

The history of american literature assignment

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The same stories, fables, or belief structures were told repeatedly, each time identical to the last, and were memorized by the listeners so they would be able to pass these on to the next generation. They also used pictures, carvings, or special mementos such as bones, teeth, feathers, or skins as reminders of great hunts or wars. If an entire tribe and all its descendants were killed off, the specific stories and history of that tribe would also be gone. Other tribes may speak of the first, but never in the same detail or with the same perspective as the original tribe members.

Long before settlers arrived in America, explorers reported on their voyages to the continent. Italian explorer Amerigo Vesputius provided some of the earliest European descriptions of the American continent. Before 1600 Sir Walter Raleigh, Richard Hakluyt, Thomas Harriot, and John White had published accounts of discoveries. The writings of Captain John Smith, an explorer whose travels took him up and down the eastern seaboard of America, represent a shift from exploration narrative toward early history. Early histories, however, were written mostly by settlers rather than by explorers.

William Bradford, the first governor of the Plymouth Colony. Wrote his *Of Plymouth Plantation* from 1620 to 1647. Another important historian of early America was Thomas Morton, whose *New English Canaan* used humor in portraying what he considered to be the overbearing and intolerant qualities of the Puritans. Histories of early America, especially in New England, were filled with references to the Bible and to God's will. Nearly all events could be explained from this religious perspective: Foul weather and diseases were perceived as God's wrath; a bountiful harvest represented God's blessing.

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Given the Puritans' relationship with God, It is not surprising that sermons and other religious writings dominated literature in America in the 17th century. John Cotton, Thomas Hooker, Roger Williams, and John Winthrop were among the most prominent religious writers. A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mary Rowland (1682). This work is a firsthand account by a colonist who was taken captive by Indians during King Phillip's War. It presents a dramatic tale of suffering and of Rowland's efforts to make sense of that suffering. Her story became the model for a new genre of early American literature: captivity narratives.

Such accounts became staples of American literature and eventually provided material for American fiction. While still religious in tone and purpose, captivity narratives emphasized the experiences of individuals. They also incorporated many of the fundamentals of fiction, making use of characters, dramatic action and setting. The Salem witch trials of 1692 were another period in early Massachusetts town resulted in the execution of 14 women and 6 men, Cotton Mather's *The Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693) documented the events of the witch trials.

Cotton Mather remained an important literary figure in the 18th century. His *Magnolia Christi Americana* (*The Great Works of Christ in America*, 1702) is a history of New England that celebrates the founding generation of Puritans. Like his earlier works, it is religious; however, its interest in the human side of the Puritan founders marked a new achievement in American literary history. Mather's rewarding career included writings on science and medicine as well as theology and history. His *Sentiments on the Small Pox Inoculated* (1721) was instrumental in introducing the smallpox vaccine to New England.

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A new genre for American writers, the travel narrative, would become especially influential late in the sass. Travel narratives include *Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America* (1778) by Jonathan Carver and *Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, the Cherokee Country, etc* (1791) by William Bertram . Travel stories often blended observations on nature and landscape with tales of personal courage and achievement. The first American newspaper, the *Boston News-Letter*, was founded in 1704, and joined by the *Boston Gazette* in 1719.

At a time when swapper Journalism was concerned primarily with reporting political events, the *New-England Currant*, started by James Franklin in 1721, became the first newspaper to include literary entertainment. Franklins younger brother Benjamin Franklin published humorous social commentary in the *Currant* under the pen name of Silence Dogwood . Magazines also appeared for the first time in the colonies during the mid-sass. Before 1800 magazines were concerned primarily with measuring America's developing culture against the British model.

During the sass Boston and Philadelphia became centers of publishing in addition to being political and immemorial centers. Benjamin Franklin was key in establishing a writing community in Philadelphia. In 1727 he and a group of friends established a men's reading club in Philadelphia called the *Junta* . Members shared printed works and discussed topics of the day. Such reading and discussion clubs became an important part of American culture. Women organized literary circles in the sass and sass. These groups, known as salons, resembled men's reading clubs.

They also encouraged members to compose their own work, mainly poetry, but very few of these works were preserved. By the mid-18th century American writing was primarily political. In America the 18th century was known as the Age of Enlightenment. Americans held a growing belief in the supremacy of reason over church; they also stressed the importance of the individual and freedom over authorities and institutions. America's great Enlightenment writers included Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Jefferson, who also played important roles in the American Revolution.

Thomas Paine became a leading figure in the cause of American independence with the pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776). This enormously popular political document stated that the American colonies received no advantage from Great Britain and that common sense called for them to establish an independent republican government. Written in a straightforward style using the language of the common person, *Common Sense* was published just months before the Declaration of Independence. Great Britain could be settled peaceably.

