

# American Literary Periods

*Puritanism to Postmodernism:  
American Authors get the job  
done!*

## A plan

- **Early American and Colonial Literature, the Writers of the Revolutionary Period  
1776-1820**
- **The Romantic Period and the Rise of Realism**
- **Modernism and Experimentation**
- **American Poetry and Prose  
since 1945**

# Periods of American Literature:

- Pre-Colonial Period (till 1620)
- 1607-1776: Colonial Period
- 1765-1790: The Revolutionary Age
- 1775-1828: The Early National Period
- 1828-1865: The Romantic Period (Also known as: The American Renaissance or The Age of Transcendentalism)
- 1865-1900: The Realistic Period
- 1900-1914: The Naturalistic Period
- 1914-1939: American Modernist Period

# Periods of American Literature:

- 1920s: Jazz Age, Harlem Renaissance
- 1920s, 1930s: The "Lost Generation"
- 1939-present: The Contemporary Period
- 1950s: Beat Writers
- 1960s, 1970s: Counterculture

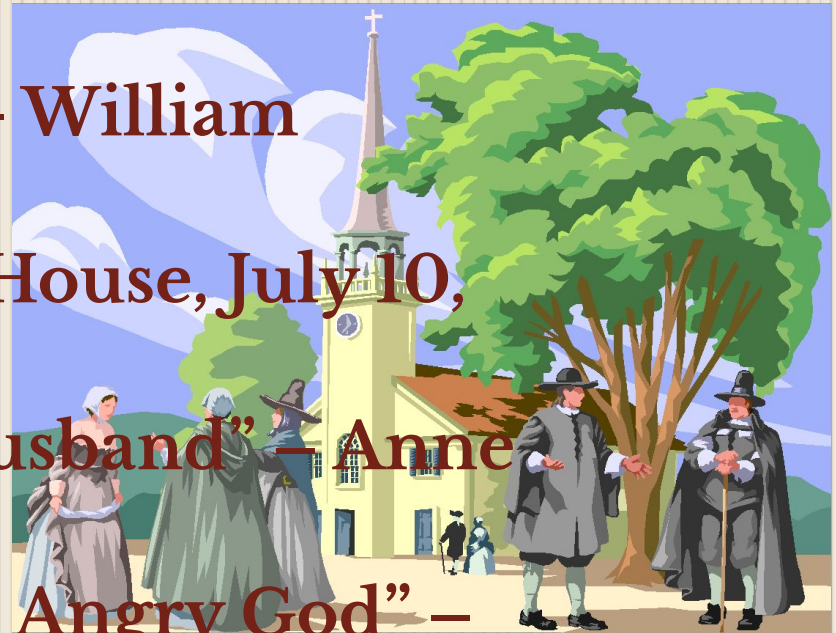
In addition, American Literature recognizes works of:

- African-American Writers
- Native American Writers
- Asian-American Writers

# Puritanism

**17<sup>th</sup> Century:** Puritanism is a movement created by extreme Calvinist Protestants who sought to purify religion and society. They believed God would cleanse their feelings through “grace” eliminating envy, vanity, and lust. Puritans valued plainness in all things including their writing.

- “Of Plymouth Plantation” – William Bradford
- “Upon the Burning of Our House, July 10, 1666”
- “To My Dear and Loving Husband” – Anne Bradstreet
- “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” –



Jonathan Edwards

# Classicism/ The Age of Reason

**18<sup>th</sup> Century:** The Age of Enlightenment, or Age of Reason, is an intellectual movement which began in Europe. Writers during this time believed the goals of rational individuals were knowledge, freedom, and happiness. The literary movement which coincided with the Age of Reason was Classicism, based on the study of and adherence to the ancient classic works of Greece and Rome. Classicists valued clarity, order, balance, and reason instead of imagination. They believed nature was like a machine with fixed, unchanging laws.

- *Poor Richard's Almanack* – Benjamin Franklin
- “Speech in the Virginia Convention” – Patrick Henry
- “The Crisis, Number 1” – Thomas Paine
- “The Declaration of Independence” – Thomas Jefferson





# Nationalism in Literature

- **Late 18<sup>th</sup> Century to Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century:** Nationalism developed from pride, patriotism, and the desire to be distinctly different from the Europeans. American writers tried to write stories and poems unlike European Romantic writers, but they largely failed in their efforts.
- **“Rip Van Winkle” – Washington Irving**
- **The Deerslayer – James Fenimore Cooper**

# Romanticism

- **19<sup>th</sup> Century:** Romanticism is the movement that rebelled against Classicism in favor of the imagination and emotions. Romantic writers favored intuition over reason and were more concerned with the individual than the whole society. They saw art as an imaginative expression of an individual's essence. Romantics viewed nature as a beautiful mystery, and source of moral and spiritual lessons, not a machine. Many American Romantic writers were also Nationalists who used American history and legends as their subject matter.

