Summary of Literary Periods, Concepts, and Authors

In This Chapter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overview</th>
<th>Literary Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Few Major Concepts or “Ism”</td>
<td>Featured Authors on Released Exams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OVERVIEW

Literature might be thought of as the creative measure of history. Great writers, poets, and playwrights mold their sense of life and the events of their time (their own histories) into works of art. It seems impossible to disconnect most literary works from their historical context, but the themes that make their work universal and enduring perhaps do transcend time in that they speak to people of all time, ensuring us that we are all part of something much larger than simply the here and now.

When you look at the literary concepts below and study the timeline, you will see that shifts in literary theory or tradition are often precipitated by major events in history, most notably wars. The ways that history is linked to literature are endless, and this chapter only hints at some of them.

This chapter is not here for you to memorize. In fact there are rarely questions on the exam that expect you to know particular literary periods and their characteristics. However, it will not hurt you...
to have a sense of how literature (particularly Western literature) has evolved over time. And this timeline and the representative authors will help you determine a reading list for your study.

A FEW MAJOR CONCEPTS OR "ISMS"

The following list is given in chronological order,

**Romanticism (mid-19th century)**
- Valued feeling over reason
- Valued the individual, but recognized the alienation of the individual
- Literature characterized by elements of the supernatural, appreciation for the beauty of nature, personal introspection

**Transcendentalism (mid-19th century)**
- An offshoot of American Romanticism led by Bronson Alcott, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Favored self-reliance and non-conformism
- Sought to see the sublime in the ordinary
- Believed that to transcend was to reach beyond ordinary experience—self perfection was an aim

**Realism (mid- to late 19th century)**
- Pre- and post-Civil war
- Writers rejected sentimentality, wanted to represent true life experience, including the way people really acted and spoke
- Shunned flowery diction and romanticism
- The rise of the women’s movement also significant

**Regionalism (19th century)**
- Extension of Realism
- Focus on local setting, customs, and dialects
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**Naturalism (19th century)**
- Extension of Realism
- Themes are darker: crime, poverty, prejudice, etc.
- Naturalist writers tried to understand scientific or psychological reasons behind behavior

**Imagism (early 20th century)**
- Movement in poetry that favored the use of images as the things themselves
- Motto: "The natural object is always the adequate symbol."
- Willingness to play with forms
- Most notable poets: Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams

**The Lost Generation (1914–)**
- The Lost Generation is the phrase coined by writer Gertrude Stein and later made popular by Ernest Hemingway
- Referred to the generation who lost fathers, husbands, sons and brothers in World War I and who felt aimless and without foundation
- Many of the lost were disillusioned by traditional American values and became expatriates, who chose to leave the United States for Europe, Mexico, and elsewhere. (Paris was an especially favored destination.)

**The Harlem Renaissance (1920s)**
- The explosion of African American visual art, dance, music, and literature in the 1920s, primarily centered in Harlem, New York
- Poet Langston Hughes is often seen as the symbol of the period.
Modernism (1918–1945)

- The prolific period between the end of World War I and the end of World War II
- Other historical context:
  - The industrial revolution and the age of machines
  - Mass immigration to the United States
  - Women’s rights (19th amendment)
  - The Great Depression
- Alienation and the loss of the individual to the machine are major themes.

Post Modernism (1945–)

- Begins with detonation of atom bombs in Japan to end World War II
- Key markers:
  - Post-apocalyptic themes
  - Satire
  - The absurd
  - Anti-heroes
  - The rise of multiculturalism and diverse voices
- Themes:
  - Alienation due to race, gender, and sexual orientation
  - Intolerance
  - Political and social oppression

The Beat Movement (1950s)

- Led by poet Allen Ginsberg and novelist Jack Kerouac
- Rejected mainstream American values and embraced nonconformity and Eastern philosophy
- The forefather of the 1960s counter-culture movement (Hippie Movement)

Gonzo Journalism (1970–)

- Named by Hunter S. Thompson in 1970
- Refers to a new kind of journalism where the writer can be part of the story, blending fact and fiction
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Magical Realism (1960's–)
- Magical or supernatural elements appear in otherwise realistic circumstances
- First considered an element of painting
- Mostly associated with Latin American writers, especially Gabriel García Marquez, Carlos Fuentes, and Isabel Allende

Creative Nonfiction (late 20th and early 21st century)
- A genre that blends elements of literature with nonfiction
- Includes memoir, travel and place essays, personal narratives, etc.

