

Part 1: Explore the Context and Analyze the Argument

**1. What is the historical context of Emerson's essay?**

"Self-Reliance" was published in 1841, during the Transcendentalism period; a literature movement that promoted *"intuitive, spiritual thinking instead of scientific thinking based on material things."*<sup>1</sup>

**2. Who is Emerson's audience?**

Emerson's audience is everyone, he hopes to spread his message to as many people as he possibly can. His message applies to society as a whole, not specific people.

**3. What is Emerson's rhetorical situation?**

In his message, challenging rationalism, Emerson intends to spread the message to not conform to society, or to change yourself to fit in with everyone else. That you should follow your own heart and pursue your own dreams and aspirations, not try to be like everyone else. Individualism is the way to go.

**4. What is Emerson's thesis?**

*"The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried."*

**5. Analyze the claims and evidence Emerson uses to support his thesis.**

Emerson makes the claim that despite society being against new ideas and ways of life, you must not conform to it; instead continue to push through. He makes reference to famous historical figures from the past, such as Pythagoras and Jesus, who went through the same trouble, in which they were deemed "crazy" for thinking different than the rest. As well he uses facts, such as that society is a *"joint-stock company,"* to pull back the curtain on it and how it is against the new.

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<sup>1</sup> [Vocabulary.com](https://www.vocabulary.com)

## Part 2: Analyze the Figurative Language

Quote  What is being said?	Interpret the Figurative Language  What is Emerson saying?	Analyze the Effect  How does this example affect the tone or meaning?	Determine the Purpose  How does this support his claim?
"No kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed in that plot of ground which is given to him to till."	You must work for what you get, nothing comes to you for free. " <i>Kernel of nourishing corn</i> " references to what we have, and " <i>his toil bestowed in that plot</i> " refers to the work and effort put in that results in success.	This statement creates a thoughtful/contemplative tone throughout the passage. Through the use of metaphors and words with deep meaning, he is able to place great emphasis on the signification of this quote.	Emerson's main message is that we should follow our passions, and not conform and allow society to tell us what to do. In order to reach our goals, we must put in the work and effort and as he said bestowing " <i>toil on that plot of ground.</i> "
"Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string."	To be truly happy with yourself and to push through whatever comes your way, you need to trust yourself. Without confidence, you will not have the ambition and drive to go after what you want.	This quote exemplifies the importance of confidence. " <i>Every heart vibrates</i> " assists in further creating a thoughtful tone that greatly resonates with the audience.	Apart of his overall message of following your passions, and not letting others define you, confidence is the key. Society will go out of its way to dissuade you or to make you feel you are not good enough, however confidence is what helps you to push through and make you feel that you are good enough.
"Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender	Emerson here is saying that society is trying to create the mirage that what is commonly known is the best route and should be the only route. However, by giving into this like owning a share out of many others who do as well, you become just like	Such metaphors as " <i>society is a joint-stock company</i> " and " <i>culture of the eater</i> " help paint a picture of what society does against you in your pursuits. As well, this again contributes to his thoughtful tone that forces the audience to rethink how they view society.	Society will always be out after you, trying to get you to surrender your hopes and dreams and way of life to it; to "conform" to it. Here he puts great emphasis on that fact, and why you need to stand your ground and live life the way you want to live it.

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<i>the liberty and culture of the eater."</i>	everyone else; and cannot fully blossom into your full potential.		
<i>"Why drag about this corpse of your memory, lest you contradict somewhat you have stated in this or that public place?"</i>	<i>"Dragging about this corpse of your memory"</i> refers to invoking the past, and letting it infatuate your actions in the present. He says that you should not drag it around like a <i>"corpse of your memory,"</i> as if it is stuck to you, and let yourself be free as every day is a new opportunity to be a better you.	Another key aspect of this passage is individualism; what one needs to do themselves in order to be successful. This deep and thoughtful quote, which continues to grow his contemplative tone, showcases to the audience that you cannot let the past define you; you must let go of it and be free from it.	The past is the past, you cannot change it; despite how wrong things may have gone. However, you cannot let it define you. To be able to move forward in life and accomplish the things you are set after, you must let go. Without doing so, you will be stuck in place dreading on what happened, and not proceeding forward. Emerson implores this as he creates a focus on individualism.

### Part 3: Argument and Application

Develop a position agreeing or disagreeing with Emerson's claim "To be great is to be misunderstood." State your position (thesis) and the evidence to support your position. Your evidence can come from your reading, your relevant personal experiences, and your observations.

Channel your inner Emerson and employ your own figurative language to make your argument more effective. Use **at least two instances** of figurative language (simile, metaphor, allusion, personification, hyperbole, etc.) in your evidence or explanations. Underline your figurative language.

#### Thesis:

Being misunderstood by others due to not thinking like them signals you are indeed great, as you are not thinking like the mass majority; yet that you are thinking in your own unique way, and you must not give up.

#### Evidence 1:

Albert Einstein, often seen by others as crazy as a madman ended up being one of the most influential physicists the world has ever known.

#### Explanation of Evidence 1:

Einstein was one to question almost anything, due to his childlike curiosity. He faced opposition from others throughout his life because of how different he was from other "normal" scientists, as well as him vocalizing his ideas and thoughts. However he went on to change the world through such things as the Theory of Relativity, his work on the Manhattan Project, and various other contributions to the physics world.

#### Evidence 2:

*"Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh."*

#### Explanation of Evidence 2:

Despite not being understood by others, and them knowing what made them stand out to the world, they continued to push through and share their contributions with the world. However as time went on and through their perseverance, society started to realize their talents and accept them. People may have a bad first impression of you, but push through and prove them wrong.

#### Evidence 3:

*"No kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till."*

**Explanation of Evidence 3:**

The system society creates to succeed makes it as hard as a nutshell to crack through. Because of that, people only work with what they have and what they know to be normal. However, you must go against the system if you want to make something out of yourself and make a name out of yourself. It is not easy work as almost all odds are against you, but you must keep cracking away at that nutshell.

**Evidence 4:**

*"Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater."*

**Explanation of Evidence 4:**

The "corporation" of society creates the false illusion of what is deemed right and wrong, and controls people in what they believe in themselves. Those who think different, and are the most unique, are often frowned upon as they appear different than the illusioned "normal." This system limits individualism and one's aspirations to be something great in the world, as people often let it get to them down to the core.