

## **DOMAIN 1. LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE**

### **COMPETENCY 1.0 UNDERSTAND AMERICAN LITERATURE FROM THE COLONIAL PERIOD THROUGH THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

**Skill 1.1 Understand the significance of writers, works, and movements in the development of American literature from the colonial period through the end of the nineteenth century.**

#### **The Colonial Period**

William Bradford's excerpts from *The Mayflower Compact* relate vividly the hardships of crossing the Atlantic in such a tiny vessel, the misery and suffering of the first winter, the approaches of the American Indians, the decimation of their ranks, and the establishment of the Bay Colony of Massachusetts.

Anne Bradstreet's poetry relates much concerning colonial New England life. From her journals, modern readers learn of the everyday life of the early settlers, the hardships of travel, and the responsibilities of different groups and individuals in the community. Early American literature also reveals the commercial and political adventures of the Cavaliers who came to the New World with King George's blessing.

William Byrd's journal, *A History of the Dividing Line*, concerning his trek into the Dismal Swamp separating the Carolinian territories from Virginia and Maryland makes quite lively reading. A privileged insider to the English Royal Court, Byrd, like other Southern Cavaliers, was given grants to pursue business ventures.

#### **The Revolutionary Period**

There were great orations such as Patrick Henry's *Speech to the Virginia House of Burgesses* -- the "Give me liberty or give me death" speech - and George Washington's *Farewell to the Army of the Potomac*. Less memorable and thought rambling by modern readers are Washington's inaugural addresses.

The *Declaration of Independence*, the brainchild predominantly of Thomas Jefferson, with some prudent editing by Ben Franklin, is a prime example of neoclassical writing -- balanced, well crafted, and focused.

Epistles include the exquisitely written, moving correspondence between John Adams and Abigail Adams. The poignancy of their separation - she in Boston, he in Philadelphia - is palpable and real.

## The Romantic Period

Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville are the preeminent early American novelists, writing on subjects definitely regional, specific and American, yet sharing insights about human foibles, fears, loves, doubts, and triumphs. Hawthorne's writings range from children's stories, like the Cricket on the Hearth series, to adult fare of dark, brooding short stories such as "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment," "The Devil and Tom Walker," and "Rapunzel's Daughter." His masterpiece, *The Scarlet Letter*, takes on the society of hypocritical Puritan New Englanders, who ostensibly left England to establish religious freedom, but who have been entrenched in judgmental finger wagging. They ostracize Hester and condemn her child, Pearl, as a child of Satan. Great love, sacrifice, loyalty, suffering, and related epiphanies add universality to this tale. *The House of the Seven Gables* also deals with kept secrets, loneliness, societal pariahs, and love ultimately triumphing over horrible wrong. Herman Melville's great opus, *Moby Dick*, follows a crazed Captain Ahab on his Homeric odyssey to conquer the great white whale that has outwitted him and his whaling crews time and again. The whale has even taken Arab's leg and according to Ahab, wants all of him. Melville recreates in painstaking detail, and with insider knowledge of the harsh life of a whaler out of New Bedford, by way of Nantucket. For those who don't want to learn about every guy rope or all parts of the whaler's rigging, Melville offers up the succinct tale of Billy Budd and his Christ-like sacrifice to the black and white maritime laws on the high seas. An accident results in the death of one of the ship's officers, a slug of a fellow, who had taken a dislike to the young, affable, shy Billy. Captain Vere must hang Billy for the death of Claggert, but knows that this is not right. However, an example must be given to the rest of the crew so that discipline can be maintained.

Edgar Allan Poe creates a distinctly American version of romanticism with his 16 syllable line in "The Raven," the classical "To Helen," and his Gothic "Annabelle Lee." The horror short story can be said to originate from Poe's pen. "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Cask of Amontillado," "The Fall of the House of Usher," and "The Masque of the Red Death" are exemplary short stories. The new genre of detective story also emerges with Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue."

American Romanticism has its own offshoot in the Transcendentalism of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. One wrote about transcending the complexities of life; the other, who wanted to get to the marrow of life, pitted himself against nature at Walden Pond and wrote an inspiring autobiographical account of his sojourn, aptly titled *On Walden Pond*. He also wrote passionately on his objections to the interference of government on the individual in "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience."

Emerson's elegantly crafted essays and war poetry still give validation to several important universal truths.

Probably most remembered for his address to Thoreau's Harvard graduating class, "The American Scholar," he defined the qualities of hard work and intellectual spirit required of Americans in their growing nation.

