Qn 1:

- Emerson has a broad view on Nature; Broader than most other essayist
- Emerson focuses on understanding and learning from Nature; Theoreu only appreciates the physical beauty of things.
- Some ideas are relevant to most other essays. For example, in Death of a Moth, the idea of beauty in heroism of the moth. The beauty of its actions. In the Edge of the Sea, the beauty in the ever changing dynamic nature of things. Also a sense of infinite knowledge.
- In Theoreu, there is a sense of the need to be a “transparent eye-ball”. Like that of a poet in Emerson.

In the essay *Nature*, Emerson suggests four uses of nature: Commodity, Beauty, Language and Discipline. Commodity, “the only use of nature which all men apprehend”, provides man with sustenance. They include, “Beasts, fire, water, stones, and corn.” The experience of beauty depends on the individual’s rejoice in “primary forms…in and for themselves.” Such forms include physical attractiveness, heroic actions and intellect. Emerson believes Language is strongly related to God’s words, and hence provided by nature. Indeed, “Words are signs of natural facts”, and “Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact.” Lastly, Nature provides Discipline, which teaches our Reason and Understanding with “sincerest lessons, day by day.”

Surely, this is a broad definition of the word, Nature. I therefore contend that most naturalist essays are written as a discussion or appreciation of one of these four gifts of nature. However, most naturalist essays are unable to talk about all four aspects, since the area of discussion would be too broad. Rather, they more often concentrate on one of the aspects in their Essays.

For example, in *The Death of a Moth*, by Virginia Woolf, it was apparent that the moth that landed on her windowpane, being “neither gay like butterflies nor somber like their own species”, was not endowed with physical attractiveness. However, it was beauty in
its own way, through its actions that earns it the classification of Beauty, by Emerson’s standards. It was truly heroic in the way it relentlessly attempted to free itself for a force that was overwhelming, and it was brave enough to accept its final verdict of death gracefully.

This beauty of its action was certainly something that Virginia Woolf wanted to write about, for she had learned a lesson in life through an event in nature, that is through Discipline. She learned that “Death was stronger than I am”, but the passive resignation to one’s ultimate fate is not acceptable. To make the best of life, one has to try, over and over again, to free oneself from any potential confinement, even if it was those of death.

Another example of the appreciation of Nature is in the essay, *Where I lived, and what I lived for*, by Henry David Thoreau, who was a friend of Emerson and obviously inspired by him. In this essay, Thoreau talks about all the aspects that are provided by Nature, except possibly Discipline. In fact, Emerson’s main criticism for Thoreau is his lack of attempt in trying to understand and learn from Nature. Rather, he merely appreciates nature for its gifts.

This, however, he did a good job in. As Thoreau describes his home and its surroundings, we get a sense of being a “transparent eyeball” that floats in some spiritual metaphysical river, appreciating Beauty as it comes. This is tantamount to the appreciation of Nature as suggested by Emerson, in a “moving ship”, where “change in our point of view gives the whole world a pictorial air.” In this stream, we move from “an airy and unplastered cabin” to “the shore of a small pond”, stopping to admire the physical beauty of the wood-thrust on the way.

As Thoreau enjoys his journey of a poet that “unfixes the land and sea and makes them revolve around an axis of his primary thought”, he truly indulges himself in the Commodities of Nature. He takes in the “fragrance filling the air” and the “celestial music” of the day. Even the bath in the pond he takes ever so religiously, constitutes him enjoying a Commodity of Nature.
Finally, Thoreau appreciates the Language aspect of Nature, as he quotes the verse:

“There was a shepherd that did live,
And held his thoughts as high,
As the mounts whereon his flocks
Did hourly feed him by.”

Indeed, “words are signs of natural facts” and the word, “high” is compared to the “mounts”. It is also true that “Nature is the symbol of spirit”, as we now see a three-way contrast of “high” with the more spiritual aspect of “thought”. Language and spirit are therefore very much part of Nature.

These are but two naturalist essays that have dwelled on some subset of the four uses of nature. However, it is apparent that if broken down and categorized, most other naturalist essays can be categorized as such.
Qn 2:

Use the history of the naturalist essay to predict the future of the naturalist essay.

- Essays have revolved more from pure appreciation to that of questioning and discussing.

As we advance the frontiers in technology, it is inevitable that it influences more and more of our writings, including that of naturalist essays. This should not be surprising, since the language of man evolves over time, and it seems to be converging with the language of science and logic, as science takes on a more persistent role in our lives. This process occurs regardless of the appreciation the writer has over the forthcoming technological change.

The American lecturer, essayist, and poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was born in 1803, acknowledges in *Nature* that nature and science are related. Indeed, “Agriculture, Astronomy, Zoology” are all lessons offered by nature. A scientific naturalist essay may sound like an oxymoron but it is not self-contradicting. However, since he was influenced by his time, the support and examples for most of his arguments come from the Bible, such as Noah or the Garden of Eden, or from Greek Mythology, such as Apollo, the son of Zeus. Spirituality forms the basis of evidence in his time.

