Introduction to American Literature

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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 Wiggleworth 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.

Colonial Literature

Colonial American Literature

- **Colonial American literature is writing that emerged from the original U.S. colonies during the period from 1607 to the late 1700s. It was largely influenced by British writers, and was created to inform people about colonial life, religious disputes and settlement issues. Many of the characteristics of Colonial American literature can be found in the poems, journals, letters, narratives, histories and teaching materials written by settlers, religious figures and historical icons of the period. Colonial American literature includes the writings of Mary Rowlandson, William Bradford, Anne Bradstreet and John Winthrop.**

Aspects and Characteristics of Colonial American Literature

Historical

One of the major characteristics of Colonial American literature is its historical aspects, which evolved over time during the 400 years since its beginnings. Great figures from American history have also contributed to this genre, such as John Smith and William Penn.

Narrative

Colonial American literature is characterized by the narrative, which was used extensively during this period. Most of the literary works of this genre are composed of letters, journals, biographies and memoirs. An example is Mary Rowlandson's narrative account, "The Sovereignty and Goodness of God: Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson." This narrative gives an insider's account of a colonist being captured by Native Americans and describes the heavy hostility between the Native Americans and colonists. Rowland's story is categorized as an autobiography and a captivity narrative.

Religion and Poetry

Religion is also another characteristic of Colonial American literature and can be found mostly in Puritan writings. The Puritans wrote about the religious foundations of many of their settlements, especially the exodus from Britain, and employed the constant theme that God should be worshipped. They also used texts that prepared them for worship. This literature helped spread the message of God, suggesting that "life was a test" and the soul would face damnation if that test was failed. Ambition and hard work were continuously stressed. Many of the Puritan works were written in poetry form. Anne Bradstreet's poetry, the "Bay Psalm Book," and Pastor Edward Taylor's "Preparatory Mediations" are good examples of religious

texts of the era. It was this type of writing that led to the Puritanism and Great Awakening movements. Non-Puritan writers also used religion to show the religious tension between the Colonial settlers and Native Americans.

The Enlightenment

In the 18th century, the Enlightenment showed a great shift in Colonial American literature from a religious foundation to scientific reasoning applied to human nature, society, culture and political awareness. Many texts were written in pamphlet or narrative form and challenged the role of God and religious life, seeking to replace them with reason. Rational thought and science were the new themes. "The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin" and the pamphlet "Common Sense" by Thomas Paine explored many of these new ideas. Similar texts also led the way to more awareness of social, economic and scientific issues. The American Revolution had a large part to play in the shifting of ideas.

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Romanticism

Influence of European Romanticism on American writers

The European Romantic movement reached America in the early 19th century. American Romanticism was just as multifaceted and individualistic as it was in Europe. Like the Europeans, the American Romantics demonstrated a high level of moral enthusiasm, commitment to individualism and the unfolding of the self, an emphasis on intuitive perception, and the assumption that the natural world was inherently good, while human society was filled with corruption.

__Romanticism became popular in American politics, philosophy and art. The movement appealed to the revolutionary spirit of America as well as to those longing to break free of the strict religious traditions of early settlement. The Romantics rejected rationalism and religious intellect. It appealed to those in opposition of Calvinism, which includes the belief that the destiny of each individual is preordained. The Romantic movement gave rise to New England Transcendentalism which portrayed a less restrictive relationship between God and Universe. The new philosophy presented the individual with a more personal relationship with God. Transcendentalism and Romanticism appealed to Americans in a similar fashion, for both privileged feeling over reason, individual freedom of expression over the restraints of tradition and custom. It often involved a rapturous response to nature. It encouraged the rejection of harsh, rigid Calvinism, and promised a new blossoming of American culture.

-American Romanticism embraced the individual and rebelled against the confinement of neoclassicism and religious tradition. The Romantic movement in America created a new literary genre that continues to influence American writers. Novels, short stories, and poems replaced the sermons and manifestos of yore. Romantic literature was personal, intense, and portrayed more emotion than ever seen in neoclassical literature. America's preoccupation with freedom became a great source of motivation for Romantic writers as many were delighted in free expression and emotion without so much fear of ridicule and controversy. They also put more effort into the psychological development of their characters, and the main characters typically displayed extremes of sensitivity and excitement.

-The works of the Romantic Era also differed from preceding works in that they spoke to a wider audience, partly reflecting the greater distribution of books as costs came down during the period. The Romantic period saw an increase in female authors and also female readers.

Poe, Emerson, and Hawthorne are near perfect representations for Romanticism. Poe's poetry has that happy, lyrical, and metrical verse. His subjects may be gloomy, but his poems contain sentimentality and supernatural characteristics and are about exploring the human psyche. For example, "The Raven" is about a sleepless narrator who is absolutely haunted by a raven. This man is mourning the death of his lost Lenore and is very melancholy. The raven shows up and makes his perch and will not leave. The man asks questions about grief, but the raven will only answer "nevermore." This event would never occur in real life, which makes the poem Romantic. The poem also is about exploring the depths of this man's grief. Similarly, Emerson is Romantic. Actually he is transcendental, but this can be seen as an offshoot of Romanticism.

