Comprehension

1. Recall  According to Thoreau, what should be respected more than the law?

2. Summarize  What should a citizen do about an unjust law?

3. Clarify  List the three ways Thoreau says a citizen may serve the state. With which did Thoreau agree?

Critical Analysis

4. Make Judgments  Consider the historical context of Thoreau’s essays. Would it be easier or more difficult to practice his brand of nonconformity today? Consider the possible contemporary consequences of the following:
   - refusing to pay a tax ("Civil Disobedience," lines 144–166)
   - going to live alone in the woods (Walden, lines 1–37)
   - celebrating or “cultivating” poverty (Walden, lines 198–230)

5. Analyze Essays  Even when they discuss serious or even lofty ideas, essays are often loosely structured and highly personal. Skim Walden and “Civil Disobedience,” noting passages in which Thoreau refers to himself. Identify his personal feelings and instances when he shares his own experiences, such as the night he spent in jail. How do these passages influence your acceptance of his arguments? Explain, citing specific lines from both essays.

6. Interpret Paradox  A paradox is a statement that seems to contradict itself but may nevertheless suggest an important truth. Reexamine both selections and record in a chart the examples of paradox you find. Then explain what truth or idea each paradox illustrates.

   Paradox | Explanation
   --- | ---
   “I did not wish to live what was not life…” (Walden, lines 26–27)

7. Evaluate Ideas  Ralph Waldo Emerson said of Thoreau, “No truer American ever lived.” Review the political ideas you summarized as you read “Civil Disobedience.” Do you consider Thoreau’s arguments to be those of a patriot or those of a traitor? In your response, consider Thoreau’s points on
   - the necessity of government
   - majority rule
   - how unjust laws may be changed

Literary Criticism

8. Critical Interpretations  Critic Andrew Delbanco has asserted that Thoreau is, “despite all the barricades he erected around himself, an irresistible writer; to read him is to feel wrenched away from the customary world and delivered into a place we fear as much as we need.” What does Delbanco mean when he says we both need and fear the world Thoreau creates? After you interpret the critic’s statement, explain whether or not you agree with him.