### **The Transition between Romanticism and Realism**

The Civil War period ushers in the poignant poetry of Walt Whitman and his homages to all who suffer from the ripple effects of war and presidential assassination. His "Come up from the Fields, Father" about a Civil War soldier's death and his family's reaction and "When Lilacs Last in the Courtyard Bloom'd" about the effects of Abraham Lincoln's death on the poet and the nation should be required readings in any American literature course. Further, his *Leaves of Grass* gave America its first poetry truly unique in form, structure, and subject matter.

Emily Dickinson, like Walt Whitman, leaves her literary fingerprints on a vast array of poems, all but three of which were never published in her lifetime. Her themes of introspection and attention to nature's details and wonders are, by any measurement, world-class works. Her posthumous recognition reveals the timeliness of her work. American writing had most certainly arrived!

Mark Twain also left giant footprints with his unique blend of tall tale and fable. "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" and "The Man who Stole Hadleyburg" are epitomes of short story writing. Move to novel creation, and Twain again rises head and shoulders above others by his bold, still disputed, oft-banned *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which examines such taboo subjects as a white person's love of a slave, the issue of leaving children with abusive parents, and the outcomes of family feuds. Written partly in dialect and southern vernacular, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is touted by some as the greatest American novel.

### **Contemporary American Literature**

#### **American Drama**

The greatest and most prolific of American playwrights include:

Eugene O'Neill -- *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, and *Desire Under the Elms*

Arthur Miller -- *The Crucible*, *All My Sons*, and *Death of a Salesman*

Tennessee Williams -- *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *The Glass Menagerie*, and *A Street Car Named Desire*

Edward Albee -- *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, *Three Tall Women*, and *A Delicate Balance*

## **American Fiction**

The renowned American novelists of this century include

John Updike -- *Rabbit Run* and *Rabbit Redux*

Sinclair Lewis -- *Babbitt* and *Elmer Gantry*

F. Scott Fitzgerald -- *The Great Gatsby* and *Tender is the Night*

Ernest Hemingway -- *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*

William Faulkner -- *The Sound and the Fury* and *Absalom, Absalom*

Bernard Malamud -- *The Fixer* and *The Natural*

## **American Poetry**

The poetry of the twentieth century is multifaceted, as represented by Edna St. Vincent Millay, Marianne Moore, Richard Wilbur, Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, and Rita Lone. Head and shoulders above all others are the many-layered poems of Robert Frost. His New England motifs of snowy evenings, birches, apple picking, stone wall mending, hired hands, and detailed nature studies relate universal truths in exquisite diction, polysyllabic words, and rare allusions to either mythology or the *Bible*.

## **American Indian Literature**

The foundation of American Indian writing is found in story-telling, oratory, autobiographical and historical accounts of tribal village life, reverence for the environment, and the postulation that the earth with all of its beauty was given in trust, to be cared for and passed on to future generations.

Early American Indian writings

Barland, Hal. *When The Legends Die*

Barrett, S.M. Editor: *Geronimo: His Own Story - Apache*

Eastman, C. & Eastman E. *Wigwam Evenings: Sioux Folktales Retold*

Riggs, L. *Cherokee Night* - drama

Twentieth Century Writers

Deloria, V. *Custer Died for your Sins* (Sioux)

Dorris, M. *The Broken Cord: A Family's on-going struggle with fetal alcohol syndrome* (Modoc)

Hogan, L. *Mean Spirited* (Chickasaw)

Taylor, C.F. *Native American Myths and Legends*

### **Afro-American Literature**

The three phases of Afro-American Literature can be broken down as follows:

- Oppression, slavery, and the re-construction of the post-Civil War/rural South
- Inner city strife/single parenting, drug abuse, lack of educational opportunities and work advancement etc. that was controlled by biased and disinterested factions of society.
- Post-Civil Rights and the emergence of the BLACK movement focusing on biographical and autobiographical Black heroes and their contribution to Black and American culture.

