

Walden

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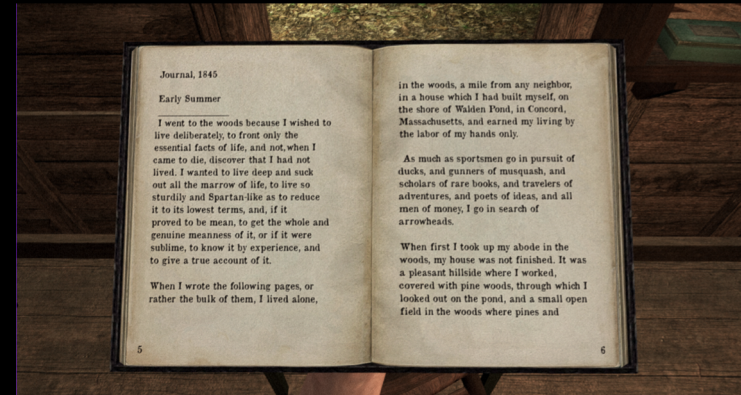
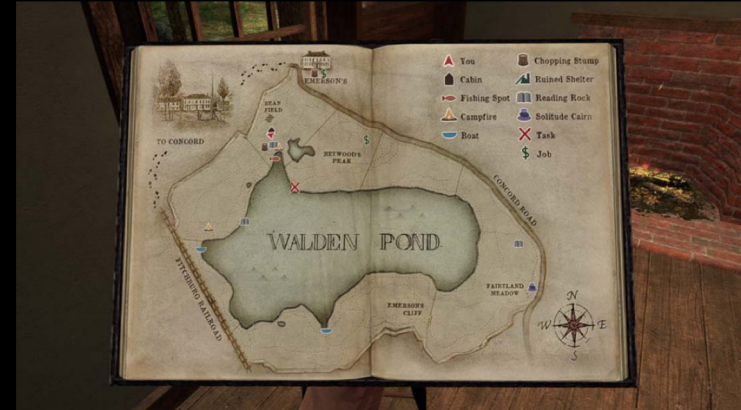
What is Walden?

Walden is a game in which you play as the main character, Henry David Thoreau, where you are living in the woods and basically trying to provide for all of your basic needs - food and shelter. As a walking simulator game, Walden aims to provide a relaxing experience by encouraging the players to find inspiration through nature, books, journaling, and simple survival tasks. It seems there is no end to the game nor a final reward/prize; the game is open-ended, allowing the player to choose how long to go on. Because of this open endedness and premise of exploration, we found that Walden expressed the ecological message of human growth and inspiration from nature, and the power of the individual to live life with meaning and self-reliance.

Exploration and Inspiration

One theme that was very apparent in *Walden* was the reliance on the environment. It seemed that you were always completing a task to maintain your survival needs and stay inspired. For example, even if the player was well-rested and fed, they could still be tired and weak due to lack of inspiration. The player's energy, health, and inspiration were all connected, emphasizing the importance of exploration and reflection.

The journal was the most significant reward of the game, accounting for your progress and tasks completed during the game. As you collect arrowheads a new thought is written in the journal expressing one of Thoreau's discoveries. Overall, it is very satisfying to continue to fill up your journal and learn more about the environment around you and what Thoreau was thinking at the time.



The Walden Experience

Overall, the game mechanics were simple and easy to figure out, and although tedious at times, some tasks were very satisfying to complete due to the detailed sounds and smoothness of motions. This attributes to the gaming experience by causing some repetitiveness in tasks and a lack of complex actions and goals. Compared to modern game technologies, Walden is slightly boring and dated due to this repetitive, slow nature.

