

# MAKING FRIENDS WITH EMERSON

Lessons from an Old Manse

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Friendship," 1841:

*"I do not wish to treat friendship daintily, but with roughest courage."*



## HISTORY

Born in 1803, Ralph Waldo Emerson was considered one of the greatest philosophers of his time. He thought deeply and carefully about how people should live and wrote many essays sharing his beliefs. His first essay, "Nature," was written in the study of The Old Manse in the 1830s bringing his ideas to a wide audience.

Just as "Nature" shows readers the extraordinary ways in which they may enjoy the natural world, Emerson's other essays, such as "Character," "Art," "Self-Reliance," and "Love" advised readers to pay special attention to these other parts of their lives. In "Friendship," Emerson writes about the value of making true

connections with others and how much his friends' ideas mean to him.

Ralph Waldo Emerson worked hard to spread the ideas of his good friends, such as Margaret Fuller, Henry David Thoreau, Elizabeth Peabody, Bronson Alcott, Ellery Channing, and others. Emerson used his own resources and connections to help these writers and thinkers gain attention, even encouraging them to move to Concord and become his neighbor. Because of Emerson, Sophia and Nathaniel Hawthorne lived in The Old Manse in the 1840s, using the home to explore their visual and literary arts respectively.

Letters and journals show that many of these friendships lasted for decades, surviving changes and disagreements. While Emerson did sometimes disagree with his friends, he always admired them for their beliefs, valuing their independent ideas. As he wrote in "Friendship:"

"Better be a nettle in the side of your friend than his echo."

## FOR CONTEMPLATION OR DISCUSSION

Friendship

- In "Friendship," Ralph Waldo Emerson argues that friendship is made of two important pieces – "truth and tenderness." What would you say are the essential ingredients of friendship?

- Think of what you admire about your friends. Which of these qualities or characteristics are different from your own?
- Do you agree with Emerson that it is helpful to have friends who are different from you? Why?

### Advice

- Emerson is considered a great philosopher, which means that his essays and lectures can be considered advice for living. What is the best advice you have ever received? What advice would you like to give to others?
- Emerson held strong beliefs, but these beliefs sometimes changed over the years. What's an idea or belief of yours that has changed over time? What inspired that change?

## WRITING PROMPTS

- Emerson enjoyed writing letters to his friends. Pick a friend and write them a letter. Tell them what you like about them! Share your ideas with them and ask them to give you their honest opinions.
- Write your own advice guide. It can be for something very practical, like making an omelet or choosing which movie to watch on family movie night, or something more conceptual, like how to spend your spare time or what makes the perfect Saturday morning. Be sure to include pictures, if you'd like!

## CONNECTIONS

- Read [Nature](#) and [Friendship](#) for free at Project Gutenberg.
- Emerson's friendships have inspired many artists and authors. Check out the play [Nature: Walking with Emerson and Thoreau](#) by TigerLion Arts, written about the friendship of these two famed writers and staged across the country – including some special performances at The Old Manse!
- Check out this [Crash Course introduction to philosophy](#), by Hank Green.

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This is part of the *Lessons from an Old Manse* series. For more lessons and other educational materials, please visit [Trustees Virtual Learning](#).

