

**UNIT 1 Shaping the New World**  
**Origins of the American Tradition to 1800**

A STEM school  
**FROEBEL**  
BILINGUAL SCHOOL  
Home of the Space Generation

A detailed historical painting depicting a scene of conflict or negotiation between Native Americans and European soldiers. In the center, a Native American man in traditional dress stands near a large, decorated teepee. To the left, a group of soldiers in 17th-century attire are gathered around a cannon. A large, tattered flag with a black and white design is being held aloft. The background shows a river and a forest. The overall scene is filled with activity and tension.

***HISTORICAL OVERVIEW of the  
AMERICAN TRADITION***

with **Jim Soto**

# SPEAK YOUR MIND

In our last lesson we tried to define the concept of literature. This course is called American Literature. Notice the word “American” before the word “Literature”. So, what would it mean for something to be “American”?

Take a minute to write down a definition.





- Of Anglo-Saxon origin, or looking like Barbie and Ken?
- Originating in the United States of America and the colonies that preceded it?
  - Naturalized or having completed a legal process to obtain U.S. citizenship?
  - Immigrants who moved or were brought permanently to the United States ?
  - Including the indigenous people that inhabited the land currently known as  
the United States ?
- All the above?

# WHEN DID “AMERICA” BEGIN?

Who got to write down History you and I studied?

When I was a kid, the history of America began when a group of English Puritan expatriates, led by William Bradford, arrived at **Plymouth** in 1620 and founded the **Massachusetts Bay Colony**. That was taught to me in school.

However, before this...





John Smith settled the **Jamestown Colony** in modern-day Virginia, for the London Company, in 1607.

However, before this...

In 1587, a group of 117 English settlers, led by Sir Walter Raleigh and John White, founded a colony on **Roanoke Island** off the coast of what is now North Carolina.

However, before this...







Raping, plundering and killing his way through what is now Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, across the Appalachians, and back to Alabama; Spaniard, Hernando de Soto failed to find the gold and silver he yearned for. He died of a fever in 1542.

However, before this...

Juan Ponce de León explored the Bahamas and Bimini, for ever elusive gold and the mythical Fountain of Youth. In 1513, his ships landed on Florida's east coast near the eventual colony of St. Augustine.

However, before this...





On October 12, 1492, Italian explorer Christopher Columbus arrived to what is now the Bahamas. "Discovered" they say. Keep in mind that, contrary to what I was taught, America wasn't a empty wasteland. It had a population of around 112 million people, compared to Europe's 88 million.

However, before this...





After Leif Erikson's exploration of the coasts of "Vinland", what is now Canada and New England, Viking explorers established a short-lived settlement in Newfoundland about 1021 AD.

However, before this...

Brendan the Navigator and a small group of Irish monks travelled to North America sometime between 512 and 545 AD. An 8th-century account of the journey was recorded in *The Voyage of St. Brendan*.

However, before this...





The **Hopi** people trace their history in Arizona to more than 2,000 years ago, but their history as a people goes back many more thousands of years. However, before them, we have the **Clovis** people. They get their name from an ancient settlement discovered near Clovis, New Mexico, dated to over 11,000 years ago. However, there have been people in America for at least 20,000 years!



So, were they, or were they not all “American”?



## SO, WHAT IS AMERICAN LITERATURE?

Some would say that **American Literature** is the body of written works produced in the English language in the United States. Like other national literatures, American literature was shaped by the history of the country that produced it.



Others would say that American literature is the transcribed body of written works that this nation has produced in the context of its cultural identity and civilization.





Still, others would state that American literature is the product of a diversity of peoples, regions, philosophies, and ways of life. That it consists of a wide variety of texts, including works by ethnic (African American, Hispanic American, and Native American) and women writers, since our contemporary society now emphasize American literary diversities.



The American literary tradition is part of the broader tradition of English-language literature, but also includes literature of other traditions produced in the United States and in other immigrant languages. Furthermore, a rich tradition of oral storytelling exists amongst Native American tribes, the original inhabitants of this land. This will be the definition used in this course.



# LITERARY MOVEMENTS



**Literary movements** are another way to divide literature into categories of similar philosophical, topical, or aesthetic features, as opposed to divisions by **genre**, like you learned in middle school. Like other categorizations, literary movements provide a way for comparing and discussing literary and artistic works. Keep in mind that their importance comes from the fact that they reflect the **zeitgeist** or the general intellectual, moral, and cultural climate of their time.