-In "Self Reliance," Emerson espouses the ideas of Transcendentalism. He tells the reader things like the importance of trusting oneself and that we don't know everything by knowledge; some things are learned through experience. The philosophy makes sense but is "out there" enough for it to be hard to incorporate into everyday life. Discussing abstract ideas without translation to real life is Romantic as well. In his poem "Give All to Love," he also talks of the importance to trusting oneself and giving oneself over to the divine power of love. In Hawthorne's short stories, these abstract qualities take on a symbolic meaning. In "The Birthmark," Alymer was so involved in achieving perfection that he ended up killing his wife in the process. As virtual mentor says, "Nature in romantic literature is moral; it bears symbolic meaning, and humans who challenge it with inadequate respect for the immanent power of the divine generally learn lessons in humility" (virtual mentor).

Who are they again?

-So who were these Romanticism writers? First of all they were a diverse group of individuals varying from different backgrounds and styles, but one thing that they had in common was that they were all individualistic minded writers. Here is a list of the authors below with their major works and importance:
Nathaniel Hawthorne- "Young Goodman Brown", "The Scarlet Letter", "The House of Green

Gables", one of the anti-romantics.
Edgar Allan Poe- "Narrative of Arthur Gordon Rym", "A Tell Tale Heart", "The Raven", inventor of the American short short, known for his Gothic writings, and viewed the countryside as a phantasm or an illusionary mental image.
Washington Irving-"Rip Van Winkle", "Sleepy Hollow", is the father of American Literature, saw the country as a escape from city life, and fought for copyright infringement laws for authors.

-Walt Whitman- the controversial "Leaves of Grass", "Franklin Evans", one of the bridge poets between American Romanticism and the 20th century.
Henry David Thoreau- "Civil Disobedience", he was a practical transcendentalist.
Harriet Beecher Stowe- "Uncle Tom's Cabin". the "little lady who started the Civil War" and kept European nations from aiding the south in the Civil War.
James Fenimore Cooper- "The Last of the Mohicans" and was the father of the American novel.
Emily Dickinson- "is My verse...alive", one of the bridge poets between American Romanticism and the 20th century.

Realism

American realism

American realism was an early 20th century idea in art, music and literature that showed through these different types of work, reflections of the time period. Whether it was a cultural portrayal, or a scenic view of downtown New York City, these images and works of literature, music and painting depicted a contemporary view of what was happening; an attempt at defining what was real.

- **Realism in American Literature, 1860-1890**
- **In American literature, the term "realism" encompasses the period of time from the Civil War to the turn of the century during which William Dean Howells, Rebecca Harding Davis, Henry James, Mark Twain, and others wrote fiction devoted to accurate representation and an exploration of American lives in various contexts. As the United States grew rapidly after the Civil War, the increasing rates of democracy and literacy, the rapid growth in industrialism and urbanization, an expanding population base due to immigration, and a relative rise in middle-class affluence provided a fertile literary environment for readers interested in understanding these rapid shifts in culture. In drawing attention to this connection, Amy Kaplan has called**

realism a "strategy for imagining and managing the threats of social change" (Social Construction of American Realism ix).

- Realism was a movement that encompassed the entire country, or at least the Midwest and South, although many of the writers and critics associated with realism (notably W. D. Howells) were based in New England. Among the Midwestern writers considered realists would be Joseph Kirkland, E. W. Howe, and Hamlin Garland; the Southern writer John W. DeForest's Miss Ravenal's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty is often considered a realist novel, too.

- **American Realism**

- **Description:**

- Like all the terms relating to literary movements, the term is loose and somewhat equivocal. American Realism began as a reaction to and a rejection of Romanticism, with its emphasis on emotion, imagination, and the individual. The movement began as early as the 1830's but reached prominence and held sway from the end of the Civil War to around the end of the nineteenth century. The movement was centered in fiction, particularly the novel. It attempted fidelity to real life, or "actuality," in its representation. The realist concerns himself with the here and now, centering his work in his own time, dealing with common-place everyday events and people, and with the socio-political climate of his day .

Major Writers	Representative Works
Samuel Clemens, fiction	The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Life on the Mississippi "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses" A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's court
Bret Harte, short fiction	Selected Stories of Bret Harte "The Outcasts of Poker Flat" "The Luck of Roaring Camp"
Ambrose Bierce, fiction	Tales of Soldiers and Civilian (1891)
William Dean Howells, fiction, essays	A Modern Instance (1882), The Rise of Silas Lapham, A Hazard of New Fortunes
Henry James, fiction	"Daisy Miller," Portrait of A Lady, The American, The Turn of the Screw

Edith Wharton, fiction	**The House of Mirth, Ethan Frome, The Age of Innocence**
Kate Chopin, fiction	**The Awakening**
George Washington Cable, fiction	**The Grandissimes , Old Creole Days**
Joel Chandler Harris, fiction	**Uncle Remus stories**
Charles Chestnutt, fiction	**The Conjure Woman (1899), The House Behind the Cedars (1900)**
Paul Lawrence Dunbar, poet	**"The Goophered Grapevine," "The Passing of Grandison"**
Hamlin Garland, fiction	**"Under the Lion's Paw"**

Naturalism

American Naturalism in Literature

American literary naturalism is a literary movement that became popular in late-nineteenth-century America and is often associated with literary realism. The term naturalism was initially coined by Emile Zola, the renowned French author who is also credited as a key figure in the development of French literary naturalism. In the late nineteenth century, the literary movement became popular all over Europe, from England to Russia. American writers were particularly influenced by the British and French models and began to adapt the form to reflect American social, economic, and cultural conditions. Viewed as a combination of realism and romanticism, critics contend that the American form is heavily influenced by the concept of determinism—the theory that heredity and environment influence determine human behavior. Although naturalism is often associated with realism, which also seeks to accurately represent human existence, the two movements are differentiated by the fact that naturalism is connected to the doctrine of biological, economic, and social determinism. In their short fiction, naturalist writers strive to depict life accurately through an exploration of the causal factors that have shaped a character's life as well as a deterministic approach to the character's thoughts and actions. Therefore, instead of free will, a naturalist depicts a character's actions as determined by environmental forces.