Another example is in the essay, *Where I lived, and what I lived for*, by Henry David Thoreau, which was written at around the same time. There is hardly any reference to science in the claims made in the essay, such as why a walk in nature clears one’s mind. Rather, he simply advocates a simple life; possibly that distant from science and the industrialist movement that was occurring during his time. The pure description and beauty in his language was sufficient reason for wanting a simple life. His sources, if any, are that of the Iliad and the Odyssey.
As we move towards the twenty-first century, we see a change in the support used for essays. For example, in *Sympathy For The Devil*, we see much scientific support for the contention that mosquitoes are truly versatile, persistent and deadly. They “have been around for 50 million years”, hatch roughly 200 eggs per batch and drink blood up to 2.5 times their own weight. Scientific names such as “Toxorbynchites brevipalpis” are prevalent. This is the kind of reasoning that was necessary to convince the modern reader than mosquitoes are the true saviors of the rain forests. The reason for conservation of such a forest is not a description of the pleasurable aspects of a walk in them. Rather, it is again back up by scientific explanations of how they home “roughly half of the Earth’s total plant and animal species.”

Even in the more descriptive essays of today, we still see science being juxtaposed into the picture. In *The Edge of the Sea*, by Rachel Carson, written around 1979, shows an appreciation of the beauty of the beach and its dynamic nature, “changing with the swing of the tides”. Such an essay need not talk about science, since it is mainly the appreciation of the state of things at the beach – the beauty of reflected images, the delicately beautiful shore’s inhabitants, and the little crab alone with the sea. However, in her conclusion, it is her realization of a “common thread that links these scenes and memories”, that of the evolutionary process which is even more prevalent in the dynamic structure of a shoreline. That is the “meaning and significance (that underlies) the beauty of the spectacle”. Certainly, the knowledge of science is an indisposable gift of nature. Her very awareness of science leads her to conclude her essay as such.

In conclusion, the naturalist essay has evolved in the way support is provided, as man becomes more aware about science. This is inevitable since knowledge in a man’s mind forms a part of him. He is unable to consciously forget knowledge is knows, and therefore, science will influence his writing style whether consciously or subconsciously. To predict the future of the naturalist essay, we may only extrapolate this trend. Perhaps, the future may regard our present logic and arguments may seem insufficient in view of greater truths discovered in the future. Then perhaps, the future may offer its own style of writing, where there may be more equations than words.
Qn 3:

As I think back on the essays that I have read this term, I realized that I have an increased appreciation of the use of icons or metaphors in an essay. These icons can have a simplistic meaning in terms of the text, or may have a deeper meaning if one chooses to dwell in them further. Therefore, in a few words, they paint a picture of a thousand words in the minds of the reader, and it is up to the reader to appreciate the painting as closely as his wishes.

An example of the use of icons is in Hansel and Gretel in *The Complete Grimm’s Fairy Tales*. While it may be read a simple story for children, there are many metaphors that may take on a deeper meaning. Their mother and the witch could be the same metaphor for a domineering figure in a house where they are confined to be in. This offers a deeper moral in the Fairy Tale. While they are offered somewhat protection at home, they can never be free if they do not leave home in search of their own individuality. They need to leave home to fend for themselves and discover truths for themselves. A tiger that is domesticated loses its instinct to hunt. The breaking of bonds with a parental figure may not be easy, however. Indeed, the first time they had to leave home, they attempt to find their way back and run home crying. However, this pain is required for the greater happiness of Hansel and Gretel. Finally, they pass all tests, and as a symbolism of reaching maturing, they cross a river. To further emphasize the personal accomplishment of each of them, they do so, one at a time. They finally manage to rush home as new people, free from the parents but still loving them as much as before. The death of their mother in the story further reiterates this fact. They can finally “live together in perfect happiness.”

Inspired by the use of double meanings in such icons, I have attempted to incorporate those in my recent essays. In my first essay where I described my environment, I used a frame as an icon. It could be simplistically be thought of as something to be looked
through, but it has deeper meanings such as the different perceptions and thoughts a person may have, perhaps even nested within another frame.

In my final essay draft, I again tried to use another icon. This time it was that of a painting that was hanging on the wall. A man who does not appreciate the painting may be obliged to ensure his surroundings, or he may invert the painting so it is more pleasing to him. This icon manifests the deeper question of whether man should adapt to his environment or whether the environment should adapt to the man.

In another essay, I quoted rather extensively from *The Death of a Moth*, by Virginia Woolf, when I wrote about an environmental disaster. As I wrote about the death of my girlfriend’s grandfather, I found astonishing similarity between in the admirable aspects of the moth and that of Annie’s grandfather. Therefore, the moth was an icon in my essay, for a person who accomplished his goals in life and could pass away gracefully and peacefully. Indeed, the moth could be seen as one whose goal was to tell his story to Virginia Woolf, so that she may further pass his story on to others, thereby attaining immortality in the minds of others. In comparison, Annie’s grandfather arranged his time of death by ensuring that he spoke to each one of his grandchildren, thereby offering to each of them a memory of the occasion and a story to tell future generations.

In conclusion, a person’s writing style is never static. Rather, it is the integration over time of the different experiences he encounters, whether in the form of personal experience in an art museum, or in the form of mental reassimilation of another person’s essay. My writing style has certainly been influenced over the last term, and this process will and should never stop.