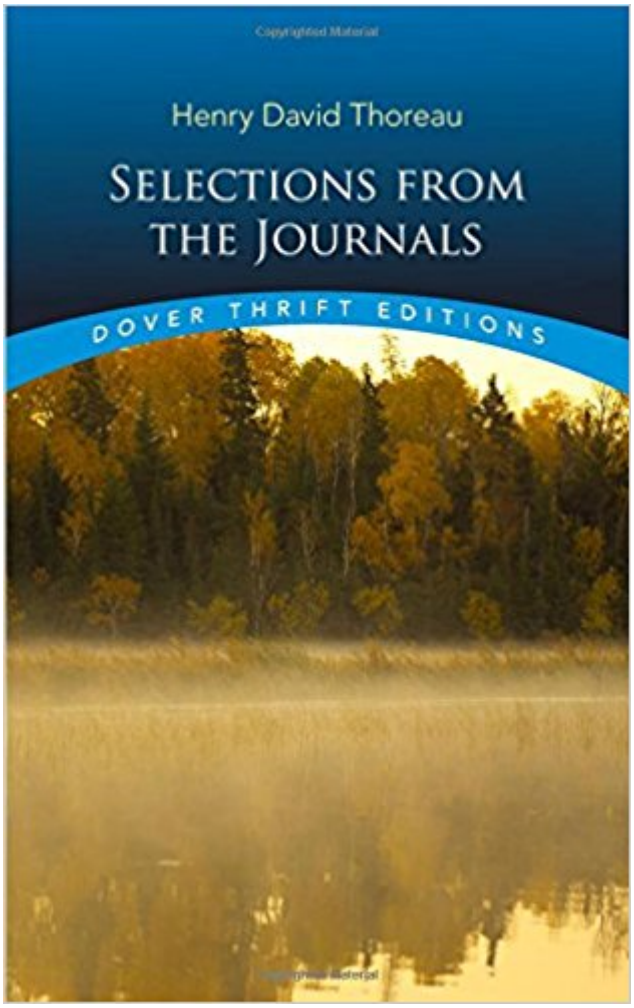
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Selections From The Journals (Dover Thrift Editions)



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Synopsis

Begun in 1837 at the recommendation of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thoreau's Journal covers a period of 25 years until just before his death. The work provided much raw material for his books, and it remains a fascinating record of his thought as it developed over time. The complete Journal comprises 14 volumes and runs more than two million words.This edition offers a delightful one-volume sampler of some of the best passages from the larger work. Carefully chosen by noted Thoreau scholar Walter Harding, the selections include masterly meditations on society, nature, man (often Thoreau himself), and other subjectsÃ¢â ¬â •expressed with verve and vigor in some of the most poetic prose in American literature. Readers will find this book the perfect introduction to the great naturalist and a tantalizing taste of the manifold delights to be found in his writings.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Good content but very short. Much more selective than I figured it would be, especially given the great length of Thoreau's journal.

Although these selections do not include the most famous of Thoreau's journal entries, they show the writer as a meticulous observer of the world around him. The entries on kittens reveal a warmth often missing from his work.

Encouraged by mentor Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau began a journal at age twenty just after returning to his native Concord after college. He kept it up for a quarter century, quitting shortly before his death; it eventually encompassed fourteen volumes and two million words. This is of course daunting, and only true hard-cores will want to read all, but a basic familiarity is essential for anyone interested in Thoreau. The journals have his books' building blocks, and it is fascinating to see how he refined and altered before publishing. It is often at least as interesting to see what he did not use as what he did. The journals are of course also valuable for the same reason any notable person's would be - they give an intimate, virtually day-by-day account of Thoreau's life and thought. They let us trace his philosophy and career as nothing else can - far more so, for instance, than an autobiography could, as it is direct and unpolished. That said, it is immediately clear that Thoreau's talent was so great that even his journals are eminently readable - remarkably well-written and simply engaging. They have a wealth of wisdom and even much that is very quotable.This fills a very important role by letting the curious get familiar with the journals without having to delve into the monolith. It is bare bones to be sure - fifty-five pages - but quite representative. The selections are carefully made by Walter Harding, Founding Secretary of the Thoreau Society, who did a remarkable job. They range from across Thoreau's career, including the first entry and some of the last. Thoreau's brilliance, range, and depth come across clearly - as does his oft-overlooked humor. His love of nature makes itself felt in powerfully descriptive sketches of landscapes and animals, and his evolving thought is present in highly noteworthy reflective passages. The autobiographical material is perhaps most intriguing, especially when touching on interactions with others. My favorite entries include Thoreau's characteristically optimistic reflections on having stacks of his unsold books returned, a hilarious pig chase, and a forest fire recollection. These alone suggest the work's scope even in this greatly abbreviated form, and many other passages are nearly as good.Anyone unsure about the journals should of course start here; the price is simply incredible. Many will of course want to go on, while those requiring only a primer will be well satisfied, but anyone keen on Thoreau in any way needs at least this.

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