

## Key for Exemplar of Close Reading #1: (on Mac/English/Eng 30/Reading comp/key of exemplar of close reading #1)

Text: Background Information: This is the opening paragraph of an essay, "On Civil disobedience," originally written in 1849 by Henry David Thoreau, a well-known figure in nineteenth century American cultural and literary thought.

In its entirety:

I heartily accept the motto, -- "That government is best which governs least"; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe -- "That government is best which governs not at all"; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. The standing army is only an arm of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it.

### First Reading: Paraphrasing and Interpretation

I heartily accept the motto, -- "That government is best which governs least"; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically.

The most effective form of government is one that establishes the least number of rules, regulations, and laws, so that people are as free as possible to make their own decisions and live in the ways they see fit. The US government is not yet living up to this ideal and I, Thoreau, would like to see the government moving toward that ideal more quickly and more methodically.

Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe -- "That government is best which governs not at all";

The ideal form of government is one that places no rules and regulations on people whatsoever.

and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have.

When people can live rationally, respecting the rights and needs of others as a matter of course, making reasonable decisions in thinking through issues and problems, when they rise above needing to be restrained, they will then demand a government that doesn't interfere with their ability to live life as they so choose.

Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient.

Government, at best, is a necessary evil, a contrivance that is useful in the short run. But most governments typically are not useful and beneficial to people, and all governments sometimes fail to serve the people usefully.

The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. The standing army is only an arm of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it.

The problems inherent in established governments are similar to the problems that typically emerge where you have established armies within a country. And the two sets of problems are interrelated, because fixed armies are controlled by fixed governments. When governments are established, they presumably are established to carry out the desires of the people they represent. But they often become dysfunctional, failing to achieve their original purposes and intentions and are used by the “powers that be” to serve the interests of those who are governing rather than those they should be representing. This often happens before the people even have the opportunity to take advantage of the expressed purposes and goals of the government. In other words, this problem seems to be almost a natural implication of an established government (given historical examples).

## Second Level: The Thesis

*Clarification of Thesis: all governments tend to abuse power, to generate laws and to make decisions that unduly restrict people's freedom. Therefore, people are best served by governments that govern as little as possible. When people are able to live without being governed, they will demand to live without government.*

*Elaboration of Thesis: Though a democratic government is chosen by the people to carry out the will of the people, it is far too easy and common for governmental power to be used for purposes of vested interests rather than for the best interest of the people. When this happens, the rights of the people are subverted. Therefore a minimalist type of government is the best. But people can have such a government only when they think well enough to demand it and can live rationally without unnecessary governance.*

**Exemplification of Thesis:** *We can see this thesis illustrated in the \_\_\_\_\_ War. Though the voters never approved of that war, it was forced on the citizenry by politicians and business people who were greedy for more land, more power, and more profits.*

**Illustration of Thesis:** *Governments abusing power and doing what is in their interest rather than the interest of the people is similar to bureaucrats designing regulations to fit their own desires or the desires of pressure groups rather than the needs of the people the bureaucracy is supposed to serve.*