leaves. The location shifts to a sunny field at an earlier time, when Henry has just returned from Harvard. Henry and John talk about Henry's education, which Henry talks with his
cellmate, Bailey, who has been accused of burning down a barn; Bailey has been waiting for his trial for three months, a fact that outrages Henry. Henry treaches Bailey how to spell his name, then grabs a chair from the jail cell and moves to the front of the stage, shifting
back in time to when he was a teacher. He is interrupted by Deacon Nehemiah Ball, the Chairman of the Concord School Committee, who criticizes Henry's deviations from the approved school textbooks. Henry gets into a theological argument with Ball, who is outraged at Henry's transcendentalist beliefs, and Henry provokes the class to laugh at
Ball. John later tells Henry he should apologize to save his job, which Henry does. However, although Ball excuses him, he forces Henry to whip six of his students for laughing. Henry proposes to John that they start their
own unconventional school, which they do. Henry and John stand in a meadow teaching a number of students, including Ellen, a beautiful young woman who is much older than the class. Henry criticizes Ellen for trying to take notes, a method used in conventional schooling. The action shifts back to the jail cell, where Bailey has successfully learned
how to write his own name. Henry encourages Bailey to unlearn it and remain uneducated. Henry pushes the jail cell's locker box to the front of the stage, where it becomes a boat by a pond. John tells Henry their school is losing all of its students. John leaves, and Ellen enters. Henry uses the opportunity to invite her for a boat ride, during which he
tries to explain his transcendentalist views to her and profess his love to her; both attempts are unsuccessful, and Henry suggests that Ellen go to church with John. Back in the jail cell again, Henry proclaims to the steeping Bailey that they are freer in prison than the outside community, who must conform. At the front of the stage, a crowd of
churchgoers files out of the church, Ellen on the arm of John. Although Lydian attempts to mask Waldo's satirical comments, it is clear from Waldo's conversation with Deacon Ball that Waldo is critical of organized religion. This belief is underscored by the appearance of Henry, who, to the dismay of his mother and Ball, is working on Sunday. Later
Henry and John talk about Ellen's refusal to marry John. John dies from blood poisoning, cutting himself with a dirty razor. The action shifts back to the day when Henry hires on as Waldo's handyman and tutor for Edmund, Waldo's son. This is the beginning of the friendship between the two men. Waldo insists on paying Henry, but Henry will not take
money, and instead asks for the future use of a portion of Waldo's wooded estate, Walden, for an experiment. Waldo also asks for Henry's occasional help in polishing his speeches. Back in the jail cell, Henry and Bailey talk about Walden, where he remains secluded from civilization, except when he has to go into town for supplies. The action shifts,
and Henry walks into town to get his shoe fixed. Constable Sam Staples comes up to Henry and serves him with a bill for unpaid taxes. Henry to jail. Waldo gets a note saying that Henry is in jail and goes to see him. Sam pleads with Henry to
pay his tax, but Henry, cryptic no longer, finally explains that he is not paying his tax because it is going to pay for the war against Mexico, which he does not support. The act ends with Waldo asking Henry what he is doing in jail, while Henry asks what Waldo is doing out of jail, implying that Waldo should be protesting in jail with Henry. Act 2Lydian
 sends Edward with Henry to go huckleberry hunting. Edward says he wishes Henry was his father, a sentiment he later repeats to his mother. Lydian suggests that Henry refuses. The action shifts to Walden Woods, where
Henry feeds an escaped slave, Henry Williams, on his way to Canada. The time shifts ahead, and Henry accuses Waldo of not practicing what he preaches, and encourages Waldo, who has much more influence than Henry, to
speak out against slavery and the war. Waldo hesitantly agrees, and Henry rushes off, ringing the town bell and announcing that Waldo is not coming, that he has chosen to think over the matter and write a carefully worded essay describing his position. The crowd disperses.
Henry tries to get their attention again, but this time, the bell makes no sound. Back in his jail cell, Henry is in the grips of a nightmare. The Mexican war rages around his sleeping body, and all of the major characters in the play are in the battle. Edward Emerson is a drummer boy, Sam Staples is a sergeant, Bailey is a soldier, Ball is the general, and
Waldo is the president. Henry tries to talk to Waldo, but no sound comes out. When Ball asks Waldo for instructions, he says that he needs to collect his thoughts. Williams appears as a Mexican soldier. Edward is wounded, but Waldo ignores this fact, saying he needs more time to think, and write a carefully worded essay. The unseen voice of then-
Congressman Abraham Lincoln advocates stopping the war. John comes on the scene in a soldier's uniform and gets killed. Back in the jail cell, Henry wakes up from his nightmare, and finds Sam is there with breakfast. He also tells Henry that somebody paid his tax for him, and that he is free to go. Henry is outraged and forces Sam to tell him that it
was his Aunt Louisa who did it. Henry leaves the cell, telling Bailey that he is leaving Walden, because he has to stop hiding in the woods and take a more active stand against society's injustices. CHARACTERSBailey Bailey that he is leaving Walden, because he has to stop hiding in the woods and take a more active stand against society's injustices. CHARACTERSBailey is Henry's vagrant cellmate, who has landed in prison after he fell asleep in somebody's barn and burned it down by accident.
Henry tries many times to talk to Bailey about his crusade against conformity, but Bailey is an uneducated man, who says he cannot even write his name, but then encourages him to unlearn it, since writing will only get him in trouble. Bailey is excited to hear
about Henry's place in Walden Woods, and says that he [Henry] had a place to call home. Bailey gets panicked about the idea of a trial, and asks Henry to be his lawyer, since he is an educated man. Henry refuses, and Bailey asks Henry to help
him pray. Henry is outraged when he finds out that Bailey has been waiting three months for a trial, and at the end of the play, threatens to sit in the jail cell until Sam Staples intervenes on the behalf of Bailey. Bailey is touched, since nobody has ever stuck up for him before, and says that when he gets out of jail, he may come visit Henry at Walden
Woods. However, Henry says that the Walden stage of his life is over, and he needs to rejoin civilization and take a stand. In Henry's nightmare, Bailey is a civilian soldier who refuses to fight. Deacon Nehemiah Ball visits Henry's nightmare, Bailey is a civilian soldier who also acts as the chairman of the school board, does not like Henry who also acts as the chairman of the school board, does not like Henry who also acts as the chairman of the school board, does not like Henry who also acts as the chairman of the school board, does not like Henry who also acts as the chairman of the school board, does not like Henry who also acts as the chairman of the school board, does not like Henry who also acts as the chairman of the school board, does not like Henry who also acts as the chairman of the school board, does not like Henry who also acts as the chairman of the school board, does not like Henry who also acts as the chairman of the school board, does not like Henry who also acts as the chairman of the school board, and the school board who also acts as the chairman of the school board, and the school board who also acts as the chairman of the school board who also acts as the chairman of the school board who also acts as the chairman of the school board who also acts as the chairman of the school board who also acts as the chairman of the school board who also acts as the chairman of the school board who also acts as the chairman of the school board who also acts as the chairman of the school board who also acts as the chairman of the school board who also acts as the chairman of the school board who also acts as the chairman of the school board who also acts as the chairman of the school board who also acts as the chairman of the school board who also acts as the chairman of the school board who also acts as the chairman of the school board who also acts as the chairman of the school board who also acts as the chairman of the school board who also acts as the chairman of the school board who also acts as th
class, he is shocked that Henry is deviating from the authorized textbooks and considers Henry's transcendental view of God to be blasphemous. Ball is the first to suggest throwing him in jail. In Henry's nightmare, Ball is the General, who advocates
destroying the enemy and who incites the Federal forces to kill. Edward Emerson is the son of Waldo and Lydian, and he wishes Henry was his father instead of the often absent Waldo. Edward hunting for huckleberries,
and Edward gets excited and drops his basket of berries. Although he is upset, Henry consoles him, saying that he is helping to fertilize the earth to make more huckleberries. Edward is delighted when Henry puts gloves on the claws of Lydian's chickens—so that they cannot trample Lydian's flowers anymore. In Henry's nightmare, Edward plays a
drummer boy who is wounded in the fight. When Henry carries the wounded boy to Waldo, the president in the dream Waldo echoes his noncommittal statement from before, saying that he needs to write a carefully worded essay about the situation. Lydian Emerson Lydian is the wife and supporter of Waldo, and encourages Henry to settle
down, get married, and conform. Although Lydian appears to agree with many of Henry's ideas, she refuses to go against her husband by supporting Henry that Waldo cannot possibly live up to the ideal image that Henry has painted of her husband. It is Lydian who
comes in place of Waldo, to tell Henry and the assembled crowd that her husband is not ready to speak yet. In Waldo's old age, Lydian helps her befuddled husband remember Henry's name, the event that starts the play. Ralph Waldo Emerson Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of America's greatest writers, is in this play shown to be an ineffective preacher
 when compared with Henry's activism. Waldo gives many lectures at Harvard outlining the beliefs of Transcendentalism, and he finds a willing acolyte in one of his audience members, Henry David Thoreau. Waldo hires Henry as a handyman and tutor for his son, Edward, in exchange for the use of a piece of Waldo's wooded estate. This arrangementalism, and he finds a willing acolyte in one of his audience members, Henry David Thoreau.