# PROMINENT LITERARY MOVEMENTS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

| Name(s) of Literary Movements  | Approx. Dates  |
|--|----------------|
| Native American  | Oral Tradition |
| Puritanism or Colonial   | 1620-1750      |
| Revolutionary, Age of Reason, Enlightenment                            | 1750-1800      |
| Romanticism, Dark Romanticism, Anti-Transcendentalism, American Gothic | 1800-1865      |
| Transcendentalism  | 1840-1860      |
| Realism  | 1865-1914      |
| Naturalism   | 1885-1930      |
| Regionalism  | 1865-1895      |
| Modernism  | 1914-1945      |
| Lost Generation, Jazz Age & the Harlem Renaissance                     | 1917-1937      |
| Beat Generation  | 1950-1965      |
| Contemporary or Postmodernism  | 1939-Present   |

# Native American (Before 1600)

Characterized by oral traditions, epic poems, creation myths, songs, and poetry. Native American literature was well established long before Europeans arrived. Recently, authors have revived the tradition, with insightful stories about life on reservations.





# Puritanism or Colonial (1620-1750)

Motivated by a desire to 'purify' the Church of England with the simple worship of God, Puritans left to colonize the New World. As settlers, they recorded their experiences through diaries and historical accounts before the American Revolution.



## Revolutionary, Age of Reason, Enlightenment (1750-1800)

Consisting mostly of philosophers and scientists, Enlightenment writers sought to understand the world around them through reason and deduction, rather than faith. Literature of this period was frequently satirical and skeptical.





# Romanticism, American Gothic (1800-1865)

This era valued feeling, intuition, and idealism, in addition to interior experience and imagination. Individual freedom and worth were paramount, and poetry was seen as the highest expression of the mind. The Dark Romantics, or American Gothic writers, combined these values with dark supernatural themes and settings.



# Transcendentalism (1840-1860)

Transcendentalists advocated self-reliance and individualism over authority and conformity to tradition, believing institutions and organizations were responsible for corrupting the inherent goodness of people. In their writing, transcendentalists commonly reflected on nature, a unified “divine spirit”, common to all people, and community.





# Realism, Naturalism & Regionalism (1865-1914)

As America suffered from growing pains, this movement was marked by feelings of disillusionment. Familiar subjects included ghettos of rapidly growing cities, the Industrial Revolution, and corrupt politicians. Authors focused on painting a realistic setting of everyday life and ordinary people, including local color, while also seeking to explain human behavior.



# Modernism (1914-1945)

Modernism began as an extension of realism, but made efforts to break with literary and poetic traditions. Authors of this era were bold and experimental in style; an example of this being the “stream of consciousness”. Commonly dealing with the struggles of individuals, modernist literature is characterized by the optimistic belief that people can change the world around them.





## Lost Generation, Jazz Age & The Harlem Renaissance (1917-1937)

Alongside modernism, African American culture in Harlem, New York was flourishing. Much of the style derived from poetry rhythms based on spirituals, jazz lyrics on the blues, and the use of slang in everyday diction. These influences intersected with prohibition, reactions to WWI, and the sultry nightlife of the big city to produce an energetic progressive culture.



# Beat Generation (1950-1965)

The Beat Generation was a small group of authors whose literature explored and influenced American culture in the post-World War II era. The Beats were against the inhibitions of their parents' generation and promoted drug use and sexuality as worthy topics of discussion. Beat hipsters defied modest America with their hedonistic bohemianism and celebration of nonconforming creativity.





# Contemporary/Postmodernism (1950-Present)

Literature since WWII has been heavily influenced by studies of media, language, and information technology. It rejects the idea that anything is truly “unique”, proposing that culture endlessly duplicates itself. Postmodern literature is marked by irony in the form of parody, self-awareness, and deconstruction. It frequently reminds the audience that they are reading a work of fiction or supply other “meta” commentary. New literary forms and techniques focused on intense dialogue, and blending fiction with nonfiction.



# ASSESSMENT

After reading pages 1-6 in your book, complete the following activities:

1. Look at the cover slide of this presentation (*DeSoto's Discovery of the Mississippi River*). Which features of this painting suggest that it is not a historically accurate presentation of the event? Explain.
2. Give your own definition of American Literature and justify it.
3. Suppose you were a colonial teenager during the American Revolution. Write a paragraph explaining your feelings about the events taking place around you.
4. When Christopher Columbus returned to Spain after his voyage to San Salvador, he told the monarchs in Madrid that the "Indians" he had encountered in the New World might make good slaves. Write a paragraph explaining what does Columbus's message suggest about Europeans' attitude toward the rest of the known world.





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