

Breadth of time periods of american literature

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



If I was teaching a course in American Literature since 1865, the texts that I would choose to teach would be "Tulips" by Sylvia Plath, Leaves of Grass by Walt Whitman, Sula by Toni Morrison, Wise Blood by Flannery O'Connor, The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Housekeeping by Marilynne Robinson, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain, "The Yellow Wallpaper" by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Daisy Miller by Henry James, and Drown by Junot Diaz.

I feel that it is important to chronologically p the 150 or so years of literature in this time period, to choose a diversity of authors in terms of gender, race and sexuality, to represent the nation regionally as well as possible, to include texts that focus on important issues in the nation including immigration, gender equality and race relations, and to focus on texts that are relatively accessible and reflect the time period in which they are written. With these texts, I feel that this is accomplished.

Chronologically, this list is relatively complete - there are texts that represent the period of reconstruction (The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn) and that are from around ten years ago (Drown). Indeed, different aspects of this list speak to the Industrial Revolution and ever-changing face of America through technological advancement, and others discuss the ways that race and gender exist in the time period in which they are written ("The Yellow Wallpaper" and Sula, for example).

Further, not only do these texts represent a breadth of time periods, but they also show different regions of the United States, including the South (Wise Blood) and the West (Housekeeping), with the typical representation of the

Northeast and many texts that are not necessarily central to any specific region.

Through providing a diversity of chronological and regional representation, I feel that students, especially in a nation that is not as familiar with the United States as we are, would be able to get a better feel of how the United States changed over the past 150 years and how the different regions of the United States face different challenges. Just as it's important to represent different literal aspects of the United States, it's just as important to represent the diversity of people that make the nation up.

By providing works from authors like Toni Morrison and Junot Diaz, students would get a perspective on the African American and immigrant experience in the United States, respectively. Indeed, America exists differently for the immigrant characters in this collection of Diaz short stories than it does for the characters seeking the American Dream in *The Great Gatsby*, and it's important for students to explore these differences among communities in the U. S.

Indeed, this collection of texts also reflects issues that are of the utmost importance in the United States - "Tulips" and "The Yellow Wallpaper" discuss what it means to be a woman and how motherhood or marriage can trap women, for example. *Wise Blood* explores the intricacies of religion, and more specifically Christianity, in the South, and *Sula* thoroughly discusses how black Americans live in the "Bottom" while whites live at the top long after the conclusion of the Civil War.

Students reading my list of texts would be exposed to a breadth of issues, while also reading canonical literature that explores nature such as *Leaves of Grass* and the work of Henry James and his take on relationships and people. All of the works that are included in this list cover so many different aspects of American Literature, and together they paint a picture that represents the time period and nation as well as any ten-piece collection can.

Regionally, canonically and chronologically, the list covers all of the essential points present in American literature, and it also touches on multiple issues of diversity within the texts as well as issues central to American culture in these different time periods. These poems, short stories, novellas and novels are an excellent window into American Literature as well as the ever-ubiquitous American culture, and I would be excited to teach these texts to any classroom. 2nd Essay: Southern Literature is fraught with guilt, struggle and a resistance to dominant American cultural norms.

Three of the most important authors in Southern Lit, Zora Neale Hurston, William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor, are all incredibly attentive to issues important to all Southern people, but they each discuss Southern life in a different form. While all three deal with the integral issues of race relations in the South, the constant struggle with the separation of the North from the South, and what exactly it means to have a Southern identity, each of these authors does this in a very different manner.

Hurston focuses on African American dialect and unique experiences within those communities, Faulkner traditionally discusses close-knit small town communities in a stream of consciousness and highly narrative manner, and <https://assignbuster.com/breadth-of-time-periods-of-american-literature/>

O'Connor takes a highly moralistic tone, with a focus on religion and community in the South. Hurston's "Sweat" is similar to her most famous "Their Eyes Were Watching God" in that gender struggles and dialect within African American communities are showcased. Indeed, one of the central conflicts in "Sweat" is the struggle for dominance within the relationship between Delia and Sykes Jones.

Even though aspects of Southern femininity and masculinity are inherent to this struggle, femininity is the focus as this is typical of Hurston and the protagonist, and thereby where the reader's sympathies more dominantly lie, is with Delia Jones. The work focuses on how African American communities exist, with a focus on Delia's humming and the music that's present, thereby demonstrating a focus on an oral tradition that doesn't necessarily exist within Faulkner and O'Connor's work.