later provides the location for Henry's Walden Woods project. Waldo spends much of his time writing or delivering lectures, much to the chagrin of his lonely wife, Lydian, who nevertheless supports Waldo completely. Waldo and Henry become great friends, but the friendship sours when Henry gets fed up with Waldo's lack of public protest. Henry become great friends, but the friendship sours when Henry gets fed up with Waldo's lack of public protest.
accuses Waldo of failing to use the whole of his massive influence to speak out against such injustices as slavery and the war in Mexico. Waldo marvels at the fact that Henry is a living, breathing example of the principles that he lectures on, but is unable to adopt an activist lifestyle of protest himself. Instead, he prefers to work within the laws, and
write his lectures and essays. When Henry challenges Waldo to become a greater activist by speaking to the town, Waldo tentatively agrees, but backs out after Henry has already gathered a crowd. Waldo sends Lydian to let Henry know that Waldo sends Lydian to let Henry know that Waldo sends Lydian to let Henry has already gathered a crowd. Waldo sends Lydian to let Henry know that Waldo sends Lydian 
while Henry counters, asking Waldo why he is out of jail. In other words, if Waldo really practiced what he president, who refuses to acknowledge the war tragedies that are happening around him or make any decisions; instead, he says he
needs to write careful essays about them, echoing his earlier message about why he cannot speak out like Henry's actions draw a crowd, and he claims that Henry is always starting false fires, as when he says Waldo is going to give a speech and Waldo does not. In Henry's nightmare, the farmer serves
as a soldier. Henry See Henry David Thoreau Henry's mother does not understand why Henry always acts so strange, and wishes he would just conform like everybody else. Henry's mother does not understand why Henry always acts so strange, and wishes he would just conform like everybody else. Henry's mother does not understand why Henry always acts so strange, and wishes he would just conform like everybody else.
prays that Ellen Sewell will accept John's marriage proposal. At John's funeral, she tries to get Henry to a God that felt it necessary to take John. Ellen Sewell is a young woman who attracts both Henry and John, and who declines John's marriage proposal. Ellen is much older than the other students in
Henry's and John's school, although she asks to be able to study with them. She is intrigued, then turned off, by Henry's transcendental beliefs, and Henry suggests that she go to church with John. Although she does accompany John to church, she claims that her father is forbidding her from marrying either Henry or John. However, Henry and John
both believe that she wants to have both brothers. When John dies, Ellen is out of town, so she asks Henry what has happened. Henry is very rude to her, describing John's death in very graphic terms, which shocks her at first. In the end, however, she suggests that maybe they are meant to transcend John's death, an admission that makes Henry is very rude to her, describing John's death in very graphic terms, which shocks her at first. In the end, however, she suggests that maybe they are meant to transcend John's death, an admission that makes Henry is very rude to her, describing John's death in very graphic terms, which shocks her at first. In the end, however, she suggests that maybe they are meant to transcend John's death, an admission that makes Henry is very rude to her, describing John's death, an admission that makes Henry is very rude to her, describing John's death, and the properties of 
believe Ellen is starting to understand his beliefs. Constable Sam Staples Sam Staples Sam Staples Sam Staples is the law enforcement officer in Concord, who reluctantly throws Henry in jail. Sam is a good-natured man, who first of all serves Henry with his bill for unpaid taxes, then offers to loan Henry the money to pay for them. Henry is outraged at this suggestion, and
forces Sam to take him to jail. Sam does not understand why Henry will not just pay his taxes. At the end of the first act, Henry has stated outright why he is in jail, a question that it posed at the beginning of the first act but not
answered until this point. In Henry's nightmare, Sam is a Sergeant, who inspires his troops to hate, and who forces Henry and Bailey to take guns they do not want. Henry and Bailey to take guns they do not want. Henry is in jail, but the
audience does not find out until the end of the first act that it is because he does not want to pay the taxes that will support the Mexican-American war. Henry is an uncompromising believer in casting off the chains of conformity and deliberately suggests that society should do things differently, such as starting the alphabet with a different letter.
Because of these ideas, his mother, and indeed many of the townspeople, find Henry strange. Henry is a Harvard-educated man, but does not believe in conventional education. He tries teaching his open-minded beliefs in the strictly censored school, and when that fails, he opens his own ill-fated school with his brother, John. He is initially attracted to
Ellen Sewell, but realizes that his brother, John, would make a better match, although Ellen turns John down. After John's death, Henry's views on organized religion and his belief in a caring God deteriorate even more. A devoted disciple and friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry spends all of his energies trying to adhere to the ideals that Waldo
lectures about. At one point, Henry hires on as Waldo's handyman and the tutor of Waldo's son, Edward, in exchange for the use of part of Walden, and treats him as a free man. Henry is distraught when he hears that Williams was shot as
he was trying to make his way to Canada, and uses the incident to launch an argument about Waldo's lack of activism. Henry and could do more good. Waldo tentatively agrees to give an impromptu speech against slavery and the war in
Mexico, but backs out, leaving Henry to try, unsuccessfully, to get the attention of the frustrated townspeople. In Henry's nightmare, he is initially sleeping, as the war rages around him. Sam Staples wakes Henry up within his dream, forces a gun in his hand, and forces him to join the nightmarish war. When Waldo appears as the president, Henry and forces a gun in his hand, and forces him to join the nightmarish war.
tries to talk to him, but Waldo cannot hear anything that he is saying, and refuses to comment on the war or make any decisions. At the end of the play, Henry wakes up to find that his tax has been paid by his Aunt Louisa, a fact that angers him. When Henry leaves the jail, he vows to leave Walden and take his activism to the next level. John
Thoreau John Thoreau is Henry's much-loved brother, who shares many of Henry's beliefs, but does not have the same conviction as Henry to apologize to Deacon Ball, so that Henry can save his job
After the school founded by Henry and John fails, John goes back to his job at the pencil factory. Both John and Henry are attracted to Ellen Sewell, a young woman who asks to join their school. When Henry's attempt to win her love fails, he encourages her to see John. However, although she accompanies John to church, Ellen does not accept his
marriage proposal, because her father does not like the Thoreau brothers. Also, as John and Henry discuss, it appears that she wants both brothers, not just one or the other. John dies from blood poisoning, after he cuts himself shaving with an old razor. In Henry's nightmare, John is a Federal soldier, who dies at the end of the dream. Waldo See Ralph
Waldo EmersonHenry Williams Henry Williams food, and is distraught when he hears erom his former owner, encounters Henry treats him as an equal. Henry gives Williams food, and is distraught when he hears
that Williams has been shot while trying to escape to Canada.THEMESFreedomThe overriding message in the play, Henry meets a slave, Williams, who plans to go "North as I kin git! They
say the Norther ya git, the free-er ya git!" However, although Henry supports Williams's escape to Canada, he warns him that men in the north are not free, either: "Every man shackled to a ten-hour-a-day is a worfc-slave. Every man who has to worry about next month's rent is a money-slave." TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDYResearch the causes.