Resources:

#### 1. Pre-Civil War

Bethune, Mary McLeod. *Voice of Black Hope*

Fast, Howard. *Freedom Ride*

Haskins, James. *Black Music in America - A History through its People*

Huggins, Nathan Irving. *Black Odyssey*

Lemann, Nicolas. *The Promised Land*

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Wheatley, Phyllis. *Memoirs and Poems*

#### 2. Post-Civil War and Reconstruction

Armstrong, William. *Souder*

Bonham, Frank. *Durango Street*

Childress, Alice. *A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich*

Gaines, Ernest. *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*

### 3. Post Civil War - Present

Angelou, Maya. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Baldwin, James. *Go Tell It on the Mountain*

Haley, Alex. *Roots*

Hansberry, Lorraine. *A Raisin in the Sun*

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Hughes, Langston. *I, Too, Sing America*

Wright, Richard. *White Man Listen!* and *Native Son*

#### **Latino/a Literature**

In the field of literature, we have two new expanding areas, Latino/a and feminist writers. These authors write to retain cultural heritage, share their people's struggle for recognition, independence, and survival, and express their hopes for the future.

##### Latino/Latina Writers

De Cervantes, Lora (Chicana). *Starfish*

Cisneros, Sandra (Hispanic). *Red Sweater* and other short story collections

Marquez, Gabriel Garcia (Colombian). *Hundred Years of Solitude*

Nunoz, A. Lopez (Spanish). *Programas Para Dias Especiales*

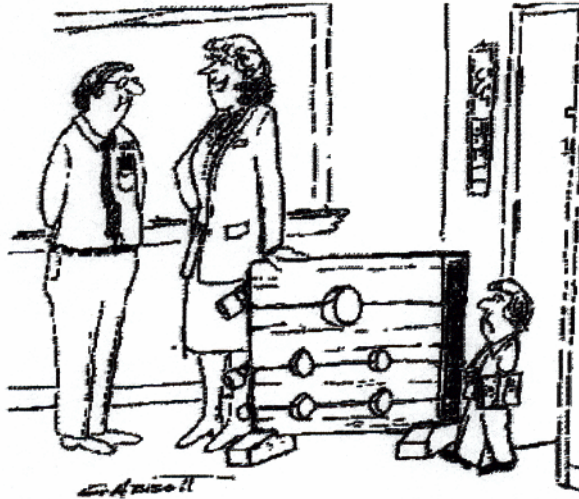
Neruda, Pablo (Chile). Nobel Prize Winner- Collections of Poetry

Silko, Leslie Marmon (Mexican). *The Time We Climbed Snake Mountain*

Soto, Gary (Mexican). *The Tales of Sunlight*

#### **Feminist / gender concern literature written by women in the United States**

Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome* is a heartbreaking tale of lack of communication, lack of funds, the unrelenting cold of the Massachusetts winter, and a toboggan ride which gnarls Ethan and Mattie just like the old tree which they smash into. *The Age of Innocence*, in contrast to *Ethan Frome*, is set in the upper echelons of fin-de-siècle New York and explores marriage without stifling social protocols.



**"I never use it, but I've found it to be a great deterrent."**

Willa Cather's work moves the reader to the prairies of Nebraska and the harsh eking out of existence by the immigrant families who choose to stay there and farm. Her most acclaimed works include *My Antonia* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.

Kate Chopin's regionalism and local color takes her readers to the upper-crust Creole society of New Orleans and resort isles off the Louisiana coast. "The Story of an Hour" is lauded as one of the greatest of all short stories. Her feminist liberation novel, *The Awakening*, is still hotly debated.

Eudora Welty's regionalism and dialect shine in her short stories of rural Mississippi, especially in "The Worn Path."

Modern black female writers who explore the world of feminist/gender issues as well as class prohibitions are Alice Walker -- (*The Color Purple*), Zora Neale Hurston (*Their Eyes Were Watching God*), and Toni Morrison (*Beloved*, *Jazz*, and *Song of Solomon*).

#### Feminists

Alcott, Louisa May. *Little Women*

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique: The Second Stage*

Bronte, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Janeway, Elizabeth. *Woman's World, Woman's Place: A Study in Social Mythology*

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*

Rich, Adrienne. Adrienne Rich's Poetry: *Motherhood As Experience and Driving into the Wreck*

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*

## **Skill 1.2 Knowledge of the changes in literary form and style in American literature.**

See Skill 1.3.

## **Skill 1.3 Identify the characteristics of major literary periods in American literature (Colonial, Revolutionary, Romantic, Renaissance, Realism, Civil War, post–Civil War).**

American Literature is defined by a number of clearly identifiable periods.

### **1. Native American works from various tribes**

These were originally part of a vast oral tradition that spanned most of continental America from as far back as before the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

- Characteristics of native Indian literature include
  - Reverence for and awe of nature.
  - The interconnectedness of the elements in the life cycle.
- Themes of Indian literature often reflect
  - The hardiness of the native body and soul.
  - Remorse for the destruction of their way of life.
  - The genocide of many tribes by the encroaching settlement and Manifest Destiny policies of the U. S. government.