Paine shook this belief, making his readers feel that each person had the power and responsibility to participate in the revolution. The Declaration of Independence was a crucial achievement in both politics and American prose. It was structured in the form of an assertion that was then proven through specific examples. The declaration was written by a committee made up of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston, though Jefferson was ultimately responsible for most of the writing .

The declaration and the Constitution of the United States (1787) were key statements of American freedom, but as collaborative documents they necessitated compromises to satisfy all of their authors. One of the most significant compromises was the absence of any mention of slavery. Slavery was unethical from the views of the American Revolution, but for the sake of unity with the Southern colonies, whose cotton) economy was rooted in slavery, no protest was made against it. A final flurry of political writing at the close of the century arose from the debate over ratification of the Constitution.

Federalists supported the strong central government outlined in the Constitution, while an anti-Federalist faction opposed it. A series of essays supporting ratification was published in 1787 and 1788 and circulated in pamphlets. The essays, later published as *The Federalist*, were written by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay . Slave narratives recorded another side of life in America. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789) has long been considered an important African American text.

American fiction was formally established after the American Revolution. *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), a tragic love story by William Hill Brown, is generally considered the first American novel . Another Literary milestone was Hannah Foster's *The Coquette* (1797), a novel in the form of letters, or an epistolary novel. Over the course of the 19th century the country progressed from an agricultural economy concentrated on the Eastern coast to an industrialized nation that spanned the continent. With the dramatic changes in the nation came dramatic changes in its literature.

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At the start of the sass's only a handful of novels had been written, but by mid-century American fiction rivaled the best in the world. Biography and history remained strong; religious writing, on the other hand, had substantially declined in importance. Among the first developments of the young nation was the realization that America had its own language and that American English differed from British English. Noah Webster, noting the unique American styles in language and literature, undertook the massive project of developing an American dictionary.

He had already advocated changes in American spellings of English words in such writings as *Dissertations on the English Language* (1789) . Webster published his first dictionary in 1806. The first edition of his major work, *American Dictionary of the English Language*, came out in 1828. What made this work radical was his insistence on defining words based not only on traditional English usage but also on American variations in usage, called Americanism, and his inclusion of at least 12, 000 new words not previously recognized by English dictionaries.

Gaining independence also provided the United States with a history of its own. Samuel Miller's *A Brief Retrospect of the Revolution*. Best known among these patriotic histories was the monumental ten- volume *History of the United States* (1834-1876) by George Bancroft, who is often called the father of American history . America's westward expansion after the Louisiana Purchase generated a sizable collection of political writings, especially in light of manifest destiny belief that the country's territorial expansion was not only inevitable but also divinely ordained.

The term manifest destiny was coined by writer John Louis Sullivan in “Annexation,” an article that argued for the annexation of Texas and appeared in the July-August 1845 issue of United States Magazine and Democratic Review . The Native American experience began to be told in autobiography. William Apes was the first Native American to produce extensive writings in English. In *A Son of the Forest* (1829) he described his conversion to Christianity and his participation in the War of 1812 between the United States and The greatest development in American biography was the slave narrative.

Britain . The tension produced by slavery in America had already become apparent by the Revolution, but it heightened considerably in the sass, right up until the American Civil War (1861-1865). Frederick Douglass created a masterpiece of the genre with *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), a work that he revised and enlarged several times for later editions. While describing his life as a slave and his struggle toward freedom, Douglass emphasized the primary role that literacy played in opening opportunities for African Americans.

He represented his ability to write his own story as the ultimate act of a free man . Harriet Jacobs offered a different but no less upsetting representation of slavery in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). In the book, Jacobs told of the sexual abuse experienced by young female slaves. During the late sass and early sass, romanticism was the dominant literary genre in Europe. In reaction to the Enlightenment and its emphasis on reason, romanticism used emotion and imagination. Until about 1870 romanticism influenced the

major forms of American writings: transcendentalist writings, historical fiction, and sentimental fiction.

In New England, an intellectual movement known as transcendentalism developed as an American version of romanticism. The movement began among an influential set of authors based in Concord, Massachusetts, and was led by Ralph Wald Emerson. Like romanticism, transcendentalism rejected both 18th-century rationalism and established religion, which for the transcendentalists meant Puritan traditions. The transcendentalists found their inspiration in nature and rejected materialism. Emerson's essay "Nature" (1836) was the first major document of the transcendental school.

His other key transcendentalist works include "Self-Reliance" (1841), an essay in which he stressed the importance of being true to one's own nature. Henry David Thoreau, a friend of Emerson, put transcendentalist ideas into action. *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854) is his journal of a two-year experiment in living as simply and self-reliantly as possible in a small cabin that he built on the shores of Walden Pond, near Concord. His essay "Civil Disobedience" (1849) is a statement against government intimidation that records his short stay in jail after he refused to pay a tax in support of the Mexican War (1846-1848).