- “Rip Van Winkle” – Washington Irving

- The Deerslayer – James Fennimore Cooper

- “Masque of the Red Death” and “The Tell-Tale Heart” – Edgar Allan Poe

- Walden – Henry David Thoreau

- “Young Goodman Brown” – Nathaniel Hawthorne



E.A. Poe



# Transcendentalism

- 19<sup>th</sup> Century: American Transcendentalism was created by Emerson who borrowed his ideas from German Transcendentalism and Indian religion to develop a new philosophy. Transcendentalists believe that the basic truths of the universe transcend the physical world and lie beyond the knowledge that can be obtained from the senses. They feel that every individual has the ability to experience God firsthand in his/her intuition. They value nature and believe in the spiritual unity of all life, stating God, humanity, and nature share a universal soul. They feel that nothing in nature is trivial or insignificant; all is symbolic and important. They also promoted the belief that every human being is born inherently good.
- “Self Reliance” – Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Walden – Henry David Thoreau
- Woman in the Nineteenth Century – Margaret Fuller

# Anti-Transcendentalism

- **19<sup>th</sup> Century:** Anti-Transcendentalism (like Transcendentalism) is a subsection of Romanticism. Hawthorne and Melville were far less optimistic than Emerson and his fellow philosophers. The Anti-Transcendentalists believed good and evil coexist in the world and that intuition could lead a person to evil just as easily as it could lead to good.
- The Scarlett Letter, “The Birthmark”, “The Minister’s Black Veil” – Nathaniel Hawthorne
- Moby Dick – Herman Melville



# Realism

- **Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century to Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century:** Realism, unlike Romanticism, places less emphasis on the imagination and more on observed fact. These writers viewed the world and human behavior scientifically, mirroring realities without softening or idealizing them. This movement is often considered a rebellion against Romanticism.
- The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn – Mark Twain
- My Antonia – Willa Cather



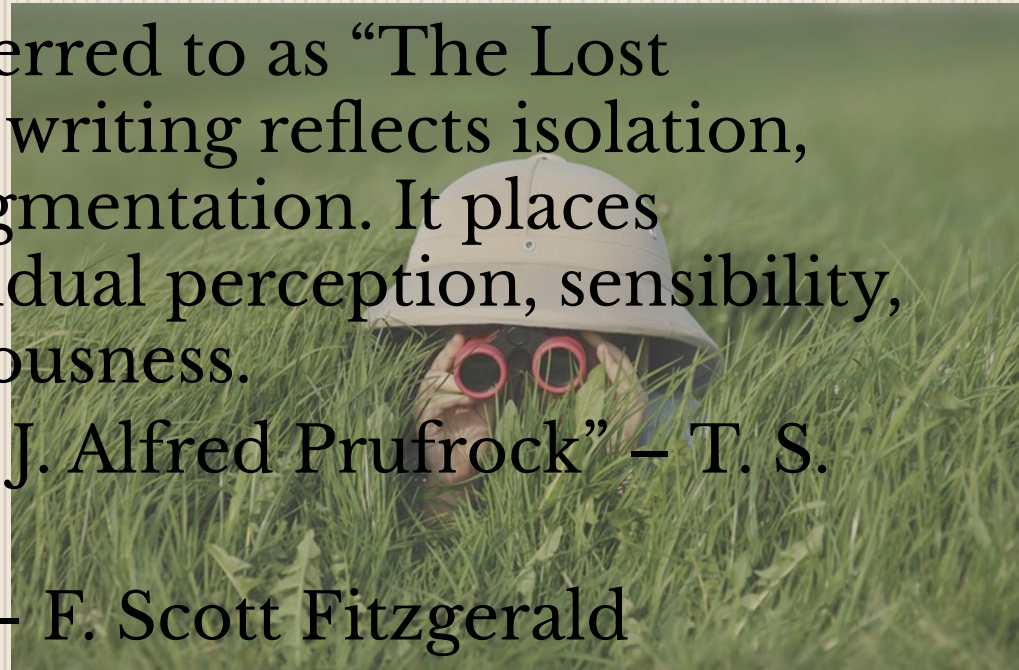


# Naturalism

- **Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century to Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century:** Naturalism was a significant offshoot of Realism. Many American authors were influenced by this movement. Naturalism demands that writers penetrate the surface of life and human character. It focuses on inherited traits and environmental conditions (nature and nurture). Naturalism usually explores the negative aspects of society. These authors did not judge their characters' morality, but rather viewed them through a social Darwinist lens. Naturalists believed that chance exists but free will is rarely possible.
- **The Red Badge of Courage – Stephen**

# Modernism

- **First half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century:** Modernism is a self-conscious break from traditional literary forms and subject matter and a search for a distinctly contemporary mode of expression. It was heavily influenced by the horrors and disillusionment of World War One. These writers are also referred to as “The Lost Generation”. Their writing reflects isolation, alienation, and fragmentation. It places emphasis on individual perception, sensibility, and human consciousness.
- “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” – T. S. Eliot
- The Great Gatsby – F. Scott Fitzgerald
- “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” –



# Harlem Renaissance

- Primarily the 1920's: The Harlem Renaissance, also called the New Negro Movement, is a period of outstanding creativity among African American writers. Many of these works were sophisticated explorations of black life and culture that revealed and stimulated a new confidence and racial pride.
- The Invisible Man – Ralph Ellison
- “Lift Every voice and Sing” – James Weldon Johnson
- Their Eyes Were Watching God – Zora Neale Hurston
- “Harlem: A Dream Deferred” – Langston Hughes



# Post Modernism

- **The Second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century:**  
Postmodernists believe that there is no single truth, but rather a variety of perspectives none of which is better or worse than another. This movement neither embraces nor resists the conventional. It accepts everything equally. Postmodern works are often eclectic, and anachronistic. Postmodernists make no distinction between “high art” and popular culture, can blur the boundary between fiction and nonfiction, and often sample other artists’ work freely...(very freely).

- *The Simpsons* – Matt Groening
- Fear and Loathing In Las Vegas – Hunter S. Thompson

- Snow Falling on Cedar – David Guterson
- Breakfast of Champions – Kurt Vonnegut
- *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* – Edward Albee
- The Secret Life of Bees – Sue Munk Kidd