Further, the end of the short story demonstrates how women are able to obtain dominance in relationships, if they ever are able to do so, through Sykes' horrifying death. Indeed, this story demonstrates many of Hurston's focuses, and it shows typical struggles within Southern African American communities in terms of gender relations and oral traditions versus dominant narratives. Faulkner's "Barn Burning" is different from this in that its focus is on a father and son, and also on the town in which the characters live.

Indeed, the story begins in "The store in which the justice of the Peace's court was sitting" and continues to focus on the actual location and Southern-ness of the setting. Like Hurston, the dialogue of "Barn Burning" is uniquely Southern, with the characters saying the word "it" as "hit," thereby demonstrating Southern dialect and accents in a way that separates

it from any Northern dialogue. Also like Hurston's work, the story discusses race relations in the South, though necessarily from a white perspective instead of a black perspective.

Because of this, the community at the center of the story is a white community instead of a black community, and it thereby emphasizes race relations and oppressive institutions within Southern society instead of exploring the ways in which African American communities form themselves. While there are no explicit O'Connor works on the syllabus, it would be remiss to discuss Southern writing without using O'Connor as an example.

In her "A Good Man is Hard to Find," for example, the explicit focus of the narrative is on what it means to be a good person, and how a criminal is not necessarily a more evil and corrupt person than a grandmother without good intentions. While the criminal who murders the family who are at the center of the story is clearly not a "good man," neither is the matriarchal grandmother who is central to the story: indeed, she would have been good if "it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life.

"O'Connor discusses Southern society in terms of morality and religion throughout her novels and short stories, and within this discussion also exists issues of race relations, Southern society and dialect, and other things. Indeed, O'Connor, Faulkner and Hurston all recognize the differences between the South and other regions in the United States, the unique moral and community systems that exist there, and demonstrate these aspects differently. 3rd Essay: William Carlos Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow" and e.

e. cumming's [my sweet old etcetera] both rely on unconventional, modernist poetic form and use this form to convey separate messages. Williams' poem uses its form to put emphasis on a dependence on the smallest things – indeed, the form and subject of “ The Red Wheelbarrow” hinge on the wheelbarrow itself, and demonstrate how form and subject are both integral to a poem's ultimate message. Similarly, cummings' unconventional form is different from almost any other poet and uses multiple definitions of etcetera.

Both poems show how form is as essential to function as subject and literal messages are, and both use this form to reiterate the meaning of the poem. Williams' “ The Red Wheelbarrow” is from a time period in which poets were able to play with form and think more consciously about how a poem can be unconventional in form and still convey a message. Indeed, this poem more or less relies on form to convey that message. What is so interesting about this poem is that there is no terribly clear message in the poem; in fact, it initially seems to not say much of anything and instead to toy around with words.

However, the way the poem is structured, the seemingly insignificant nouns are placed at the forefront. As the poem reads, “ so much depends / upon / a red wheel / barrow” (lines 1-4). Here, the poem does in fact depend on the “ barrow” – every couplet in “ The Red Wheelbarrow” hinges upon a second one-word line that consists of a relatively common and insignificant noun. The nouns continue to locate the poem. The red wheelbarrow is “ glazed with rain / water / beside the white / chickens” (lines 5-8), showing that while

each couplet is grounded by the final one-worded line, the entire poem is grounded by the wheelbarrow.

Indeed, all of the lines refer back to it: it is the thing that is glazed with rainwater, and it is the thing that is beside the white chickens. The first couplet itself makes it increasingly clear that the wheelbarrow is at the center of this poem in multiple ways: everything in the poem depends on it literally, as is stated in the first two lines, but it is also structurally at the center of the poem. William Carlos Williams is able to use this unconventional form to make a statement about what is important – after all, how can so much depend on a wheelbarrow unless Williams demonstrates it in this unconventional way?