American literary naturalism came to the forefront of popular literature during a time of tremendous cultural and economic upheaval in the United States; in the late nineteenth century, industrialization, urbanization, mechanization, and an influx of immigrants from all over the world resulted in extreme changes on the American landscape. The short fiction of American literary naturalism depicts the experiences of impoverished and uneducated people living in squalor and struggling to survive in a harsh, indifferent world. Major thematic concerns of the form include the fight for survival—man against nature and man against society; violence; the consequences of sex and sex as a commodity; the waste of individual potential because of the conditioning forces of life; and man's struggle with his animalistic, base instincts. As a result, the short stories of this literary movement are often regarded as depressing, slice-of-life documentations of sad, unfulfilled lives. A handful of significant American authors, such as Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, and Frank Norris, utilized the form, which noticeably declined in popularity by the early twentieth century. Critics note, however, the literary movement's continuing influence on contemporary American authors.

NATURALISM IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Definitions:

The term naturalism describes a type of literature that attempts to apply scientific principles of objectivity and detachment to its study of human beings. Unlike realism, which focuses on literary technique, naturalism implies a philosophical position: for naturalistic writers, since human beings are, in Emile Zola's phrase, "human beasts," characters can be studied through their relationships to their surroundings. Other influences on American naturalists include Herbert Spencer and Joseph LeConte.

Naturalistic writers believed that the laws behind the forces that govern human lives might be studied and understood. Naturalistic writers thus used a version of the scientific method to write their novels; they studied human beings governed by their instincts and passions as well as the ways in which the characters' lives were governed by forces of heredity and environment. Although they used the techniques of accumulating detail pioneered by the realists, the naturalists thus had a specific object in mind when they chose the segment of reality that they wished to convey.

In George Becker's famous and much-annotated and contested phrase, naturalism's philosophical framework can be simply described as "pessimistic materialistic determinism."

The naturalistic novel usually contains two tensions or contradictions, and . . . the two in conjunction comprise both an interpretation of experience and a particular aesthetic recreation of experience. In other words, the two constitute the theme and form of the naturalistic novel. The first tension is that between the subject matter of the naturalistic novel and the concept of man which emerges from this subject matter. The naturalist populates his novel primarily from the lower middle class or the lower class. . . . His fictional world is that of the commonplace and unheroic in which life would seem to be chiefly the dull round of daily existence, as we ourselves usually conceive of our lives. But the naturalist discovers in this world those qualities of man usually associated with the heroic or adventurous, such as acts of violence and passion which involve sexual adventure or bodily strength and which culminate in desperate moments and violent death. A naturalistic novel is thus an extension of realism only in the sense that both modes often deal with the local and contemporary. The naturalist, however, discovers in this material the extraordinary and excessive in human nature.

The second tension involves the theme of the naturalistic novel. The naturalist often describes his characters as though they are conditioned and controlled by environment, heredity, instinct, or chance. But he also suggests a compensating humanistic value in his characters or their fates which affirms the significance of the individual and of his life. The tension here is that between the naturalist's desire to represent in fiction the new, discomfiting truths which he has found in the ideas and life of his late nineteenth-century world, and also his desire to find some meaning in experience which reasserts the validity of the human enterprise.

Characteristics:

Characters. Frequently but not invariably ill-educated or lower-class characters whose lives are governed by the forces of heredity, instinct, and passion. Their attempts at exercising free will or choice are hamstrung by forces beyond their control.

Setting. Frequently an urban setting, as in Norris's McTeague.

Techniques and plots. Walcutt says that the naturalistic novel offers "clinical, panoramic, slice-of-life" drama that is often a "chronicle of despair" . The novel of degeneration--Zola's L'Assommoir and Norris's Vandover and the Brute, for example--is also a common type.

Themes:

1.Walcutt identifies survival, determinism, violence, and taboo as key themes.

2. The "brute within" each individual, composed of strong and often warring emotions: passions, such as lust, greed, or the desire for dominance or pleasure; and the fight for survival in an amoral, indifferent universe. The conflict in naturalistic novels is often "man against nature" or "man against himself" as characters struggle to retain a "veneer of civilization" despite external pressures that threaten to release the "brute within."

3. Nature as an indifferent force acting on the lives of human beings. The romantic vision of Wordsworth--that "nature never did betray the heart that loved her"--here becomes Stephen Crane's view in "The Open Boat": "This tower was a giant, standing with its back to the plight of the ants. It represented in a degree, to the correspondent, the serenity of nature amid the struggles of the individual--nature in the wind, and nature in the vision of men. She did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent."

4. The forces of heredity and environment as they affect--and afflict--individual lives.

5. An indifferent, deterministic universe. Naturalistic texts often describe the futile attempts of human beings to exercise free will, often ironically presented, in this universe that reveals free will as an illusion.