conditions, and outcomes of the Mexican-American War, choosing one prominent military or political figure from both Mexico and the United States of America who took part in the conflict. Imagine that these two leaders have been invited to appear on a modern-day, televised debate show, to defend their viewpoints about, and actions during, the
war. Write a short script or scenario that depicts what might happen during this debate. Research the main beliefs of transcendentalists in the place of Henry David Thoreau, imagine that he has traveled through time to the early 1970s. Incorporating
your research from both major belief systems, write a journal entry that describes how he might have contributed to or been affected by the Vietnam antiwar movement. Freedom fighting is a common theme throughout human history of the struggle.
focusing especially on ways that this society fought against or protested its oppression. How do these compare to the methods used by Thoreau or the end that he cannot afford to just stay at Walden anymore, and that he needs to
be more active in his fight with society. Research Thoreau's life after the jail incident and use this information to discuss whether or not his efforts to effect change society were also prevalent in other visual arts in the twentieth century, such as painting and film
Choose a visual medium, and find an example of a work that you feel accurately represents at least one of the main themes of the play. Discuss the history behind the work, including how it was received. This idea of being chained to institutions, even within a free society, is expressed further through Henry's individual struggle. When he is confronted
by Sam Staples, the friendly constable tells Henry he has to pay his taxes, to help support the war. Henry, however, refuses to pay, on the grounds that he does not support the war and says that he does not want to be part of a society that does. If one honest man in this state of Massachusetts had the conviction and the courage to withdraw from this
unholy partnership and let himself be locked up in the County Jail, it'd be the start of more true freedom than we've seen since a few farmers had the guts to block the British by the bridge up the road. With statements like this about various social institutions, and with his resulting actions—Henry does have the courage to be locked up—Henry proves
that he is willing to stand up against conformity, a phrase commonly referred to as "rocking the boat." This phrase is given a very literal translation in the play when Henry's school. Says Henry: "Stand up to your father! (He stands. The boat
rocks.)" This action terrifies Ellen, as it does society. Finally, the lack of freedom is expressed through dialogue, specifically the words "get along" with whatever society dictates. When Henry wants to complain about the fact that his cellmate, Bailey, has
been waiting three months for trial, Bailey stops him, saying he does not want to "make a ruckus. I'm not a troublemaker. I just want to earn my keep, make a little tobakky money, and get along." As Henry says to Bailey, "Get along'!" Those words turn my stomach." At the beginning of the second act, Lydian tells Henry that "in order to get along, you
have to go along," a statement that enrages Henry, who responds by shouting "GO ALONG! GO ALONG! GO ALONG! GO ALONG! GO ALONG! "Shortly after that, Waldo tells Henry that "We have to go along with the majority!" a statement that again frustrates Henry, who responds by shouting "GO ALONG! GO ALONG! GO ALONG! GO ALONG!" Shortly after that, Waldo tells Henry that "We have to go along with the majority!" a statement that again frustrates Henry.
military's plan to "conquer the entire territory." In response to this, all of the characters chant "Go along!" several times, emphasizing that most, in the end, will conform. Activism Because of his objections to various social ills like slavery and the war against Mexico, Henry becomes an activist, although in the beginning, his form of activism is very
passive, rebelling against society by retreating from it and living at Walden. Waldo calls Henry on this fact during their argument about activism. Says Waldo, "And what are you doing about it, young man? You pull the woods up over your head. You resign from the human race." Henry is not deterred, however, and challenges Waldo, asking him if he
is really aware of what is going on in the war. Here, Henry merges his distaste for slavery and the war against Mexico into one comment. Says Henry, when describing the reasons for the war, it is "slave-holders grasping for more slave territory? More slavery and less freedom, is that what you want?" As the play progresses chronologically, Henry's
activism becomes more pronounced than just retreating from society. After his heated conversation with Waldo, Henry convinces his mentor to address the issues of slavery and war in a public statement and goes to drum up a crowd for the speech. He rings Concord's town bell, and people come running. He preps the crowd, getting them excited by
saying that "Emerson is going to rile up the whole country. And you're going to hear it first!" However, Waldo backs out of the speech, and when the townspeople realize it was a false alarm, they start to leave. Henry tries to get them to come back, by ringing the bell again, but this time, as the stage directions indicate, "THE BELL DOES NOT RING!"
Walden, "I may not be there." As the final stage directions indicate, Henry is moving to the next step in his activism: "He seems to grow in stature, lifted and strengthened by a greater challenge." Henry realizes that he cannot count on other people like Waldo to change society, that he must leave Walden and try to change society himself. Intelle
dualismIn contrast to Henry's activism, Waldo's intellectualism—thinking thoroughly about the situation but rarely acting—is shown to be ineffective. Through his lectures and writings at Harvard and elsewhere, Waldo has inspired people like Henry to "Cast Conformity behind you." As a result, Waldo has become a very popular and influential public
ideals if they compromise his personal security. Waldo's ineffectiveness is demonstrated when he refuses to show up for the public appearance that Henry sets up. Waldo's message, saying that her husband, "wants more time to meditate on these matters.... So that he can write a careful essay setting forth
his position." This highly intellectual approach angers Henry, who wants Waldo to take action. In addition, Lydian's quote in response to the questions of whether or not he supports total destruction of the enemy and in what he thinks
about the fact that his son has been shot.STYLEExpressionism was a movement that was popular in drama and other, mainly visual, arts, beginning in Germany in the 1910s. Expressionism was a movement that was popular in drama and other, mainly visual, arts, beginning in Germany in the 1910s. Expressionism was a movement that was popular in drama and other, mainly visual, arts, beginning in Germany in the 1910s.
to bend concrete reality—to express emotions and ideas. In the case of The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail, Lawrence and Lee bend reality by staging their drama in a shifting landscape, where the main characters, especially Henry, move instantly and dream-like through time and space. The resulting dream-like episodes cause the audience to become
 somewhat disoriented. Ultimately, these feelings express the playwrights' message—activism is not always easy, and can in fact be uncomfortable and unpredictable, just like the respective wars that were going on in Thoreau's time (the Mexican War) and in the 1970s (the Vietnam War). Time and SpaceAs noted above, the characters in the properties are the properties of the properties and unpredictable and unpredictable and unpredictable and unpredictable.
through time frequently. These time and space jumps all take place either in or around Henry's jail cell. Although Henry's jail cell is constantly present on stage, he leaves it often—sometimes physically, sometimes not—to travel to other times and places. An example of Henry jumping through time and space without leaving his cell occurs when John
visits Henry in his jail cell, Henry is in a trance, remembering a speech that he has heard Waldo say at Harvard. John looks at Henry, who is still stuck in his memory of Harvard, and says: "Now here's a rare specimen—."At the end of this statement, Waldo makes a remark from another part of the stage, and then, as the stage directions indicate, "The
light intensifies on Henry and John—the amber of sunny fields." At this point, John picks up his specimen conversation from the jail cell to a meadow, just after Henry has returned from Harvard. In
addition to the lighting, this fact is revealed to the audience when John says, "Welcome home. How's your overstuffed brain?" Although Henry is still technically in the jail cell as far as the stage dynamics are concerned, the playwrights convey to the audience the time and place of the new location through lighting and dialogue. In some cases,
Lawrence and Lee indicate the time and space change by having Henry or another character move to a different part of the stage, or by having Henry use a stage prop such as a chair or storage locker. However, depending upon how subtle these clues are, the audience is sometimes called upon to work harder to recognize these setting shifts. For
example, at the beginning of the second act, after Henry erupts at Lydian for telling him that he has to "go along," the stage directions indicate that "Lydian has reached for a little straw berry-basket." With this small act, the setting shifts smoothly to an earlier time, using Lydian's words of "go along" as a transition from the argument to a time right
before Henry takes Edward huckleberry hunting. Says Lydian in the next line, "Edward? (The little boy comes running to her). Go along with Mr. Thoreau." This more subtle technique makes it harder for the audience to follow, but, once again, underscores the expressionistic and uncomfortable quality of the play. Although the entire play is dreamlike,
the play achieves its ultimate expression in the actual dream at the end of the play, Henry's nightmare, which convinces Henry to take action. Foil is a character who, when placed next to another character, makes the other character seem better in
some way. In this case, Henry is the obvious activist, and his status as an activist is raised when Henry is compared to the other characters, who all experience a relative lack of activism. As described above, the most overt foil is Waldo, whose intellectualism prevents him from activist, and his status as an activist activism. As described above, the most overt foil is Waldo, whose intellectualism prevents him from activism. As described above, the most overt foil is Waldo, whose intellectualism prevents him from activism.