Similarly, e. e. cummings poem [my sweet old etcetera] challenges ideas of what the “ etcetera” of the poem is by introducing it in a form that allows multiple interpretations. Indeed, the poem begins with “ my sweet old etcetera / aunt lucy” (lines 1-2), and also includes references to it as “ not to / mention shirts fleaproof earwarmers / etcetera wrists etcetera” (lines 11-13), “ my / mother hoped that / I would die etcetera” (lines 13-15), “ my / self etcetera lay quietly” (lines 19-20), and “ dreaming, / et / cetera, of / Your smile / eyes knees and of your Etcetera” (lines 23-27).

All of these uses of etcetera are different and challenge what exactly the word means: indeed, the word literally refers to a continuing list of things, but here sometimes it's used in an apathetic sense, sometimes as a euphemism, and other times as its definition connotes. Like “ The Red Wheelbarrow,” this poem hinges on the definition of one word, and because

of seemingly spontaneous line breaks and capitalization, that word carries entirely different meanings at different places in the text.

Interestingly, in the last parenthetical notation, etcetera refers to both the never-ending list of actions of the speaker and also, presumably, the body of the woman who is being described, thereby showing the many definitions of the word. Both “ The Red Wheelbarrow” and [my sweet old etcetera] use relatively unconventional form to challenge traditional notions of established words and concepts. By relying on a different method of poetry and description, both writers are able to disrupt these ideas that are so closely tied to the words, and also to redefine both the words and the poetic form that they are using to describe them.

4th Essay: If I could choose any two authors to explore more fully, I would pick Zora Neale Hurston and Henry James to look at further. Not only are these two authors very different in terms of their writing styles, but they also are from different time periods and different literary perspectives, with Hurston generally describing communities and concrete people more fully while James writes conceptually and canonically in a way that focuses on narrative and other literary forms.

Both authors speak to different audiences, both of which I at least partially identify with, and I look forward to reading more by each author. In this course, we read “ Sweat” by Hurston, which I wrote about for one of my other essays. I really enjoy this work not only because I enjoy Southern literature, but also because it focuses on a different aspect of identity than many of the authors that we’ve read in this course.

Indeed, Hurston focused on African American oral narratives, and was actually often involved in sociological work and gathering African American folktales to preserve in writing instead of simply within an oral tradition. Because her life was not always spent in looking at writing through a strict literary lens, I think that she has a unique perspective in representing life as it truly exists within communities that are not typically discussed in popular fiction.

She herself grew up in an African American town, and is particularly knowledgeable and gifted at representing these types of communities. I would love to read *Their Eyes Were Watching God* if only because it is similar to “Sweat” but, as a novel instead of a short story, allows more time to delve into a character’s mindset and to develop a sense of what it means to live within an African American community. Further, I think that Hurston has a unique and powerful style that explores language in a way that many authors simply don’t.

She is able to write using heavy symbolism and metaphors throughout her prose, but she’s also able to interestingly, intelligently and authentically portray the language that exists within black southern communities, something that most authors would not even think about discussing. Indeed, because of her early life in a unique community that most canonical authors do not understand, her sociological work on oral narratives within black communities, her interesting view on language and style, and her emphasis on women’s issues and gender equality, I would love to look more closely at Zora Neale Hurston’s body of literature.

Henry James is also an incredibly important figure in American Literature, but for very different reasons than Hurston. Indeed, James style is not as accessible or engaging as Hurston's often is, and he is much more cerebral in the issues that he chooses to tackle. As *Daisy Miller* demonstrates, though, James has a terrific understanding of how to manipulate narrative to show multiple dimensions of characters, and his other work demonstrates this even further.

The novel which I would most like to read by him is *The Turn of the Screw*, primarily because it is both a frame narrative (similar to the *Canterbury Tales*), which provides many unique and interesting insights into narrative, and also because it is a unique version of a ghost story that is much more literary in style than most of what gets represented in popular culture today. Because James is so able to take on narrative, I enjoyed *Daisy Miller* thoroughly: not only were the characters deep, complex, round and interesting, but the timeline was also challenging.

I really enjoy reading Henry James because he is, in many ways, timeless – while his work is obviously dated in certain ways in terms of subject and the setting, the human condition is so central to everything that he writes that it can be understood outside of this context. Because of his narrative abilities, interest in the human psyche and innate human struggles, challenging prose that pushes different ideas of symbolism and identity, and the innovative subjects that he chooses to write about, I would also very much enjoy looking at what else Henry James has written.