Practitioners:

Theodore Dreiser
Edith Wharton; "The House of Mirth" (1905)
Ellen Glasgow; "Barren Ground" (1925)

John Dos Passos (1896-1970), U.S.A. trilogy (1938): The 42nd Parallel (1930), 1919 (1932), and The Big Money (1936)
James T. Farrell (1904-1979), Studs Lonigan (1934)
John Steinbeck (1902-1968), The Grapes of Wrath (1939)
Richard Wright, Native Son (1940), Black Boy (1945)
Norman Mailer (1923-2007), The Naked and the Dead (1948)

Other writers sometimes identified as naturalists:

Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio (1919)
Abraham Cahan, The Making of an American Citizen
Kate Chopin; "The Awakening"
Rebecca Harding Davis
William Faulkner
Henry Blake Fuller, The Cliff-Dwellers
Hamlin Garland, Rose of Dutcher's Coolly
Robert Herrick, The Memoirs of an American Citizen (1905)
Ernest Hemingway
E. W. Howe, The Story of a Country Town

Modernism

Modernism in Literature: Quick Overview

Don't confuse the Modernists movement with the standard dictionary definition of modern. Modernism in Literature is not a chronological designation; rather it consists of literary work possessing certain loosely defined characteristics.

What is Modernism?

The following are characteristics of Modernism:

Marked by a strong and intentional break with tradition. This break includes a strong reaction against established religious, political, and social views.

Belief that the world is created in the act of perceiving it; that is, the world is what we say it is.

There is no such thing as absolute truth. All things are relative.

No connection with history or institutions. Their experience is that of alienation, loss, and despair.

Championship of the individual and celebration of inner strength.

Life is unordered.

Concerned with the sub-conscious.

American Modernism

Known as "The Lost Generation" American writers of the 1920s Brought Modernism to the United States. For writers like Hemingway and Fitzgerald, World War I destroyed the illusion that acting virtuously brought about good. Like their British contemporaries, American Modernists rejected traditional institutions and forms. American Modernists include:

Ernest Hemingway - *The Sun Also Rises* chronicles the meaningless lives of the Lost Generation. *Farewell to Arms* narrates the tale of an ambulance driver searching for meaning in WWI.

F. Scott Fitzgerald - The Great Gatsby shows through its protagonist, Jay Gatsby, the corruption of the American Dream.

John Dos Passos, Hart Crane, and Sherwood Anderson are other prominent writers of the period.

Elements of Modernism in American Literature

Modernism was a cultural wave that originated in Europe and swept the United States during the early 20th century. Modernism impacted music, art and literature by radically undoing traditional forms, expressing a sense of modern life as a sharp break from the past and its rigid conventions. In literature, the elements of modernism are thematic, formal and stylistic.

Destruction

During the First World War, the world witnessed the chaos and destruction of which modern man was capable. The modernist American literature produced during the time reflects such themes of destruction and chaos. But chaos and destruction are embraced, as they signal a collapse of Western civilization's classical traditions. Literary modernists celebrated the collapse of conventional forms. Modernist novels destroy conventions by reversing traditional norms, such as gender and racial roles, notable in F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby," for example. They also destroy conventional forms of language by deliberately breaking rules of syntax and structure. William Faulkner's novel "The Sound and the Fury," for instance, boldly rejects the rules of language, as Faulkner invents new words and adopts a first-person narrative method, interior monologue.

Fragmentation

Related to the theme of destruction is the theme of fragmentation. Fragmentation in modernist literature is thematic, as well as formal. Plot, characters, theme, images, and narrative form itself are broken. Take, for instance, T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," which depicts a modern waste land of crumbled cities. The poem itself is fragmented, consisting of broken stanzas and sentences that resemble the cultural debris and detritus through which the speaker (modern man) wades. William Faulkner's novels, such as "The Sound and the Fury" are also fragmented in form, consisting of disjointed and nonlinear narratives. Modernist literature embraces fragmentation as a literary form, since it reinforces the fragmentation of reality and contradicts Hegelian notions of totality and wholeness.

Cycle

- **Modernist literature is concerned with representing modernity, which, by its very definition, supersedes itself. Modernity must, in order to emerge, annihilate the past. Problematically, modernity must annihilate itself the very moment it is actualized, as the moment it emerges, it becomes a part of the past. Modernist literature represents the paradox of modernity through themes of cycle and rejuvenation. Eliot's speaker in "The Waste Land" famously declares "these fragments I have shored against my ruins" (line 430). The speaker must reconstruct meaning by reassembling the pieces of history. Importantly, there is rebirth and rejuvenation in ruin, and modernist literature celebrates the endless cycle of destruction, as it ever gives rise to new forms and creations.**

- **Loss and Exile**

- **Modernist literature is also marked by themes of loss and exile. Modernism rejected conventional truths and figures of authority, and modernists moved away from religion. In modernist literature, man is assured that his own sense of morality trumps. But individualism results in feelings of isolation and loss. Themes of loss, isolation and exile from society are particularly apparent in Ernest Hemingway's novels, the protagonists of which adopt rather nihilistic outlooks of the world because they have become so disenfranchised from the human community.**

- **Narrative Authority**

Another element of modernist literature is the prevalent use of personal pronouns. Authority becomes a matter of perspective. There is no longer an anonymous, omniscient third-person narrator, as there is no universal truth, according to the modernists. In fact, many modernist novels (Faulkner's, for instance) feature multiple narrators, as many modernist poems ("The Waste Land", for instance) feature multiple speakers. The conflicting perspectives of various narrators and speakers reflect the multiplicities of truth and the diversities of reality that modernism celebrates.