of activism, such as Henry's brother John, who agrees with Henry's ideas of unconventional schooling, saying that: "All a school needs is a mind that sends, and minds that receive." John loses heart and leaves to go "back to the pencil factory," a
conforming job that compromises the ideals that he and Henry share. Henry, on the other hand, decides to trade his intellectual pursuits for natural pursuits for nature: "Perhaps, some day, if my work has been useful to you, and if
we remain friends, I may ask you for a bit of your woods." Ellen Sewell is also a foil for Henry is saying, and takes down notes. Henry tells her: "Don't just remember what I said. Remember what I'm talking about." Although Ellen eventually
stops taking notes, showing that she can follow this concept of nonconformity, she nevertheless does not fully adopt the transcendentalist ideas that Henry tries to explain to her. Says Henry: "When you transcend the limits of yourself, you can cease merely living—and begin to BE!" However, Ellen is "a little bit afraid—just—to 'be!'" and as a result
soon goes back to her normal life of conformity, as most of the characters and Henry, the only one who persists in trying to achieve the ideal that Waldo has set forth, Henry appears as the ultimate activist. HISTORICAL CONTEXTThe American Renaissance During the time the play takes place,
America was experiencing a renaissance, or rebirth, in the arts, particularly literature. This renaissance was sparked mainly by Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose famous Harvard addresses in the 1830s inspired other contemporary New England writers, like Thoreau, to produce many great literary works. At the center of Emerson's teachings and the
American Renaissance was the idea of Transcendentalism, a literary and philosophical movement that idealized self-sufficiency and freedom of individual thought and opposition to conformity, even to the point of neglecting to form a concrete definition of Transcendentalism itself. Transcendentalism were opposed to rationalism and, ultimately,
believed in the potential of the human mind to transcend the physical reality and thus find the meaning in life. Along with Emerson and Thoreau, other writers of the American Renaissance formed a group that was eventually called the Transcendental Club. Members included Nathaniel Hawthorne and Bronson Alcott, both residents of Concord
Bronson was the father of Louisa May Alcott, another writer who would later incorporate the Transcendentalist beliefs she learned as a child into her own writings later in the century. Mexican WarAs Henry notes in the play, he refuses to pay taxes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes in the play, he refuses to pay taxes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes in the play, he refuses to pay taxes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes in the play, he refuses to pay taxes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes in the play, he refuses to pay taxes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes in the play, he refuses to pay taxes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes in the play taxes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes in the play taxes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes in the play taxes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes in the play taxes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes in the play taxes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes in the play taxes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes in the play taxes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes in the play taxes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes in the play taxes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry notes that will go to support the Mexican WarAs Henry
Mexican War, also known as the Mexican-American War, took place between the United States and Mexico from April 1846 to February 1848. The war began over a dispute between the two countries about where the dividing line was between the United States and Mexico. In 1845, directly following this
annexation, President James Polk sent an emissary to negotiate both the border dispute and to try to buy additional lands—modern-day New Mexico and California. Mexico refused to negotiate, and Polk sent General Zachary Taylor and his troops into the disputed border area, which technically belonged to Mexico. This move, in turn, instigated an
attack by Mexican forces. Polk cited this attack as taking place on American territory—even though the dispute over the Mexico border territory had not been settled—and Congress authorized a war. Support for the war was largely divided. Although Polk and many southerners were ecstatic, many in the northern states viewed the war as an attempt
to acquire more lands, which some believed were only for the purpose of creating more slave-holding southern states. The war was one-sided, as United States's technologically advanced forces won consecutive battles on two fronts. Under Colonel Stephen Kearny, New Mexico and California were easily occupied, with the native populations putting
up little fight. Meanwhile, in Mexico, General Taylor's forces conquered the Mexican forces in a couple of key battles, but neglected to follow the defeated forces farther into Mexico. When President Polk learned of this, he deployed a different force, under the direction of General Winfield Scott, to land at Veracruz and march inland to overtake
Mexico's capital, Mexico City. On September 14, 1847, after a series of victories, Scott's forces conquered the capital. As a result of the treaty between the two nations, Mexico, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, California, Texas, and western Colorado, for $15
million. Vietnam Antiwar Protests When Lawrence and Lee wrote The Night Thoreau's historical protest was more subtle than many other antiwar protests used during Vietnam. Common methods of protest during
Vietnam included men burning their draft cards, which legally obligated them to report for duty in the military. Because skipping this duty was a punishable offense, some were not content with destroying their cards, and fled the country—COMPARE & CONTRASTMid-1840s: The United States engages in a brutal war in Mexico in an attempt to gain
more land for America.Late 1960s-Early 1970s: The United States engages in a brutal war in Vietnam in an attempt to locate hidden terrorist groups. Mid-1840s: The U.S.-Mexican War is started by President Polk with
authorization from Congress. Polk says that Mexico's attack on American soil, In addition, it is Polk's placement of American forces in this disputed borderland that prompts the Mexican army to attack. Late 1960s-Early 1970s: Congress gives
President Johnson unlimited powers to wage war in Vietnam, as the result of two alleged attacks on American naval destroyers in the region. Although one attack is later confirmed, the other is not. In addition, the ships, which Johnson claims are on routine missions in neutral waters, are actually on covert missions within enemy waters, which
provokes the first attack. Today: The War on Terrorism starts after the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D. C., are attacked by terrorists, who crash fueled commercial jetliners into the two structures. Much of this is captured on live television, and Americans widely support the moves by President Bush and Congress
to begin and escalate a war on terrorism. Mid-1840s: During the U.S.-Mexican War, many Americans in the northern states do not support the fighting. Late 1960s-Early 1970s: Many young American men protest against the
Vietnam war by refusing to fight. Common methods of protest include burning draft cards and fleeing to other countries, although demonstrations—peaceful and violent—also increase. Today: The American military experiences a surge in its ranks as patriotic men and women willingly join the fight against terrorism. in many cases to Canada—to avoid
military service or prosecution. Some chose to ignore their draft notices and stay inside the country, actively voicing their protest. Among the more famous protesters was world-champion heavyweight boxer, Mohammed Ali, who in 1967 refused to be drafted as a result of his religious beliefs. Ali's case went to court later that year, and he was
sentenced to five years prison and a $ 10,000 fine, although he eventually appealed the case all the way to the Supreme Court, which decided three years later to reverse the decision and let Ali go free. However, Ali was not so lucky in his boxing career. When he refused to be drafted, the World Boxing Association and the New York State Athletic
Commission stripped Ali of his championship boxing title and revoked his boxing license, a decision, at which point Ali was able to box again. Besides protesting the draft, others protested the war itself in demonstrations, many of which were meant to be nonviolent. One of the most famous,
and tragic, of these protests took place on Kent State University's campus in May 1970. Following the April 30 announcement by President Richard Nixon that the United States' military forces were invading Cambodia, students at Kent State staged the first of many demonstrations that week. As the demonstrations spawned rioting and arson, Ohio's
governor called in the state's National Guard to try to maintain order. During the demonstrations on May 4, the National Guardsmen fired a number of bullets into the crowd, killing four students and injuring many others. Although many of the students on campus were protesting the war, some were merely gathering in the protest area to eat their
lunch or watch what was going on. In the end, the four students that were killed were never confirmed as protesters. This tragic event ignited college campuses around the country in protest, and many campuses were temporarily closed as a result.CRITICAL OVERVIEWThe Night Thoreau Spent in Jail is one of Lawrence and Lee's most famous plays
although it has received very little critical attention. As Alan Woods wrote in his introduction to the play in The Selected Plays of Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, the play was "widely produced across North America," but "was deliberately never performed either on or off Broadway." As Woods noted, Lawrence and Lee did this to demonstrate
"that the theatre could be born and continue to live elsewhere than on a few blocks of Manhattan real estate." As a result, the New York dramatic critics did not review the play. However, as Woods wrote in his general introduction to The Selected Plays of Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, the play "was a landmark success in the regional theatre
movement."This pattern of having many successful productions with little critical commentary has been repeated since the play's first productions in 1970. In fact, with rare exception, the only criticism has come from regional newspapers that reviewed local performances, such as Christopher Rowan's 1998 review in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.