LITERARY TIMELINE

Literary timelines are readily available to literature students. The value of a timeline is to show literary works in a historical context and in relationship to other works. The timeline below is not inclusive, but shows some of the major writers of each literary period. Consult Chapter 4 for lists of works cited on the AP Lit exam.

800–400 BCE
World Literature
Greek writers: Homer, The Iliad and The Odyssey
Sophocles, Oedipus Rex and Antigone
Euripides, Medea

250 BCE–150 CE
World Literature
Roman writers: Vergil, The Aeneid
Horace, poet and satirist
Ovid, lyrical poet
450–1066
World Literature
Haiku poetry in Japan

British Literature (Anglo Saxon Period)
Beowulf

1066–1500
World Literature
Italian writers: Petrarch: sonnets
Dante Alighieri: The Divine Comedy
Boccaccio: The Decameron

British Literature (Middle English Period)
Geoffrey Chaucer: Canterbury Tales
German Johannes Gutenberg invents the printing press

1500–1660: The Renaissance
World Literature
Miguel de Cervantes, Spanish writer: Don Quixote

British Literature
Shakespeare
Christopher Marlow: Dr. Faustus
Ben Jonson, known for satirical plays and lyric poetry
John Donne, known for metaphysical conceits
Edmund Spenser: The Faerie Queen
Andrew Marvell: To His Coy Mistress
John Milton: Paradise Lost

1660–1785: The Neoclassical Period
World Literature
Molière, French, Tartuffe
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>World Literature</th>
<th>British Literature</th>
<th>Summary of Literary Periods, Concepts, and Authors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>450–1066</td>
<td>Haiku poetry in Japan</td>
<td>Voltaire, French, <em>Candide</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>世界文学</td>
<td>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, French writer and philosopher</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Beowulf</em></td>
<td>Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German writer</td>
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<td>1066–1500</td>
<td><em>Petrarch: sonnets</em></td>
<td>British Literature</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dante Alighieri: <em>The Divine Comedy</em></td>
<td>Alexander Pope, British poet</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Boccaccio: <em>The Decameron</em></td>
<td>Daniel Defoe, <em>Robinson Crusoe</em> and <em>Moll Flanders</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Chaucer: Canterbury Tales</em></td>
<td>Jonathan Swift, <em>Gulliver's Travels</em> and <em>A Modest Proposal</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Gutenberg invents the printing press</em></td>
<td>Samuel Johnson</td>
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<td><em>The rise of the novel</em></td>
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<td>1500–1660:</td>
<td>*Miguel de Cervantes, Spanish writer: <em>Don Quixote</em></td>
<td>American Literature</td>
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<td>The Renaissance</td>
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<td><em>Edwards, Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Shakespeare</em></td>
<td>(sermon)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Christopher Marlow: <em>Dr. Faustus</em></td>
<td>Anne Bradstreet, poet</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ben Jonson, known for satirical plays and lyric poetry</td>
<td>Puritan writing was God centered, plain in style, instructive in purpose.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>John Donne, known for metaphysical conceits</td>
<td>1750–1800:</td>
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<td>Edmund Spenser: <em>The Faerie Queen</em></td>
<td>American Literature</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Andrew Marvell: <em>To His Coy Mistress</em></td>
<td>(The Age of Reason/Revolutionary Literature)</td>
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<td>John Milton: <em>Paradise Lost</em></td>
<td>Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine: <em>Common Sense</em></td>
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<td>1660–1785:</td>
<td>*Molière, French, <em>Tartuffe</em></td>
<td>Benjamin Franklin</td>
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<td>The Neoclassical Period</td>
<td></td>
<td>African-American poet Phillips Wheatley, <em>Poetry on Various Subjects</em></td>
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<td>Period recognized by emerging nationalism; characterized by persuasive, philosophical writing: speeches, pamphlets, and the beginnings of newspapers in America.</td>
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<td>1785–1830:</td>
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<td>British Literature</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>William Blake, William Wordsworth</td>
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<td>Samuel Taylor Coleridge: <em>The Rime of the Ancient Mariner</em></td>
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Jane Austen  
Lord Byron  
Percy Bysshe Shelley  
John Keats  
Alfred Lord Tennyson  
Mary Shelley: Frankenstein

**American Literature**  
Washington Irving: *Rip Van Winkle*  
William Cullen Bryant: *Thanatopsis*  
James Fenimore Cooper: *The Last of the Mohicans*  
Nathaniel Hawthorne (often included in this period), see below.