Social Evils

Modernist novels did not treat lightly topics about social woes, war and poverty. John Steinbeck's "Grapes of Wrath" frankly depicts families plagued by economic hardship and strife, contradicting idyllic depictions of American life represented elsewhere in literature. Modernist novels also reflect a frank awareness of societal ills and of man's capacity for cruelty. Ernest Hemingway's anti-heroic war tales depicted the bloodiness of the battlefields, as he dealt frankly with the horrors of war. Faulkner, particularly in his most famous novel, "The Sound and the Fury," also shows how incomprehensibly cruel man can be, especially with regard to racial and class differences

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Harlem Renaissance

Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance was a cultural movement that spanned the 1920s. At the time, it was known as the "New Negro Movement", named after the 1925 anthology by Alain Locke. Though it was centered in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City, many French-speaking black writers from African and Caribbean colonies who lived in Paris were also influenced by the Harlem Renaissance.

The Harlem Renaissance is unofficially recognized to have spanned from about 1919 until the

early or mid 1930s. Many of its ideas lived on much longer. The zenith of this "flowering of Negro literature", as James Weldon Johnson preferred to call the Harlem Renaissance, was placed between 1924 (the year that *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* hosted a party for black writers where many white publishers were in attendance) and 1929 (the year of the stock market crash and the beginning of the Great Depression).

Important Features

- **1. Harlem Renaissance (HR) is the name given to the period from the end of World War I and through the middle of the 1930s Depression, during which a group of**

talented African-American writers produced a sizable body of literature in the four prominent genres of poetry, fiction, drama, and essay.

- **2. The notion of "twoness" , a divided awareness of one's identity, was introduced by W.E.B. Du Bois, one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).and the author of the influential book *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903): "One ever feels his two-ness - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled stirrings: two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."**
- **3. Common themes: alienation, marginality, the use of folk material, the use of the blues tradition, the problems of writing for an elite audience.**
- **4. HR was more than just a literary movement: it included racial consciousness, "the back to Africa" movement led by Marcus Garvey, racial integration, the explosion of music particularly jazz, spirituals and blues, painting, dramatic revues, and others.**

Novels of the Harlem Renaissance

Fauset, Jessie Redmon: *There is Confusion*, (1924) *Plum Bun*,(1928) *The Chinaberry Tree*; (1931) *Comedy, American Style*,(1933)

Hughes, Langston: *Not Without Laughter*,(1930)

Larsen, Nella: *Quicksand*, (1928) *Passing*,(1929)

McKay, Claude: *Home to Harlem*,(1927) *Banjo*,1929; *Gingertown*, (1931) *Banana Bottom*,(1933)

Schuyler, George: *Black No More*, (1930) *Slaves Today*, (1931)

Thurman, Wallace: *The Blacker the Berry; a Novel of Negro Life*, (1929) *Infants of the Spring*, 1932; *Interne*, with Abraham l. Furman,(1932)

Van Vechten, Carl: *Nigger Heaven*, (1926)

Harlem Renaissance

In 1904 several middleclass African American families moved away from the decaying conditions of *Black Bohemia* of midtown into the newly-built suburb of Harlem. This initiated a move north of educated African Americans and a foothold into Harlem. In 1910 a large block along 135th and Fifth Ave was bought up by various African American realtors and a church group. These purchases caused a "white flight" and lowered realestate prices.

The Harlem Renaissance, also known as the New Negro Movement, was a literary, artistic, cultural, intellectual movement that began in Harlem, New York after World War I and ended around 1935 during the Great Depression. The movement raised significant issues affecting the lives of African Americans through various forms of literature, art, music, drama, painting, sculpture, movies, and protests. Voices of protest and ideological promotion of civil rights for African Americans inspired and created institutions and leaders who served as mentors to aspiring writers. Although the center of the Harlem Renaissance began in Harlem, New York, its influence spread throughout the nation and beyond and included philosophers, artists, writers, musicians, sculptors, movie makers and institutions that "attempted to assert…a dissociation of sensibility from that enforced by the American culture and its institutions."

Harlem Renaissance Definition

An African-American cultural movement of the 1920s and 1930s, centered in Harlem, that celebrated black traditions, the black voice, and black ways of life. Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon Johnson, Jean Toomer, and Dorothy West were some of the writers associated with the movement.

Definition:

a cultural movement in 1920s America during which black art, literature, and music experienced renewal and growth, originating in New York City's Harlem district; also called Black Renaissance, New Negro Movement

Characteristics of Harlem Renaissance Poetry

The Harlem Renaissance was a literary and cultural movement that began with the inception of the 20th Century. It is so called because it was first noticed in Harlem, a neighborhood of New York City. The movement was an African American cultural explosion expressed through essays, songs, theatrical pieces, novels and poetry. Harlem Renaissance poetry, as written by such literary luminaries as Langston Hughes and W.E.B. DuBois, was characterized by its themes, influences, focus and intent.

Intent

Intent is a primary characteristic of all Harlem Renaissance literature, including poetry. The intent of this poetry was to improve and uplift African Americans through historical awareness and a popular culture that reflected self-awareness and self-worth in black Americans. All of this intent was expressed by the phrase "The New Negro," introduced by

sociologist Alain LeRoy Locke in 1925. The term describes a new wave of African-American intellectuals who used poetry and other forms of artistic and cultural expression to subvert racial stereotypes and address the racial, economic, cultural and social impediments facing black Americans at the turn of the century.

Focus and Themes

Harlem Renaissance poetry is characterized by a focus on the black American experience and relevant themes. Much of the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance is characterized as an examination of the historical place of the contemporary African American with regards to history and the future. This poetry asks the question: where has the black American been and where is he/she going? Themes of migration---from Africa to the United States, from slavery and the south to industrial jobs in the urban north---were common. Poetry of the Renaissance also addressed themes of American identity and the American dream. In two famous poems, Langston Hughes wrote, "I, too, am America" and "What happens to a dream deferred?"