Rowan called the play "charmingly artless but also clunky," saying that the play mixes "family comedy" with "homespun philosophy and high-minded debate." In addition, the only major academic commentary has been from Woods, who directs the Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute at The Ohio State University—
Lawrence's alma mater. In addition to editing The Selected Plays of Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, Woods also wrote the entries for Lawrence and Lee for the Dictionary of Literary Biography. As he noted in hisLawrence and Lee for the Dictionary of Literary Biography. As he noted in hisLawrence and Lee for the Dictionary of Literary Biography.
grows brighter rather than dimmer" at the end of the play, while "Thoreau strides through the audience to confront the future." These new modes were used specifically to highlight the playwrights' anti-war message, which resonated with the Vietnam-era audiences. As Woods noted in his introduction to The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail in The
Selected Plays of Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, the play "comments on contemporaneous events, as do most of Lawrence and Lee's plays." Although it has still never been produced in New York, the play was performed in Hong Kong as a memorial to the
students killed during the anti-Communism protest in Tiananmen Square. The play is also frequently used in high school course, and in one notable case, a law school course, and in one notable case, a law school course. In his 1997 article, "Fiction Draws Students Into the Culture of Law," Ronald W. Eades noted how he has used the play as one of the texts in his American Legal
History course, since the play provides "a fictional account of issues that are raised in the course." Today, The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail is considered, along with Inherit the Wind—another play based on a historical event—to be one of the playwrights' greatest works. CRITICISMRyan D. PoquettePoquette has a bachelor's degree in English and
specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette discusses how Lawrence and Lee use changes in dialogue and plot to slowly darken the tone of their play. When The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail begins, the play is very lighthearted, and many of Henry's lines are designed to elicit laughs in other characters or the audience. By the
end of the play, however, when Henry has his gritty nightmare, humor is replaced by a grim sense of purpose. This change is not abrupt. Rather, over the course of the story, Lawrence and Lee use shifts in Henry's dialogue and the events in his life to induce a gradually darker tone into the play. In the beginning of the play, Henry is very sarcastic,
expressing all sorts of witticisms on various topics. When his mother tells Henry he is "getting everything backward," and wonders how he learned his alphabet conform to a set pattern, and to suggest alternatives. Says Henry, "Must the alphabet begin
with A?... Why not with Z? Z is a very sociable letter." Henry is equally flippant about the idea of traditional education, and When his brother asks about his Harvard diploma, he says that "They charge you a dollar. And I wouldn't pay it." John says that their mother would have liked to have the diploma to hang up, and Henry gives another witty
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response: "Let every sheep keep his own skin." Likewise, when Henry is in jail with Bailey in the beginning, and Bailey starts to snore—while Henry is straining to hear something outside—Henry does not just ask his cellmate to stop snoring. Instead, he uses his wit again, to say a line that is meant to make the audience laugh: "Every human being has
an inalienable right to snore. Provided it does not interfere with the inalienable right of other men to snore."In the first act of the play, Henry also uses witty comments to his supervisor, Deacon Ball, who calls Henry an atheist. Says Henry, "I've often
wondered, Deacon Ball, if atheism might even be popular with God himself." This witty retort causes the audience to think, and once again is intended to elicit a laugh, as is Henry's report to his class that, due to Ball's strict requirements, "You must not listen to a cricket or smell a flower that has not been approved by the School Committee." Henry
expands on this joke, by illustrating the logistical improbabilities of doing this with only two hands: "You'd better close both ears and hold your nose—though you may have to grow an extra hand to do it." When Henry opens his own school with his brother, John, he also offers witty comments to his students, such as Ellen Sewell, who he catches taking
notes. "You keep a notebook," she tells him. Henry's reply is quirky and witty: "I also wear a ridiculous straw hat. That doesn't mean that you should wear a ridiculous hat. You'd look ridiculous at this point. Henry is so committed to the idea
of not conforming that he yells at Ellen: "Follow-the-leader is not the game we're playing here! Young lady, BE YOUR OWN MAN!" From this point on, Henry still makes witty comments, such as his witty banter when he is applying for a job with Waldo, and says he wants to use his hands. When Waldo asks about his head, Henry says: "It could be
useful. For burrowing, perhaps.... I could beat it into a ploughshare." However, as the play progresses, the majority of Henry's comments become more politically charged, as opposed to just witty. Near the end of the first act, when Sam tells Henry that he has to pay his taxes to support the war, Henry is furious, and tries to renounce his citizenship
Says Henry, "I wouldn't pay the tithe and tariff to the church, so I signed off from the church, so I signed off from the government. Where do I sign?" Henry's transformation in language reaches its climax at the very end of the act, in the last exchange. Waldo has come to the jail to confront Henry, and says: "Henry! Henry! Henry!"
What are you doing in jail? However, at this point, Henry is very politically charged, and does not balk from confronting his former mentor, whoWHAT DO I READ NEXT? Mother Courage and Her Children, an antiwar play by German playwright, Bertolt Brecht, was originally published in 1949 following World War II. Like The Night Thoreau Spent in
Jail, Brecht's tragic play is set in an earlier historical era, in this case seventeenth-century Europe, during the multi-national Thirty Years' War. Brecht's play depicts the tragic figure of Mother Courage, whose attempts to make money from the war inadvertently kill all of her children. Mother Courage and Her Children is available in a reprint edition
from 1991, translated by Eric Bentley.Ralph Waldo Emerson and his transcendentalist ideas were a strong influence on the life and works of Henry David Thoreau. In 2000, many of Emerson's teachings.Lawrence and
Lee's Inherit the Wind is the writing team's most successful play. In 1925, the state of Tennessee filed suit against Michael Scopes, a young teacher who was trial, as an obvious commentary on the Communist "witch trials" that were being held by Senator Joseph
McCarthy and others during the 1950s. Harmon Smith's My Friend, My Friend. The Story of Thoreau's Relationship between the two writers, which lasted from Thoreau's Harvard days in the 1860s. Although this relationship between the two writers, which lasted from Thoreau's Harvard days in the 1860s.
