

## An important note

When I put these links here, I expect you to **PRINT them** and then apply your active reading strategies. In other words, you should take the printout and, as you read, make notes. For example:

1. Write out definitions to any words you do not know.
2. Underline things you think are main ideas or points.
3. Make notes in margins summarizing what each paragraph is about.
4. Put a question mark next to anything you don't understand.

**Finally**, if you are struggling, **CHECK THE INTERNET!** Take an active part in learning how to learn. Understanding the piece could be as simple as doing a search for the piece's title, author's name, and the word "summary" or "analysis."

**\*\*Novel Idea:** Read the piece TWICE! It will likely save you time in the long run.

Do a quick  
web search about  
this first  
essay!

Pre Read: What do you  
already know about Emerson?

**Excerpt from *Society and Solitude*  
by Ralph Waldo Emerson**

← look up this word

The necessity of solitude is deeper than we have said, and is organic. I have seen many a philosopher whose world is large enough for only one person. He affects to be a good companion; but we are still surprising his secret, that he means and needs to impose his system on all the rest. The determination of each is from all the others, like that of each tree up into free space. 'T is no wonder, when each has his whole head, our societies should be so small. Like President Tyler, our party falls from us every day, and we must ride in a sulky at last. Dear heart! Take it sadly home to thee—~~there~~ there is no cooperation.\* We begin with friendships, and all our youth is a reconnoitering and recruiting of the holy fraternity they shall combine for the salvation of men. But so the remoter stars seem a nebula of united light, yet there is no group, which a telescope will not resolve; and the dearest friends are separated by impassable gulfs. The cooperation is involuntary, and is put upon us by the Genius of Life, who reserves this as a part of his prerogative. 'T is fine for us to talk; we sit and muse and are serene and complete; but the moment we meet with any-body, each becomes a fraction. . . .

It by no means follows that we are not fit for society, because soirees are tedious and because the soiree finds us tedious. A backwoodsman, who had been sent to the university, told me that when he heard the best-bred young men at the law-school talk together, he reckoned him-self a boor; but whenever he caught them apart, and had one to himself alone, then they were the boors and he the better man. And if we recall the rare hours when we encountered the best persons, we then found ourselves, and then first society seemed to exist. That was society, though in the transom of a brig or on the Florida Keys. . . .

The people are to be taken in very small doses. If solitude is proud, so is society vulgar. In society, high advantages are set down to the individual as disqualifications. We sink as easily as we rise, through sympathy. So many men whom I know are degraded by their sympathies; their native aims being high enough, but their relation all too tender to the gross people about them. Men cannot afford to live together on their merits, and they adjust themselves by their demerits, —by their love of gossip, or by sheer tolerance and animal good nature. They untune and dissipate the brave aspirant.'

The remedy is to reinforce each of these moods from the other. Conversation will not corrupt us if we come to the assembly in our own garb and speech and with the energy of health to select what is ours and reject what is not. Society we must have; but let it be society, and not exchanging news or eating from the same dish. Is it society to sit in one of your chairs? I cannot go to the houses of my nearest relatives, because I do not wish to be alone. Society exists by chemical affinity, and not otherwise.

Put any company of people together with freedom for conversation, and a rapid self-distribution takes place into sets and pairs. The best are accused of exclusiveness. It would be more true to say they separate as oil from water, as children from old people, without love or hatred in the matter, each seeking his like; and any interference with the affinities would produce constraint and suffocation. All conversation is a magnetic experiment. . . .

A higher civility will reestablish in our customs a certain reverence, which we have lost. What to do with these brisk young men who break through all fences, and make themselves at home in every house? I find out in an instant if my companion does not want me, and ropes cannot hold me

when my welcome is gone. One would think that the affinities would pronounce themselves with a surer reciprocity.'

Here again, as so often, nature delights to put us between extreme antagonisms, and our safety is in the skill with which we keep the diagonal line. Solitude is impracticable, and society fatal. We must keep our head in the one and our hands in the other. The conditions are met, if we keep our independence, yet do not lose our sympathy. These wonderful horses need to be driven by fine hands. We require such a solitude as shall hold us to its revelations when we are in the street and in palaces; for most men are cowed in society, and say good things to you in private, but will not stand to them in public. But let us not be the victims of words. Society and solitude are deceptive names. It is not the circumstance of seeing more or fewer people, but the readiness of sympathy, that imports; and a sound mind will derive its principles from insight, with ever a purer ascent to the sufficient and absolute right, and will accept society as the natural element in which they are to be applied.

I can't help but wonder what Mr. Emerson would have thought about the internet → and its original purpose = for men to share their individual ideas with others.