Musical Themes

Much of the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance is characterized in both theme and content by the influence of traditionally "black" forms of music. The repetitive structure and recurring themes of blues music characterize the structure of many Renaissance poems. The interplay between jazz musicians and the call-and-response structure of slave songs also impacted the structure of Renaissance poetry. In its references to the black American past and experience of slavery, poetry of the era often alluded to African American spirituals. With regards to themes, much literature of the Harlem Renaissance included references the national popularity of blues and jazz.

Poetic Influences

Harlem Renaissance poetry took poetic influence from disparate forms of cultural expression. On page 287 of the book "The Harlem Renaissance," author Michael Feith asserts that poetry of the period was characterized by the influenced of African American folk poetry and oral traditions and contemporary American experimentation in modernist free verse. Authors Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman further declare on page 84 of their "Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance, Volume 1" that Harlem Renaissance poetry from Chicago was characterized by the influence of an avant-garde style that arose in that city during the First World War. This style saw the ironic interpolation of elements of Negro spirituals into contemporary poetry.

Samples of American Poetry

Because I Could Not Stop for Death
A Poem by Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality.

We slowly drove, he knew no haste,
And I had put away
My labour, and my leisure too,
For his civility.

We passed the school where children played,
Their lessons scarcely done;
We passed the fields of gazing grain,
We passed the setting sun.

Or rather, he passed us;
The dews grew quivering and chill,
For only gossamer my gown,
My tippet only tulle.

We paused before a house that seemed
A swelling of the ground;
The roof was scarcely visible,
The cornice but a mound.

Since then 'tis centuries; but each
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horses' heads
Were toward eternity.

Type of Work

“Because I Could Not Stop for Death” is a lyric poem on the theme of death. The poem contains six stanzas, each with four lines. A four-line stanza is called a quatrain. The poem was first published in 1890 in Poems, Series 1, a collection of Miss Dickinson's poems.

Commentary and Theme

“Because I Could Not Stop for Death” reveals Emily Dickinson’s calm acceptance of death. It is surprising that she presents the experience as being no more frightening than receiving a gentleman caller—in this case, her fiancé (Death personified).

The journey to the grave begins in Stanza 1, when Death comes calling in a carriage in which Immortality is also a passenger. As the trip continues in Stanza 2, the carriage trundles along at an easy, unhurried pace, perhaps suggesting that death has arrived in the form of a disease or debility that takes its time to kill. Then, in Stanza 3, the author appears to review the stages of her life: childhood (the recess scene), maturity (the ripe, hence, “gazing” grain), and the descent into death (the setting sun)–as she passes to the other side. There, she experiences a chill because she is not warmly dressed. In fact, her garments are more appropriate for a wedding, representing a new beginning, than for a funeral, representing an end.

Her description of the grave as her “house” indicates how comfortable she feels about death. There, after centuries pass, so pleasant is her new life that time seems to stand still, feeling “shorter than a Day.”

The overall theme of the poem seems to be that death is not to be feared since it is a natural part of the endless cycle of nature. Her view of death may also reflect her personality and religious beliefs. On the one hand, as a spinster, she was somewhat reclusive and introspective, tending to dwell on loneliness and death. On the other hand, as a Christian and a Bible reader, she was optimistic about her ultimate fate and appeared to see death as a friend.

Characters

Speaker: A woman who speaks from the grave. She says she calmly accepted death. In fact, she seemed to welcome death as a suitor whom she planned to "marry."
Death: Suitor who called for the narrator to escort her to eternity.
Immortality: A passenger in the carriage.
Children: Boys and girls at play in a schoolyard. They symbolize childhood as a stage of life.

Text and Notes
A Poem by Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality.

We slowly drove, he knew no haste,
And I had put away
My labor, and my leisure too,
For his civility.

We passed the school, where children strove
At recess, in the ring;
We passed the fields of gazing grain,
We passed the setting sun.

Or rather, he passed us;
The dews grew quivering and chill,
For only gossamer my gown,[1]
My tippet[2] only tulle.[3]

We paused before a house[4] that seemed
A swelling of the ground;
The roof was scarcely visible,
The cornice[5] but a mound.

Since then 'tis centuries,[6] and yet each
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horses' heads
Were toward eternity.

Notes

1...gossamer my gown: Thin wedding dress for the speaker's marriage to Death.
2...tippet: Scarf for neck or shoulders.
3...tulle: Netting.
4...house: Speaker's tomb.
5...cornice: Horizontal molding along the top of a wall.
6...Since . . . centuries: The length of time she has been in the tomb.

Meter

In each stanza, the first line has eight syllables (four feet); the second, six syllables (three feet); the third, eight syllables (four feet); and the fourth, six syllables (three feet). The meter alternates between iambic tetrameter (lines with eight syllables, or four feet) and iambic trimeter (lines with six syllables, or three feet). In iambic meter, the feet (pairs of syllables) contain an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. The following example demonstrates the metric scheme.

.....1.....2.....3.....4
Be CAUSE..|..I COULD..|..not STOP..|..for DEATH,
.....1.....2.....3
He KIND..|..ly STOPPED..|..for ME;
.....1.....2.....3.....4
The CARR..|..iage HELD..|..but JUST..|..our SELVES
....1.....2.....3
And IM..|mor TAL..|..i TY.
End Rhyme

_The second and fourth lines of stanzas 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 rhyme. However, some of the lines contain only close rhymes or eye rhymes. In the third stanza, there is no end rhyme, but ring (line 2) rhymes with the penultimate words in lines 3 and 4.

