**“Self-Reliance” Emerson – page 185**

1. Interpret the first sentence. What does every person realize at some point in his or her education? Each person needs to realize that at some point it is the individual’s perception of himself that is the most important and that individuals need to work hard to build their reputations and to acquire the things they want out life. A person must make the best of what he has been given and not waste time longing for the things of others.
2. “The eye was placed where one ray should fall, that it might testify of that particular ray.” Interpret. The eye is individual perception and the ray is a particular experience – Each person has a unique perspective and a unique role to play.
3. What does Emerson mean by the “divine idea of each of us represents”? When he uses the idea of “divine idea” he is referencing the Divine Providence which is God’s relationships in the world. Individuals need to remember that words and actions impact our perceptions of ourselves – we can’t hide from ourselves or God.
4. Explain the significance of the “iron string.” Why do you think Emerson used iron and not silken, golden, or silver string? “Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to the iron string.” Iron string, not the prettiest to the richest, cannot be bent or broken. If individuals follow their hearts, they will find the happiness they are seeking.
5. “Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members.” Interpret. Society is a negative impact on the individual – members conform to the whole instead of what is right for the individual.
6. “The virtue in most requests is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion.” Explain. Conformity is the virtue – it’s better for the whole to conform – Emerson is stating that individuality is hated by conformity because it is the exact opposite.
7. Discuss the use of the simile, “words as hard as cannon balls.” Words can do as much harm as a direct hit from a cannon ball.
8. Interpret the metaphor, “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by statesmen and philosophers and divines.” A person with a “foolish consistency” doesn’t think for himself. He just repeats what is said by other little minds instead of taking a stand and being an individual – even if a person preaches one idea one day and then changes his mind – he should then preach the new idea and keep moving on. The person needs to grow and change to fulfill his potential.
9. A good essay develops a single idea. Identify at least one theme that runs through *Self Reliance*. Individuality vs. society – change vs tradition – faith vs doubt – quest for discovery.
10. An aphorism that gains currency and is passed from generation to generation is called a proverb or adage. Select two quotations from Emerson that could be considered to be aphorisms and that you believe have the potential of becoming proverbs. Explain why you chose them and why you think they will speak to many generations.

“envy is ignorance; imitation is suicide; a man must take himself for better or worse has his portion.”

“Trust thyself: Every heart vibrates to that iron string.”

“Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind.”

“Speak what you think now in hard words, and tomorrow speak what tomorrow thinks in hard words”

“To be great is to be misunderstood”