



Henry David Thoreau by Benjamin Maxham. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

# Illuminations: Great Writers on Writing

## Henry David Thoreau



If you have ever done any work with the finest tools, the imagination and fancy and reason, it is a new creation, “independent of the world,” and a possession forever. You have laid up something against a rainy day. You have to that extent cleared the wilderness.



Let me suggest a theme for you: to state to yourself precisely and completely what that walk over the mountains amounted to for you,—returning to this essay again and again, until you are satisfied that all that was important in your experience is in it.



The more you have thought and written on a given theme, the more you can still write. Thought breeds thought. It grows under your hands.



To write a true work of fiction...is only to take leisure and liberty to describe some things more exactly as they are.



The body, the senses, must conspire with the mind. Expression is the act of the whole man, that our speech may be vascular.



When the poetic frenzy seizes us, we run and scratch with our pen, intent only on worms, calling our mates around us, like the cock, and delighting in the dust we make, but do not detect where the jewel lies, which, perhaps, we have in the meantime cast to a distance, or quite covered up again.



Essentially your truest poetic sentence is as free and lawless as a lamb's bleat.