Figures of Speech

.....Following are examples of figures of speech in the poem.

Alliteration

Because I could not stop for Death (line 1)
he knew no haste (line 5)
My labor, and my leisure too (line 7)
At recess, in the ring
gazing grain (line 11)
setting sun (line 12)
For only gossamer my gown (line 15)
My tippet only tulle (line 16)
toward eternity (line 24)

Anaphora

We passed the school, where children strove
At recess, in the ring;
We passed the fields of gazing grain,
We passed the setting sun. (lines 9-12)

Paradox

Since then 'tis centuries, and yet each
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horses' heads (lines 21-23)

Personification

We passed the setting sun.
Or rather, he passed us (lines 12-13)
Comparison of the sun to a person

Death is personified throughout the poem

#Hope is the Thing with Feathers
A Poem by Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chillest land
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

_In her poem, Emily Dickinson communicates that hope is like a bird because of its free and independent spirit. Hope is similar to a bird in its ability to bring comfort and consolation.

Dickinson uses techniques such as extended metaphor and imagery to describe hope throughout her poem.
The poem is introduced with, “Hope is the thing with feathers.” Dickinson’s use of the word “thing” denotes that hope is something abstract and vague. By identifying hope as a thing, Dickinson gives an intangible concept characteristics of a concrete object. The opening line of this poem also sets up the extended metaphor of comparing hope to a bird in the word “feathers.” “Feathers represent hope, because feathers offer the image of flying away to a new hope and a new beginning.”

_Line two of Dickinson’s poem further broadens the metaphor by giving hope delicate and sweet characteristics in the word “perches.” Dickinson’s choice of the word also suggests that, like a bird, hope is planning to stay. “Hope rests in our soul the way a bird rests on its perch.” The next line continues with hope singing to our souls. The line “And sings the tune—without the words,” gives the reader a sense that hope is universal. Hope sings without words so that everyone may understand it, regardless of language barriers. The closing line of the first stanza, “And never stops at all,” implies that hope is never ending. Hope cannot be stopped or destroyed. Dickinson’s point is emphasized in the words “never” and “at all.” In just one line, there are two negative words, which highlight Dickinson’s message.
The second stanza depicts hope’s continuous presence. “And sweetest in the gale is heard,” is ironic because hope’s most comforting song is heard during a “gale,” a horrible windstorm.

_ Those whom live without hope carry a very heavy burden indeed. Hope surely is the light in the dark tunnel. While it is true that many people all over the world live in extremely challenging situations, leading hard lives in appalling conditions. What keeps people going in such circumstances is the glimmer of hope that things can change. This is one thought that came to mind when first reading the poem "Hope is a Thing With Feathers" by Emily Dickinson. Another is that whoever or wherever you are in the world there is always hope, and what's more hope costs nothing.

_ What is striking about the poem is its absolute simplicity, both in structure and in the words the poem presents. However the content and ideas being discussed in the poem are really far from simple, the idea of hope in "extremity" and hope in the "chillest land/And on the strangest sea," is a quite philosophical way of viewing the world. The clear and easy way the rhyme scheme works in conjunction with the simple words certainly works in counter to the content. It is clear that this poem is much more than a simple piece of verse.

One of the messages of the poem seems to say that whatever life throws at the individual there is always the dove-like glimmer of hope that sits in all of us that is so strong that its voice can still be heard in the "gale" of stormy times. Everyone goes through stormy times in their life and no matter where you are on earth or from which "strangest sea" you inhabit but there is no need to despair.

_ Pain and hope the poem seem to be saying, come to all of us, but hope is the resistance that keeps human nature stubborn and fighting the things that life throws at us. Hope through the metaphor Dickinson uses, is a bird that "perches in the soul" of everyone, regardless of race, gender or status. It is something that everyone has to "keep them warm" against the storm of life, and it never stops singing nor does it ask "a crumb" of the user. It is something that is present within us that we take for granted and usually think little of, until that is we come across poetry like this to capture our attention.

There is a definite contrast within the poem between hope on the one side as represented with the words like "warm," "Soul," "sweetest;" and in the pain of life as represented in words like "storm," "gales," "chillest." Although there is a clear battle between these two elements, it is clear which one comes out on top as the voice of hope can still be heard through the gales and storms. It is clear that whatever the battles we may face, hope wins through in the end.

Poetry of Harlem Renaissance

"If We Must Die"

Claude McKay Limns

If we must die, let it not be like hogs

Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,

While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,

Making their mock at our accursed lot.

If we must die, O let us nobly die

So that our precious blood may not be shed

In vain; then even the monsters we defy

Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!

O kinsmen! We must meet the common foe!

Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,

And for their thousand blows deal one death blow!

What though before us lies the open grave?

Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,

Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

by Langston Hughes

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the

flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln

went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy

bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Literary Terms

Alliteration is the repetition of initial sounds in neighboring words.

Example:
sweet smell of success, a dime a dozen, bigger and better, jump for joy

Anaphora The deliberate repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of several successive verses, clauses, or paragraphs.
One of the devices of repetition, in which the same phrase is repeated at the beginning of two or more lines.

Example: (see: Because I could not stop for Death)

Metaphor the comparison of two UNLIKE things.

