

Enlightenment and romanticism in american literature assignment

[Art & Culture](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Rather than seeing one common theme that linked all of these readings together, I saw a shift from one literary period to another through the changing writing styles and Ideas of these authors. Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine seem to exemplify the Enlightenment period of American literature whereas Washington Irving and James Feminine Cooper exemplify a shift towards the Romantic period in American literature. While themes of Enlightenment connect Franklin, Jefferson, and Paine, those themes differ from the themes that will connect Irving and Cooper.

Each of these Enlightenment authors has a theme in their writing that exemplifies the themes of the Enlightenment period. The first is Benjamin Franklin whose writing shows an interest in human nature. Throughout Franklins lifetime he was constantly focusing on himself and how he conducted himself in everyday life. This can be seen through some of his 13 virtues such as 1) Silence: speak not what may benefit others of yourself, 2) Resolution: resolve to perform what you ought, and 3) Justice: wrong none, by doing Injuries or omitting the benefits that re your Duty (Norton, 526-527).

These virtues show that Franklin was always considering his own human nature and how he acted In his dally life. Another theme of Enlightenment includes a belief in progress. This is exemplified by Franklin also as he was constantly keeping track of his behavior: “ I entered upon the Execution of this Plan for Self-examination, and continued it with occasional Intermissions for sometime. I was surprised to find myself so much fuller on Faults than I had imagined, but I had the Satisfaction of seeing them diminish” (Norton, 520).

<https://assignbuster.com/enlightenment-and-romanticism-in-american-literature-assignment/>

Both Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine exemplify one last theme of Enlightenment which is a rational approach to the world. This means that the authors presented arguments and supported their beliefs by using logic and reasoning. In Section III of Paine's *Common Sense*, which deals with his "Thoughts on the Present State of American Affairs," he says that "America would have flourished as much, and probably much more, had no European power taken any notice of her" (Norton, 632).

He supports this claim by reasoning that the economy that the Americans have retreated so far has enabled them to provide themselves with the necessities of life and will be able to continue this success as long as the food produced in America is needed in Europe. Similar to this is Jefferson's argument against manufacturing developing in America. He says that manufacturing was a necessity in Europe because all of the farmland was either "cultivated, or locked up against the cultivator." His reasoning for why manufacturing is not necessary in America is because there is an abundance of land to be cultivated, unlike in the situation in

Europe. This use of logic and reasoning in these authors' writings is a unique style to the Enlightenment period. There is now a shift in the themes of these writings we've read which show the emergence of European Romanticism beginning to influence American writers such as Irving and Cooper.

Romanticism deals with more imaginative writing, such as fictional stories that have a dramatic plot. Washington who has a strange encounter with a group of old Dutchmen, falls asleep after drinking a funny drink, and wakes up to find that 20 years had gone by while he was sleeping.

This story, with its fictional plot, exemplifies the new type of literature that emerged during this time of Romanticism. On the other hand, James Fenimore Cooper's writing exemplifies the "natural" aspects of Romanticism which is one of the most dominant themes of this literary era. An example of this is shown in the beginning paragraph of "The Last of the Mohicans" when the scene between Natty and Chingachgook is being set: "The vast canopy of woods spread itself to the margin of the river, overhanging the water, and shadowing its dark glassy current with a deeper hue."