

Interpreting Meaning in “The End of Solitude”

Reread the following paragraphs from “The End of Solitude.” For each paragraph, describe how the author defines *solitude* and determine the author’s tone.

Paragraph	How does the author define <i>solitude</i> ?	What is the author’s tone? What words reveal the author’s attitude?
Paragraph 2	The author defines solitude as the state of being alone, disconnected from others.	The author’s tone is critical, and conveys his belief in the value of solitude. His word choice demonstrates that he values solitude and fears the consequences of losing it as a value in our culture. He also does not blame technology, but rather blames individuals for the devaluing of solitude: Technology is taking away our privacy and our concentration, but it is also taking away our ability to be alone. Though I shouldn't say taking away. We are doing this to ourselves; we are discarding these riches as fast as we can.
Paragraph 3	The author defines solitude as the state of being alone based on the examples that he gives from his students. However, his anecdotes hint that he believes solitude provides an important opportunity or value for individuals; otherwise, he would not display concern or disbelief that his students are never alone.	The author is critical of his students, who, when asked, state that they find it unsettling to be alone. The author uses the word “admitted” when talking about his student, which conveys the idea that his student knew her response would not please him given his perspective on solitude: “One of them admitted that she finds the prospect of being alone so unsettling...”
Paragraph 7	The author explains the way in which solitude was viewed during the age of Modernism. He explains that during this time period, solitude was harsher, more isolating, and believed to be necessary given the way in which people viewed society and world events were harming or holding people back. (Note: Students may not have context on the age of Modernism, which arose from changes in the late 19th and early 20th century; prompt students to consider how the rapid urbanization and conflict of World War I, coupled with the author’s language conveys about solitude).	The author’s tone demonstrates the way in which solitude was viewed as a necessary weapon to protect and preserve oneself against a harsh world. Words like “harsher, adversarial, isolating” and “the world was now understood as an assault on the self, and with good reason” help convey these ideas. “Modernism decoupled this dialectic. Its notion of solitude was harsher, more adversarial, more isolating the sense that the soul, self-enclosed and inaccessible to others, can't choose but be alone. The world was now understood as an assault on the self , and with good reason.”

<p>Paragraph 11</p>	<p>The author references the solitude of the Romantic era, which signifies the author’s belief that solitude is not only a necessary reprieve from the demands of city/social life but also necessary for self-discovery. His comments about his students suggest that he believes solitude - and an understanding of oneself - are essential for true intimacy in relationships.</p>	<p>The author has a critical tone, which comes through in his word choice (words like “losing”) and examples (“What does friendship mean...”). He is also critical of his students who say they do not have intimacy <i>or</i> time for solitude. “As a result, we are losing both sides of the Romantic dialectic. What does friendship mean when you have 532 "friends"? How does it enhance my sense of closeness when my Facebook News Feed tells me that Sally Smith (whom I haven't seen since high school, and wasn't all that friendly with even then) "is making coffee and staring off into space"?”</p>
<p>Paragraph 14</p>	<p>The author defines solitude by juxtaposing it with the idea of loneliness and an analogy where he compares boredom to idleness. By doing so, the author demonstrates the belief that solitude is not a negative thing; rather, solitude is merely the state of being alone. People have been conditioned to associate that state with loneliness because they have the opportunity to be connected 24/7 with modern technology.</p>	<p>The author’s tone is serious and instructive; he aims to show readers that solitude may be viewed with a negative connotation, but the act of being alone is not a negative thing and this is a bad thing with serious consequences. Phrases like the ones below and words like “lost” and “loss” help convey this tone: “Loneliness is not the absence of company, it is grief over that absence. The lost sheep is lonely; the shepherd is not lonely.” “We lost the ability to be still, our capacity for idleness. They have lost the ability to be alone, their capacity for solitude.</p>
<p>Paragraph 19</p>	<p>The author defines solitude as a necessary state in order for individuals to truly determine their own perspective, conscious, and passions. Without solitude, individuals will not know what they truly believe and stand for vs. what society believes and stands for. In addition, the author believes that solitude is necessary for individuals to understand themselves and to create their unique contributions to the world (through whatever discipline that may be).</p>	<p>The author’s tone aims to persuade readers to embrace solitude or risk losing themselves to society. He references Emerson as a way to appeal to the idea of the importance of knowing oneself. “To remember this, to hold oneself apart from society, is to begin to think one's way beyond it. Solitude, Emerson said, "is to genius the stern friend." "He who should inspire and lead his race must be defended from traveling with the souls of other men, from living, breathing, reading, and writing in the daily, time-worn yoke of their opinions."</p>
<p>Paragraph 21</p>	<p>The author defines solitude as a necessary state that the brave and resilient will pursue. The author implies that solitude may lead to conflict or tension, as the ability to sit alone and observe life may allow people to reach different or new understanding</p>	<p>The author’s tone serves as a call to action, and a warning that while it will not be easy to pursue solitude, it will be worth it. For example: “The last thing to say about solitude is that it isn't very polite. Thoreau knew that the "doubleness" that solitude cultivates, the ability to stand back and observe life dispassionately, is apt to make</p>

that may be upsetting to others; in addition, people may not understand why one prefers the opportunity to be alone.

us a little unpleasant to our fellows, to say nothing of the offense implicit in avoiding their company. But then, he didn't worry overmuch about being genial."
"He may have put his neighbors off, but **at least he was sure of himself.** Those who would find solitude **must not be afraid** to stand alone."