Smith's engaging account, which includes many quotes from the journals of Emerson and Thoreau, offers new insights. Thoreau's one night in jail eventually became the basis for his essay "Civil Disobedience," which was first published in 1849 as "Resistance to Civil Government." Although the work received little critical or popular attention at the
time, it found an audience with twentieth-century readers. The essay was reprinted with Thoreau's other major essays in 1993 in Civil Disobedience and Other Essays. Unlike "Civil Disobedience during Thoreau's lifetime, although the
book's sales did not really take off until it was reprinted shortly before Thoreau's death, at which point it was renamed, simply, Walden. Since then, it has sold millions of copies, achieved enormous critical success, and been translated into many different languages. Walden is currently available in a reprint edition from 1998.he feels should be in jail
protesting with him: "(Defiantly, pointing accusingly across Concord Square). Waldo! What are you doing out of jail?"While the first act features some light, witty dialogue from Henry that slowly darkens, the second act is mainly serious, as evidenced by the opening scene. Lydian tells Henry that "in order to get along, you have to go along." Henry is
disgusted at this idea of conformity, and shouts: "GO ALONG! GO ALONG! GO ALONG!" to show his rage. The second act also witnesses Henry's realization that, while witty language is fun, it is not always effective. When Bailey comes to him, nervous about his upcoming trial, he asks Henry to "Tell me what to do!" Henry responds: "Well, you might
try getting yourself born in a more just and generous age. That's not a very practical suggestion." Although Henry's witty comments about alphabets and atheism worked in the beginning when the stakes were "ALL OF THE GRADUALLY MORE SERIOUS EVENTS HAVE HARDENED HENRY'S RESOLVE, A FACT THAT IS MANIFESTED BY THE
CHANGE IN HIS LANGUAGE, FROM WITTY AND PLAYFUL, TO MORE POLITICALLY ACTIVE, TO SILENT-LETTING HIS ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN HIS WORDS."not as high, now he is dealing with a man's life, and he realizes that in such heady matters, humor does not always offer a practical solution. In the end, after his nightmare, Henry and Playful, To More Politically Active, To Silent-Letting His actions a high, now he is dealing with a man's life, and he realizes that in such heady matters, humor does not always offer a practical solution. In the end, after his nightmare, Henry and Playful, To More Politically Active, To Silent-Letting His actions a high, now he is dealing with a man's life, and he realizes that in such heady matters, humor does not always offer a practical solution. In the end, after his nightmare, Henry and Playful, To More Politically Active, To Silent-Letting His action and the realizes that in such heady matters, humor does not always offer a practical solution. In the end, after his nightmare, Henry and Playful, and the realizes that in such heady matters, humor does not always offer a practical solution. In the end, after his nightmare, Henry and Playful, and the realizes that he had a high properties a high properties and heady matters, humor does not always offer a practical solution. In the end, after his nightmare, heady matter a high properties and heady matters are not always offer a practical solution. In the end, after his nightmare, heady matter a high properties are not always offer a practical solution. In the end, after his nightmare, heady matter a high properties are not always offer a practical solution. In the end, after his nightmare, heady matter a high properties are not always offer a high properties are not always of
trades in his witty dialogue for an activist's sense of purpose. The very end of the play, which is silent, offers a marked contrast to Henry's impassioned dialogue throughout the beginning of the story. The stage directions describe in detail how Henry "seems to grow in stature, lifted and strengthened by a greater challenge," but Henry does not say
anything. He has learned that actions speak louder than words, and is prepared to act. The shift in Henry's style and frequency of speech mirrors the events in Henry's life, which also shift from the comedic and lighthearted to the tragic and purposeful. In the beginning of the play, when John asks Henry what he wants to do with his life, he says "I
want to be as much as possible like Ralph Waldo Emerson." Henry is fresh out of school at this point, and thinks that he will be able to live his Transcendental life without being greatly affected by other events. However, when Henry tries to pursue his vocation of teaching, he runs up against the strict requirements of the school, which include
whipping the students when they misbehave. Reluctantly, Henry does this, but he is so disgusted with himself that he informs Deacon Ball he "has administered the Sacrament of the Schoolroom; and he resigns as a 'teacher' in the Public Schools of Concord!" Since, at this point, the audience does not know the negative circumstances surrounding
Henry's imprisonment, Henry's resignation from school becomes the first event that is portrayed as negative. It is followed by a series of events, which get progressively more tragic. The Transcendentalist school established by Henry and John fails when they lose all of their students. Henry tries and fails to explain the ideas of Transcendentalism and
his love to the beautiful Ellen Sewell. Then, the first major tragic event in the play happens, the death of John, an event that profoundly affects Henry. Once again, Henry employs his wit when he talks about the details that surround John's death, but it is anything but humorous. Says Henry to Ellen: "He had a glamorous death. Like the Knights of the
Round Table who slashed at each other with rusty swords until they all died of blood poisoning." As Henry elaborates, he tells Ellen about the shaving accident that gave John his own blood poisoning. "John, three mornings ago, happened to think of something very funny while he was shaving. He burst out laughing, and cut himself." It is oddly fitting
that John dies as a result of his laughter, since Henry learns throughout the play that too much humor without action can kill a person's effectiveness. In the second act, Henry Thoreau tries to explain the injustice of Williams's murder, and tells Waldo that his
own policy of working within the system is not effective enough to save people like Williams: "When a man, at the border of freedom, is stopped by the rifle of a Boston policeman, he doesn't have time for Dr. Emerson's leisurely sermon on the 'slow evolving of the seasons.'" The same argument about Williams leads Henry to pressure Waldo to give a
talk against slavery and the Mexican War. However, at the crucial moment, after Henry has already gathered a crowd, Waldo sends Lydian with a message, saying that "he wants more time to meditate on these matters.... So that he can write a careful essay setting forth his position." Following this betrayal, which wounds Henry deeply, he totally
denounces Waldo: "My God, he was my god! No more! If he is the Deity, I am a doubter!"Henry realizes that he must take matters into his own hands, but is unsure how to do that. All of these conflicting feelings manifest themselves in his nightmare, in which military members chant such things as "Hate-two-three-four!" and "Learn to kill!"
underscoring the tragedy of the Mexican War that Henry wants to stop. Tragedy strikes in Henry's nightmare, too, as the little Drummer Boy (Waldo's son, Edward) is wounded, and Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, this time as the result of the war. Henry watches his brother die once again, the result of the war. Henry watc
have hardened Henry's resolve, a fact that is manifested by the change in his language, from witty and playful, to more politically active, to silent—letting his actions speak louder than his words. Of course, readers can make many other interpretations about the play, especially since the playwrights' dreamlike, expressionistic structure inspires very
different experiences in each person. In the end, as Lawrence and Lee note in their foreword to the play: "It is eminently Thoreauvian that everyone should bring to—and take from—the play something uniquely his own." Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail, in Drama for Students, The Gale Group, 2003. Curt
Guyette Guyette holds a bachelor of arts degree in English writing from the University of Pittsburgh. In the following essay, Guyette examines the theme of civil disobedience in Lawrence and Robert E. Lee explore the issue of morality versus adherence to the law and what
the conscientious course of action should be when a citizen comes into conflict with government actions he or she believes to be immoral. By dramatizing an actual event in the life of writer Henry David Thoreau, a man who personified the ideal of Americans as rugged individualists, the playwrights deliver an unambiguous message: If you believe a
government's policies are wrong, then you have an ethical responsibility to oppose those acts, even if that dissent makes you a criminal in the eyes of the state. As depicted by Lawrence and Lee, writer Henry David Thoreau was the quintessential nonconformist. A man who rejected the social conventions of his day, he gladly assumed the role of an
outcast. Thoreau was, it seems, compelled to march to a drumbeat whose discordant rhythm was dictated solely by his own conscience and intellect. As portrayed in this play, a transforming moment occurred when Thoreau decided to face jail rather than support a war against Mexico he believed to be both illegal and immoral. Writing this play at the
height of the U.S. war in Vietnam, Lawrence and Lee use events that occurred 125 years earlier to demonstrate "WRITING THIS PLAY AT THE HEIGHT OF THE U.S. WAR IN VIETNAM, LAWRENCE AND LEE USE EVENTS THAT OCCURRED 125 YEARS EARLIER TO DEMONSTRATE THAT OPENLY OPPOSING GOVERNMENT ACTIONS THAT AN
INDIVIDUAL BELIEVES TO BE UNJUST IS A TIME-HONORED AMERICAN TRADITION." that openly opposing government actions that an individual believes to be unjust is a time-honored American tradition. The authors of the play certainly admire the young Thoreau, who rejected materialism and technological advancement by retreating to the
unspoiled woods of Walden Pond. "He smelled the smog before we saw it," they wrote in an introduction to the play published in 1971. "It smarted his soul before it smarted our eyes." But they also saw the shortcomings of a life spent in seclusion and how a high-principled hermit may be nurturing his own soul but, by living in isolation, does nothing
to help uplift his fellow man. For Thoreau to transcend that limitation and become a true hero, he had to give up the Eden-like tranquility of his beloved Walden. In production notes for the play: his evolution from withdrawal
to return, the journey from hermitizing to social conscience. This is the subtext of the play. The authors were not motivated to glorify events of the play's night in jail was a sort of parable, or lesson, that very much applied to their day and time—in fact, to any day and time. That concept is reinforced by the play's
dreamlike qualities. Set in a jail cell, the story it tells knows no bounds. Characters come and go, events from the past are conjured up, abandoned, and then revisited. At its heart, this is a very political play, written in response to the events of a turbulent time in American history. As the play's authors wrote, they saw Thoreau and his writings as the
embodiment of an "explosive spirit who addressed himself to the perils of our time with more power and clarity than most angry young men writing now about now." But as time has shown, like Thoreau himself, the issues this play raises are universal, and its message timeless. The foundation of Thoreau's moral base is laid at the outset of the play. As
in his real life, Thoreau is profoundly affected by the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who comes to serve as the younger man's spiritual father. "Have you ever noticed, John," says the character Mother (who gets the order of things mixed up), "how much Mr. Emerson talks like our David Henry." Just as Emerson resigns from his position as church
pastor when he cannot, in good conscience, perform the rites required by his congregation, Thoreau, likewise, leaves his job as a public school teacher rather than be fettered by the constraints of using only approved textbooks. Nonconformist is the perfect word to describe Thoreau, likewise, leaves his job as a public school teacher rather than be fettered by the constraints of using only approved textbooks. Nonconformist is the perfect word to describe Thoreau, likewise, leaves his job as a public school teacher rather than be fettered by the constraints of using only approved textbooks.