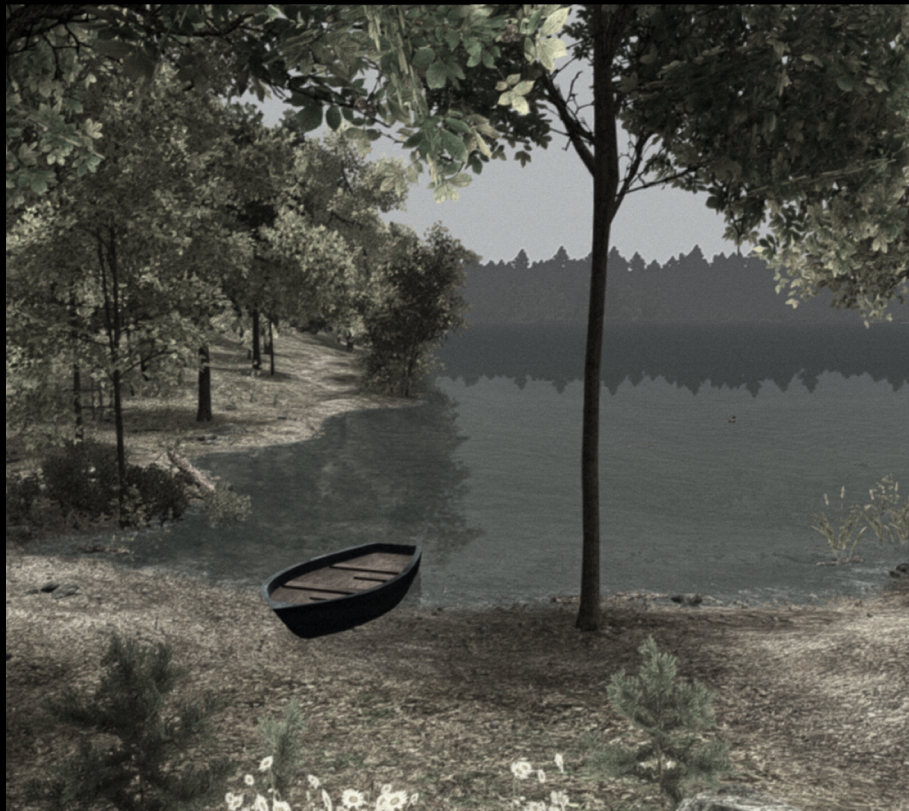
Although the experience may be different to every individual, I would classify Walden as a more tranquil, educational game as opposed to the high image quality and action-packed modern games many people play today.

Visual Style

The visual style was one of the defining negative features that our entire group disliked. While analyzing a game such as *Walden*, it is important to keep in mind those game features that create an immersive atmosphere. Two important features that create the standards for an immersive experience are the audio and the visuals. In *Walden*, while the audio was exceptional, the visuals were extremely poor.

The visuals did portray the woods enough to give the player an idea of the surrounding forest; however, it was lacking so much texture that it cannot be placed in a category to actually be compared to reality.

(To the right is an actual screenshot from the game.)



Audio Style and its contribution to game experience

The audio of the game was one of the most realistic soundscapes I've ever experienced digitally. Combined with Nvidia Audio drivers, the sounds of the birds chirping, the water splashing while rowing a boat, the crackling of wood while fueling a fire and many more scenarios all enhance the gameplay to be one of the most immersive nature games on the market.

As a group, we thought that the audio was one of the best features of Walden. In fact, in order to make the game experience even more enjoyable and immersive, we turned off the music and had only the world and game sounds on. Turning off the music allowed our group to experience real solitude in the [digital] woods; we truly enjoyed being “surrounded” by the life energy in the woods expressed as ‘nature sounds’.



Role of Characters

Henry David Thoreau is the main character of the game, who is a real life person who was part of the transcendental movement in the mid-1800s. He also runs into other characters in the game which were also transcendentalists, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson. The idea behind the movement was basically idealism, where they focused more on the individual and nature rather than materialistic things. So, this game is a perfect representation of their philosophy, as it shows Henry being one with nature, and really only doing what he needs to survive.



Connections to *Staying with the Trouble*

- Human exceptionalism – the assumption that human beings are very different from other animals and are separate from and in control of nature
- Walden opposes the idea of human exceptionalism, aligning with Haraway’s stance on challenging the idea. Walden encourages the power of nature and deemphasizes the control and power of the individual since the premise of the game is to survive and be inspired through your connection to the environment. Without a connection to nature, Thoreau is not inspired or motivated to complete other tasks.
- Also, Walden encourages the co-development of man and nature, and through the game’s tasks and goals the importance of oddkin and relationships was illustrated. Walden “stays with the trouble” by illustrating themes of cooperation with nature while and discouraging exceptionalistic ideas and competition