New England writer Nathaniel Hawthorne was a master of historical fiction. Influenced to some extent by *Blithedale Romance* (1852) is loosely based on a transcendentalist experiment in manual living at Brook Farm. Still, Hawthorne's work, with its deep ethical concern about sin, punishment, and atonement, is less optimistic than most transcendental writing. Hawthorne

was a descendant of one of the Judges at the Salem witch trials, and he set many of his works in Puritan New England and during early crises in American history .

The Scarlet Letter (1850), a story of rebellion within an emotionally constricted Puritan society, is an undisputed masterpiece in its powerful psychological insights. Mosses from an Old Manse (1846) collects some of his best short stories and sketches, including " Roger Melanin's Burial" and " Young Goodman Herman Melville became a close friend of Hawthorn's after Melville Brown. " moved to Massachusetts in 1850. He worked on several whaling ships and lived life at sea. His early travel adventures brought Melville early success.

Ironically, Melville popularity dropped after the publication of the book now considered a masterpiece of American fiction, Mob Dick (1851). Far removed from his earlier travel narratives, Mob Dick was dedicated to Hawthorne, and like Hawthorn's work was darkly metaphysical, symbolic, and complex. The story of the captain of a whaling boat, ABA, and his relentless hunt for one whale, Mob Dick is also about the mysterious forces of the universe that overwhelm the individual who seeks to confront and struggle against them.

Written in a powerful and varied narrative style, the book includes a magnificent sermon delivered before the ship's sailing, monologues by the ships' mates, and passages of a technical nature, such as a chapter about whales. While transcendentalism was deeply optimistic, celebrating human creativity and the beauty of nature, Hawthorne and Melville demonstrated that asking questions about the nature of the universe could lead to answers

showing the darker side of life. Edgar Allan Poe was another writer who inverted transcendentalist thoughts.

In his disturbing prose and poetry, Poe explored the nature of humanity and frightened readers with what he found. His tales are obsessed with death, madness, and violence demonstrated in *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840). Poe also invented the detective story with such works as “*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*” (1841) and “*The Purloined Letter*” (1844). The sentimental novel is a major form of American fiction that grew out of the responses of white writers to leaver.

The most famous and historically most significant work of American sentimental fiction is *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1851) by Harriet Beecher Stows. Sentimental fiction aimed to stir up pity for the oppressed. In Store’s novel and in novels that followed in this tradition, pity for the oppressed did not necessitate revolutionary change but rather called for an outpouring of Christian love. Sentimental fiction elicited this “Christian” sympathy from Northern white women in particular by demonstrating how the slave system violated the most basic bonds of humanity, such as that between mother and child.

President Abraham Lincoln is credited with having greeted Stows with “So you’re the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war!” *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was powerful as propaganda and expressed the deep antislavery feelings of the North. Two movements became increasingly important in American fiction after the Civil War: regionalism and realism. As the country expanded in area and population, regional differences became

more apparent and of increasing arbitration and the expansion of the railroads had made more of the country accessible.

Regional literature would do the same. Post-Civil War America was large and diverse enough to sense its own local differences. With increasing arbitration and more accessible transportation, small, rural communities became a subject of literary interest. As early as 1820 America had developed a taste for fiction with specific, localized settings and topics. Toward mid-century, regional voices had emerged from newly settled territories in the South and to the west of the Appalachian Mountains. In many of these works local dialects, sayings, and spellings were used for humor.

Tales of the West also became a popular form of regional rating and created frontier outlaws and heroes, such as Billy the Kid. These tales were especially suited to the short-story form. 1860 introduced dime novels; inexpensive tales with exciting plots intended for popular entertainment. The first dime novels were set during key events of early American history such as the Revolutionary War, but plots soon incorporated frontier lore, conflicts between cowboys and Indians, and the taming of the West for white settlement.

Dime novels may be seen as precursors of the Western, a genre that would reach the height of its popularity in the first half of the 20th century. Ever since even before the White man set foot on this continent, America has had its own way of written communication. Everything from politics, religion, westward expansion, wars, and technology has altered and improved

literature. Our society has shifted from taking influences from other societies' writings, to being influential.

Many social issues still greatly impact literature even today; everything from wars, celebrity gossip, science fiction adventures, real life traumas, and talking animals can result in the newest book on top the Best Seller List. Amidst the downward tendency and proneness of hinges, when every voice is raised for a new road or another statute, or a subscription of stock, for an improvement in dress, or in dentistry, for a new house or a larger business, for a political party, or the division of an estate, O will you not tolerate one or two solitary voices in the land, speaking for thoughts and principles not marketable or perishable?