to get along, you have to go along." But that is something he will not, perhaps even cannot, do. When the law demands that a free man must turn in runaway slaves, should a person of conscience feel bound to be law abiding? For Thoreau, the answer to that guestion is a resounding "no." He quickly learns, though, that using principles rather than
popular opinion as a personal compass comes with a price. It puts him decidedly outside the mainstream. For a man such as Thoreau, however, that price is readily paid. In his view, going along just to get along extracts a much higher toll than simple alienation from society. Henry sums up his view during a conversation with his fellow prisoner as
 they listen to the footsteps of a man walking outside the jail:I know where he's going. He's going where he's supposed to be there. Why? So he'll be liked. My God, a whole country of us who only want to be liked. But to be liked, you must never disagree. And if you never
disagree, it's like only breathing in and never breathing out!That statement, in essence, is the key to understanding the character Henry. It is as if, by his very nature, he is physically incapable of following the rest of society in lockstep. Doing so would result in intellectual and spiritual suffocation. And for Henry, that would be a much harsher fate
than merely being disliked. Or, as he comes to learn, being imprisoned.In his biography of Thoreau, Edward Wagenknecht quoted a passage from the writer's seminal essay, "Civil Disobedience": "Under a government which imprisons any unjustly the true place for a just man is also in prison." That essay is credited with influencing such leading
advocates of nonviolent protest as Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., both of whom endured incarceration rather than abide by laws they believed to be unjust. Likewise, Thoreau's willingness to be locked behind bars inspired Lawrence and Lee to dramatize that real-life incident, portraying it as a pivotal moment in the author's life. Until
then, he was content to work as Emerson's handyman and gather huckleberries with young Edward, or tend his bean patch at Walden Pond. It is an idyllic life. Unshackled from material wants, he rejoices in the splendors of nature, living simply and freely. The fact that he is largely removed from the rest of the world troubles him not at all. While in
jail, however, he has a dream that transforms him. As the playwrights noted: "His night in jail is a mystical experience for this highly sensitive man. Confined, he has the liberty to explore what he really is." Unlike his mentor Emerson, Thoreau cannot stand by silently as his nation wages an imperialistic war. In that belief, he is in good company. The
playwrights quote a speech given by Abraham Lincoln who, as a young congressman from Illinois, had the political courage to swim against the tide of public opinion and condemn the Mexican War as both unnecessary and unconstitutional. Like Henry, he chose to adhere to the dictates of his conscience rather than follow the easier course of going
along with the mainstream. It is during his dream that Henry attempts to speak out but finds he has no voice. It is symbolic of his prominence can attract an audience and influence their thoughts, Henry, in essence, has no platform
from which he can speak. He has not built the foundation for people to take him seriously and consequently is politically impotent. During times of moral crisis, dissenters need a voice that will be heard, otherwise their dissent is pointless. To emphasize the need for Henry to find his voice, Lawrence and Lee are unsparing in their depiction of war's
horror. While most of the play is relentlessly stark, leaving the audience to fill in the blank spaces, the dream sequence is particularly graphic. There are explosions of gunfire, and the "sky seems ripped apart by psychedelic splatterings of shrapnel.
There is a reason Henry refuses to subsidize all this with his tax dollars: it is hell, and he will not play any part whatsoever in supporting it. However, as he stands there, holding the body of young Edward in his arms, he realizes that his quiet dissent serves no greater good. Walden, he admits to his cellmate Bailey, may indeed be heaven, but heaven is
the realm of the afterlife. As he tells his new friend: "Bailey, I tried to escape is like sleep. And when sleep is permanent, it's death." Which is why, at the play's end, the lights do not dim as usual and Henry does not disappear behind a closing curtain. The morning sky is ablaze with new-found glory and Henry, having grown as a result of
that night's mystical experience, is "lifted and strengthened" by the greater challenge upon which he is ready to embark. Like Henry, the authors of this play wanted their audience to see the light. There is no doubt Thoreau's days as a recluse are over as he leaps from the stage to be among the people. The message is clear: for one to simply follow
the beat of one's own different drummer is not always good enough, like when, as Henry ultimately learns, there is a moral imperative to help others hear the same beat and then convince them to march alongside him. Source: Curt Guyette, Critical Essay on The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail, in Drama for Students, The Gale Group, 2003. Alan Woods In
the following essay, Woods traces the development of The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail and the significant changes made to its first version. In The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail, Lawrence and Lee continued to explore the historic past through fiction in order to comment on the present, using Henry David Thoreau's own name and the names of his
friends and fellow citizens of Concord. The play is based on Thoreau's actual incarceration when he refused to pay taxes that would go to support the Mexican-American War of 1846-48. Lawrence and Lee began work on the first draft of the play—originally titled A Different Drummer—in July 1966. Unlike their earlier collaborations, A Different
Drummer initially was Lawrence's project alone. The first outline opens with the exchange that was eventually to conclude act 1:VOICE [Emerson]: Henry, what are you doing in jail?"THE PARALLELS BETWEEN THOREAU'S PASSIVE RESISTANCE TO THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR, AND THE PROTESTS ERUPTING ACROSS THE UNITED
STATES IN THE LATE 1960S TO THE VIETNAM WAR WERE OBVIOUS; AND THE PLAYWRIGHTS FULLY INTENDED THE PARALLELS TO BE SEEN." HENRY (Clutching the bars and shouting back, like a whiplash) Waldo! What are you doing out of jail??? This first version of the play employs a mock trial as the organizing focus, with figures from
Thoreau's life being summoned to testify as Thoreau attempts to justify his actions. Lee's initial work on The Playwrights met to discuss the play in July 1967, but did not turn their full attention to the script until April 1969. As a result of the playwrights met to discuss the play in July 1967, but did not turn their full attention to the script until April 1969. As a result of the playwrights met to discuss the play in July 1967, but did not turn their full attention to the script until April 1969. As a result of the playwrights met to discuss the play in July 1967, but did not turn their full attention to the script until April 1969. As a result of the playwrights met to discuss the play in July 1967, but did not turn their full attention to the script until April 1969. As a result of the playwrights met to discuss the play in July 1967, but did not turn their full attention to the script until April 1969. As a result of the playwrights met to discuss the play in July 1967, but did not turn their full attention to the script until April 1969. As a result of the playwrights met to discuss the play in July 1967, but did not turn their full attention to the script until April 1969. As a result of the playwrights met to discuss the play in July 1967, but did not turn their full attention to the script until 1969. As a result of the play in July 1967, but did not turn the play in July 1967, but did not turn the play in July 1967, but did not turn the play in July 1967, but did not turn the play in July 1967, but did not turn the play in July 1967, but did not turn the play in July 1967, but did not turn the play in July 1967, but did not turn the play in July 1967, but did not turn the play in July 1967, but did not turn the play in July 1967, but did not turn the play in July 1967, but did not turn the play in July 1967, but did not turn the play in July 1967, but did not turn the play in July 1967, but did not turn the play in July 1967, but did not turn the play in July 1967, but did not turn the play in Ju
consultations, A Different Drummer was rethought entirely, emerging not only with a new title, but with an entirely new structure. The jail setting remained as the focal point of the play, but the trial convention was abandoned, as was any pretense at strict chronology. Rather, Lawrence and Lee embraced a fluid structure reminiscent of expressionist
theatrical experimentation earlier in the twentieth century. Once the decision was made to adopt the new format, Lawrence and Lee's work on The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail progressed rapidly during the summer of 1969, and the finished and revised text was completed by early October. Submitted to the American Playwrights Theatre (APT), the