**1832–1901: The Victorian Period**

**World Literature**  
Henrik Ibsen, Norwegian dramatist: *A Doll’s House*  
Victor Hugo, French: *Les Misérables*  
Gustave Flaubert, French: *Madame Bovary*

**British Literature**  
Robert Browning, poet  
Elizabeth Barrett Browning, poet  
Charles Dickens: *Great Expectations*  
Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*  
Emily Brontë: *Wuthering Heights*  
William Makepeace Thackeray: *Vanity Fair*  
George Eliot, a.k.a. Marian Evans: *Middlemarch*

**American Literature**  
Henry James  
Frederick Douglass: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*
Chapter 3

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Lord Byron
Percy Bysshe Shelley
John Keats
Alfred Lord Tennyson
Mary Shelley: Frankenstein

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William Makepeace Thackeray: Vanity Fair
George Eliot, a.k.a. Marian Evans: Middlemarch

American Literature
Henry James
Frederick Douglass: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave

Harriet Jacobs: Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl
Paul Laurence Dunbar: Lyrics of a Lowly Life

1840–1860: American Renaissance

Transcendentalism and American Gothic (dark romantics)
Emily Dickinson, poet
Walt Whitman: Leaves of Grass
Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Scarlet Letter
Herman Melville: Moby Dick
Edgar Allan Poe, poems and short stories

Transcendentalist Writers
Ralph Waldo Emerson, essays and aphorisms
Henry David Thoreau: Walden
Bronson Alcott
Margaret Fuller, first major feminist writer

1855–1900: American Realism/Regionalism
Mark Twain (born Samuel Clemens): The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
Bret Harte: regional writer
Stephen Crane: The Red Badge of Courage
Kate Chopin: The Awakening
Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Yellow Wallpaper

1901–1914

British (Edwardian Period)
Joseph Conrad, Polish/British author: Heart of Darkness

American (Naturalism)
Theodore Dreiser, novelist: Sister Carrie (1900)
W.E.B. Du Bois, sociologist and author: The Souls of Black Folk
Jack London, novelist: *The Call of the Wild*
Edith Wharton, novelist: *Ethan Frome*

**1919–1945**

**Modernism**

**World Literature**
Albert Camus, French writer: *The Stranger*

**British Literature**
George Orwell (born Eric Blair): *Animal Farm* and 1984

**American Literature**
John Steinbeck, Nobel Prize novelist: *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*
Zora Neale Hurston, novelist: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
Langston Hughes, poet
Tennessee Williams, playwright: *The Glass Menagerie*

**1950–Post Modernism**

**British Literature**
William Golding, British author: *Lord of the Flies*

**American Literature**
(Note: Ethnicities are listed below only to show the range of diversity in literature in this period.)
J.D. Salinger, novelist: *The Catcher in the Rye*
Ralph Ellison, African American novelist: *Invisible Man*
Arthur Miller, playwright: *The Crucible* and *Death of a Salesman*
Ray Bradbury, science fiction writer: *Fahrenheit 451*
Eugene O’Neill, playwright: *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*
Jack Kerouac, Beat writer: *On the Road*
Jack London, novelist: The Call of the Wild
Edith Wharton, novelist: Ethan Frome

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Eugene O’Neill, playwright: Long Day’s Journey into Night
Jack Kerouac, Beat writer: On the Road

Elie Wiesel, Romanian-American writer: Night
Joseph Heller, novelist: Catch 22 (1961)
John Knowles, novelist: A Separate Peace
Ken Kesey, American author: One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest
Sylvia Plath, known mostly for poetry (1932-63): The Bell Jar (1963)
Chaim Potok, Jewish-American novelist: The Chosen
Maya Angelou, African-American author: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
Toni Morrison, African-American Nobel Prize novelist: The Bluest Eye
Rudolfo Anaya, Mexican-American writer: Bless Me, Ultima
Maxine Hong Kingston, Asian-American writer: The Woman Warrior
Alice Walker, African-American writer: The Color Purple
August Wilson, African-American, Pulitzer Prize winning playwright: Fences and The Piano Lesson
Sandra Cisneros, Hispanic-American writer: The House on Mango Street
Louise Erdrich, Native American writer: Love Medicine
Amy Tan, Asian-American novelist: The Joy Luck Club

FEATURED AUTHORS

This list below is from the 2008 Course Description as published by the College Board. The purpose of this list is to suggest the broad range of authors that can be considered for study in an AP Lit course. Use this list in combination with the timeline above and the list of literary works in Chapter 4 to create a reading list for yourself. Remember, it is far better to know five or six works in depth, than to have a cursory knowledge of more.