

# عنوان المحاضرة

## Lecture One General and Brief Introduction to American Literature



In the beginning, America was a series of British colonies on the east coast of the present-day United States. Therefore, its literary tradition begins with the tradition of English literature. However, very quickly unique American characteristics and the breadth of its production began to develop an American writing tradition.

Some consider Captain John Smith to be the first American author, when he **wrote** The General Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles (1624)

Similar writers of interest include Daniel Cox, John Hammond, Gabriel Thomas, George Percy, Daniel Denton, Thomas Ash, John Lawson and William Strachey.

Poetry was also written in those early days, Nicholas Noyes wrote Doggerel verse.

Edward Taylor and Anne Bradstreet were popular and Michael Wigglesworth was known for his best selling poem *The Day of Doom*.

It is almost inevitable that given the history of the early American settlers, religious questions were rich topics for early writings. A journal written by John Winthrop discussed the religious foundations of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.



American literature has a relatively short but colorful history. **The first widely read American author** was Benjamin Franklin, whose witty aphorisms and sound advice written in the yearly journal *Poor Richard's Almanack* helped shape ideas of what it means to be an American. Washington Irving (*The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*) was the first American to gain an international literary reputation. James Fenimore Cooper's verbal landscapes in his *Leatherstocking Tales* captured the nation's vast beauty. Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson **broke from poetic tradition** and brought a sense of individuality to the nation's literature. Mark Twain still captivates readers with his unique—and uniquely American—humor and insight. **The modernists** of the 1920s and 1930s produced such talents as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. **Today, writers** like Toni Morrison and Cormac McCarthy continue to make American literature relevant and exciting.



American literature like American history, although short, however, still full of glories and shining masterpieces and writers. Those American writers, while conquering this wild America, also had conquered the great field of American literature. From its first imitative activities to innovative attempts nowadays, American literature gradually gains its unique style, theme and form, and it is always excited to see their works are more and more America in its true sense. American literature is part of world's literature, however, it always has its unique flavor that cannot be easily ignored.



Most critics hold that the history of American literature can be divided into **six** parts, orderly, colonial period, romanticism, realism, naturalism, modernism and post-modernism.

Although American literature in its true **sense did not begin until 19th** century, however, we always talk about **colonial period as a preparatory introduction to American literature.**



**American literature** is the written or literary work produced in the area of the United States and its preceding colonies. During its early history, America was a series of British colonies on the eastern coast of the present-day United States. Therefore, its literary tradition begins as linked to the broader tradition of English Literature. However, unique American characteristics and the breadth of its production usually now cause it to be considered a separate path and tradition.



## Unique American style

With the War of 1812 and an increasing desire to produce uniquely American literature and culture, a number of key new literary figures emerged, perhaps most prominently Washington Irving, William Cullen Bryant, James Fenimore Cooper, and Edgar Allan Poe. Irving, often considered the first writer to develop a unique American style (although this has been debated) wrote humorous works in *Salmagundi* and the satire *A History of New York, by Diedrich Knickerbocker* (1809). Bryant wrote early romantic and nature-inspired poetry, which evolved away from their European origins. In 1832, Poe began writing short stories – including "The Masque of the Red Death", "The Pit and the Pendulum", "The Fall of the House of Usher", and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" – that explore previously hidden levels of human psychology and push the boundaries of fiction toward mystery and fantasy. Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* about Natty Bumppo (which includes *The Last of the Mohicans*) were popular both in the new country and abroad.



Humorous writers were also popular and included Seba Smith and Benjamin P. Shillaber in New England and Davy Crockett, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Johnson J. Hooper, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, and George Washington Harris writing about the American frontier.