play was quickly accepted for production. The pilot production opened at Ohio State University on 21 April 1970—fifteen years to the day after the triumphal New York opening of Inherit the Wind. The parallels between Thoreau's passive
resistance to the Mexican-American War, and the protests erupting across the United States in the late 1960s to the Vietnam War were obvious; and the playwrights fully intended the parallels to be seen. As early as 1967, they had noted that "the whole theme of the Thoreau piece should be the obligation to rebel non-violently. Not merely the right to
rebel. But the necessity."With Thoreau as the play's constant center, the events that shaped his political and intellectual growth swirl together as he attempts to understand what brought him to the Concord jail. Thoreau's memories climax in the phantasmagoric nightmare sequence that forms the heart of act 2. Ralph Waldo Emerson serves as an
appropriate foil for Thoreau: the established intellectual leader with the moral power to provide leadership against the war who instead waffles, preferring ineffectually procrastinating discussion to direct action. The contrast between Thoreau's activism and Emerson's failure to lead is doubled by the play's other characters, who provide different sorts
of contrasts. Thoreau's cellmate, Bailey, is clearly a dramatic device, allowing Thoreau to explain his beliefs to a new person and to demonstrate his abilities as a teacher when, early in the play, he teaches Bailey to write his name. Henry's brother, John, doubles Thoreau in several ways, most significantly as Henry's surrogate in the unsuccessful
 wooing of Ellen. Ellen herself is a foil for Thoreau. Not only does she articulate the comfortable bourgeois philosophy Thoreau rejects (particulate the key elements of Transcendentalism after John's death. Each of the minor figures reverses some element of
Thoreau's character, whether it be the authoritarian pedagogical style insisted upon by Deacon Ball or Sam's unquestioning acceptance of the government's dictates. Lawrence and Lee dramatized events in Thoreau's life that illustrated their central concerns. A brief analysis of the first act will demonstrate that it is carefully constructed to lead the
audience through Thoreau's development. The play's structure appears casual and loose, although each detail carries a purpose and meaning. Waldo's apparent age and confusion in the opening sequence establishes that the play's events will take place in fluid time; Waldo's self-centeredness, which motivates his reluctance to act, is also indicated
here. Henry's exchange with his mother, which follows and overlaps the Waldo-Lydian scene, sets up immediately Thoreau's independence and self-reliance. Thoreau's independence and self-reliance. Thoreau's independence and self-reliance.
followed immediately by Waldo's "Cast Conformity behind you," reinforces his individuality. The short scene that follows with his brother. Both the intellectual and familial support will be wrenched away from Thoreau as the play progresses.
Having Waldo's moment of self-doubt follow immediately after Henry's "I want to be as much as possible like Ralph Waldo Emerson" undercuts Henry's hero worship, letting the audience know instantly that Emerson will prove ineffective. The play's first extended scene, Thoreau in the jail cell with Bailey, follows. Thoreau is on his own here. Although
the audience does not yet know that John will be dead by the time Henry is jailed or that Waldo will have failed Thoreau as well, the first Bailey scene shows the mature Thoreau. He fuses an awareness of the world of nature heightened by the Walden experience with a rejection of the political world of "a President who went out and boomed up a war
all by himself—with no help from Congress and less help from me." The scene ends with Thoreau in his Concord classroom, where Deacon Ball forces Thoreau is his concord classroom, where Deacon Ball forces Thoreau is his concord classroom, where Deacon Ball forces Thoreau is his concord classroom, where Deacon Ball forces Thoreau is his concord classroom, where Deacon Ball forces Thoreau is his concord classroom.
resignation as a teacher is paralleled directly by Lawrence and Lee with Emerson's resignation of his pulpit, also on a matter of conscience. Henry and John's own school, in the following sequence, reinforces Henry's growing awareness of the natural world and also introduces Ellen and permits Henry to explain his self-directed teaching philosophy.
Henry's rejection of learning in the jail cell sounds the first note of the Thoreau school's failure, which becomes clearer in the following long scene, in which Henry explores the possibility of traditional fulfillment through marriage. The rowing sequence with Ellen gives a further chance to explore his personal philosophy, while providing a sharp
contrast between his behavior and the expected behavior of a polite middle-class suitor. The jail cell, with Bailey's snore-response to Henry's question about marriage, provides the bridge to the next scene, the church service ultimately interrupted by Henry and his wheelbarrow working on Sunday, having taken the rest of the week off. John's
recounting of Ellen's refusal is followed quickly by John's death and burial. Ellen's awareness of Transcendentalism demonstrates Henry's success as a teacher; but bereft of both John and Ellen, he turns to his second source of support, the Emersons, in the third major scene of the act. Walden is fully introduced in this scene, and the relationships
between Henry and each of the Emersons are suggested. After a brief return to the cell, and Henry's mature reflection on what Walden has meant to him, the act's last major scene shows Henry's actual arrest and full explanation of A
Different Drummer in Jerome Lawrence's original outline. Although the structure of the first act of The Night Thoreau's arrest and then his challenge to Emerson, which ends the act. What appears on first viewing to be casual is, in fact, quite carefully
plotted. The playwrights' success in capturing the mood of the late 1960s is clear not only in their use of the parallels between the Mexican-American and Vietnam Wars, but also in their contrast of the restrictive (and restrictive) educational philosophy.
as presented by the playwrights, is quite close to the alternative educational theories most forcefully articulated in the 1960s by A. S. Neill, Ivan Illich, and Jonathan Kozol. The play also contributed significantly to the then-burgeoning regional theatre movement by its production through the American Playwrights Theatre, resulting in more than one
hundred forty separate productions from 1970 through 1971. The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail's message of individual responsibility remains current: the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre performed it in the autumn of 1989 as a memorial to the Chinese students massacred in Beijing's Tiananmen Square when the People's Army brutally crushed the
freedom movement in early June 1989. Although widely produced across North America, The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail was deliberately never performed either on or off Broadway, as the playwrights demonstrated that the theatre could be born and continue to live elsewhere than on a few blocks of Manhattan real estate. Even though the play is
frequently produced, there has been little critical comment on the script. It many ways, The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail has fallen victim to the cultural dominance of the American theatre by the New York stage: scripts receive little critical attention unless they have been successfully produced in full view of the national media, centered in New York
City. Although there are some indications that this bias may be lessening, it remained strongly in place when The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail was first produced in 1970. Lawrence and Lee's examination of individual consciousness has gone virtually unremarked other than in newspaper accounts of the (literally) hundreds of individual productions. The
Night Thoreau Spent in Jail remains in the world repertory. The play has historic significance as the greatest success of the American Playwrights Theatre, the organization founded by Lawrence and Lee in 1965 as a means of bypassing the harshly commercial conditions then beginning to dominate the Broadway stage. Headquartered at Ohio State
University, where The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail was premiered, APT created the first truly national theatrical production mechanism seen in the United States. In significant ways, it fostered the growth of professional theatries outside New York City, helping to diminish the sole power of the Broadway stage. The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail was
widely produced and highly successful across the country, with more than two thousand performances at APT-member theatres during its first two years alone. One scholar did note that "more people saw that play in one season than had seen... Inherit the Wind and Auntie Mame in their total combined runs." That The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail still
has not attracted much scholarly attention must be seen as an ironic comment on the scholarly community's lack of awareness of changes in theatrical production patterns during the past two decades, as well as on scholars ignoring evidence beneath their very noses. More than twenty years after its premiere, the Bantam edition of The Night
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