### **2. The Colonial Period in both New England and the South**

Stylistically, early colonists' writings were neo-classical, emphasizing order, balance, clarity, and reason. Schooled in England, their writing and speaking was still decidedly British even as their thinking became entirely American.

Early American literature reveals the lives and experiences of the New England expatriates who left England to find religious freedom.

The Revolutionary Period contains non-fiction genres: essay, pamphlet, speech, famous document, and epistle.

Thomas Paine's pamphlet, *Common Sense*, which, though written by a recently transplanted Englishman, spoke to the American patriots' common sense in dealing with the issues in the cause of freedom.

Other contributions are Benjamin Franklin's essays from *Poor Richard's Almanac* and satires such as "How to Reduce a Great Empire to a Small One" and "A Letter to Madame Gout."

### **3. The Romantic Period**

Early American folktales, and the emergence of a distinctly American writing, not just a stepchild to English forms, constitute the next period.

Washington Irving's characters, Icabod Crane and Rip Van Winkle, create a uniquely American folklore devoid of English influences. The characters are indelibly marked by their environment and the superstitions of the New Englander. The early American writings of James Fenimore Cooper and his Leatherstocking Tales with their stirring accounts of drums along the Mohawk and the French and Indian Wars, the futile British defense of Fort William Henry and the brutalities of this time frame allow readers a window into their uniquely American world. Natty Bumppo, Chingachgook, Uncas, and Magua are unforgettable characters that reflect the American spirit in thought and action.

The poetry of Fireside Poets - James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and John Greenleaf Whittier - was recited by American families and read in the long New England winters. In "The Courtin'," Lowell used Yankee dialect to tell a narrative. Spellbinding epics by Longfellow such as *Hiawatha*, *The Courtship of Miles Standish*, and *Evangeline* told of adversity, sorrow, and ultimate happiness in an uniquely American warp.

"Snowbound" by Whittier relates the story of a captive family isolated by a blizzard, stressing family closeness. Holmes' "The Chambered Nautilus" and his famous line, "Fired the shot heard round the world," put American poetry on a firm footing with other world writers.

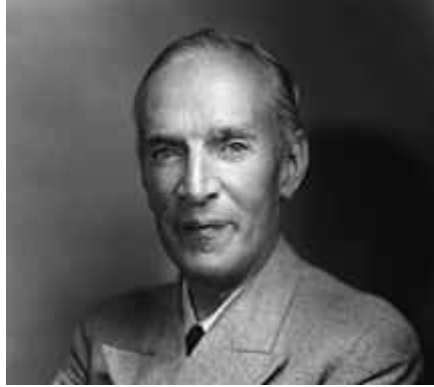
#### **4. The Transition between Romanticism and Realism**

During this period such legendary figures as Paul Bunyan and Pecos Bill rose from the oral tradition. Anonymous storytellers around campfires told tales of a huge lumberman and his giant blue ox, Babe, whose adventures were explanations of natural phenomena like those of footprints filled with rainwater becoming the Great Lakes. Or the whirling-dervish speed of Pecos Bill explained the tornadoes of the Southwest. Like ancient peoples, finding reasons for the happenings in their lives, these American pioneer storytellers created a mythology appropriate to the vast reaches of the unsettled frontier.

#### **5. The Realistic Period**

The late nineteenth century saw a reaction against the tendency of romantic writers to look at the world through rose-colored glasses. Writers like Frank Norris (*The Pit*) and Upton Sinclair (*The Jungle*) used their novels to decry conditions for workers in slaughterhouses and wheat mills. In *The Red Badge of Courage*, Stephen Crane wrote of the daily sufferings of the common soldier in the Civil War. Realistic writers wrote of common, ordinary people and events using detail that would reveal the harsh realities of life.

They breached taboos by creating protagonists whose environments often destroyed them. Romantic writers would have only protagonists whose indomitable wills helped them rise above adversity. Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* deals with a young woman forced into prostitution to survive. In "The Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," Ambrose Bierce relates the unfortunate hanging of a Confederate soldier.



Upton Sinclair

Short stories, like Bret Harte's "The Outcasts of Poker Flat" and Jack London's "To Build a Fire," deal with unfortunate people whose luck in life has run out. Many writers, sub-classified as naturalists, believed that man was subject to a fate over which he had no control.