Metaphor: Metaphor is a figure of speech where two distinctly different things are compared without using adverbs of comparison, 'as', 'like', etc.

Example:
He is a horse. Thou art sunshine.

Meter

Meter refers to the varying, nevertheless recognizable pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables that occur in regular units in the lines of a verse. Each regular unit is called a *foot*. Depending upon the number of feet in a line, a line can be called *monometer* (if it has one foot), *dimeter* (if it has two feet), *trimeter*, *tetrameter* and so on till *nonameter* (if a line has nine meters in it).

Paradox reveals a kind of truth which at first seems contradictory. Two opposing ideas.

Example:
Stone walls do not a prison make, Nor iron bars a cage.

Personification is giving human qualities to animals or objects. Making inanimates as animates.

Example:
a smiling moon, a jovial sun

Rhyme: When two similar sounding words are repeated in a stanza of a poem, it is known as a rhyme. Rhymes that appear on the end of the lines are called end rhyme which is the most common type of rhyme in poetry. There is also internal rhyme where rhyming words appear in the same line. Apart from this, rhymes can also be divided into masculine rhymes and feminine rhymes. Rhyming words that end with a stressed syllable is called the masculine rhyme, while those that end with an unstressed syllable are known as feminine rhyme.

Example:
Roses are red
Violents are blue
Sugar is sweet
And so are you.

****

How doth the little crocodile

Improve his shining tail,

And pour the waters of the Nile

On every golden scale!

Simile is the comparison of two unlike things using *like* or *as*

Simile: Simile is a figure of speech in which two objects are compared using adverbs such as "like" and "as".

Example: He eats like a horse.

Stanza is a unified group of lines in poetry.

Theme is the general idea or insight about life that a writer wishes to express. All of the elements of literary terms contribute to theme. A simple theme can often be stated in a single sentence.

Example: "After reading (this book, poem, essay), I think the author wants me to understand....."

Samples of American Fiction:

Short Story

The Story of an Hour
By Kate Chopin (1851-1904)

Type of Work

"The Story of an Hour" is a short story centering on a young married woman of the late nineteenth century as she reacts to a report that her husband has died in a train accident.

Publication

"The Story of an Hour" was first published in December 6, 1894, under the title "The Dream of an Hour."

Setting

The action takes place in a single hour in an American home in the last decade of the nineteenth Century.

Observance of the Unities

The story observes the classical unities of time, place, and action. These unities dictate that the events in a short story should take place (1) in a single day and (2) in a single location as part of (3) a single story line with no subplots. French classical writers, interpreting guidelines established by Aristotle for stage dramas, formulated the unities. Over the centuries, many writers began to ignore them, but many playwrights and authors of short stories continued to use them.

Characters

Mrs. Louise Mallard: Young, attractive woman who mourns the reported death of her husband but exults in the freedom she will enjoy in the years to come.
Brently Mallard: Mrs. Mallard's husband.
Josephine: Mrs. Mallard's sister.
Richards: Friend of Brently Mallard.
Doctors: Physicians who arrive too late to save Mrs. Mallard.

Plot Summary

By Michael J. Cummings...© 2006

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.Brently Mallard has died in a train accident, according to a report received at a newspaper office. Mr. Richards, a friend of Mallard, was in the newspaper office when the report came in.

He tells Mallard's sister-in-law, Josephine, of Mallard's death, and accompanies Josephine to the Mallard home. Because Mallard's wife, Louise—a young, attractive woman—suffers from a heart condition, Josephine announces news of the tragedy as gently as possible.

Mrs. Mallard breaks down, crying fitfully, then goes upstairs to a room to be alone. There she sits down and gazes out a window, sobbing. It is spring. Birds sing, and the trees burst with new life. It had been raining, but now patches of blue sky appear.

Suddenly, an extraordinary thought occurs to Mrs. Mallard, interrupting her grieving: She is free. She is now an independent woman—at liberty to do as she pleases. Because Mrs. Mallard seems to feel guilty at this thought, she tries to fight it back at first. Then she succumbs to it, allowing it to sweep over her. She whispers, "Free, free, free!"

_To be sure, she will cry at the funeral. However, in the years to come, she will know nothing but joy and happiness, for there will be "no powerful will bending her" to do its bidding. Of course, she had loved her husband. Well, sometimes. On other occasions, she had not loved him at all. But what does it matter now, she thinks, whether or how much she had loved her husband? The important thing is that she is free.

Worried about her sister, Josephine pounds on Mrs. Mallard's door, begging entry. But Louise, saying she is all right, tells her to go away. Mrs. Mallard then resumes her revelry about the wondrous future before her—all the days that will belong to her alone. Only yesterday she wished that life would be short; now she wishes that life will be long.

At length, she answers the door and goes downstairs with Josephine. At the bottom of the stairs, Mr. Richards stands waiting while someone is opening the front door. It is Brently Mallard. There had been a mix-up. He was not in the accident, or even near it, when it occurred. Josephine shrieks. Richards quickly moves in front of Brently to prevent Mrs.

Mallard from seeing him. But it is too late.

Physicians later determine that Mrs. Mallard's death resulted from "joy that kills." Her weak heart could not withstand the happy shock of seeing her husband alive and whole.

Theme

Oppression

Society in late nineteenth century expected women to keep house, cook, bear and rear children—but little more. Despite efforts of women's-rights activists such as Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony, women still had not received the right to vote in national elections by the century's end. Moreover, employers generally discriminated against women by hiring them for menial jobs only and paying them less than men for the same work. *The Story of an Hour* hints that Mrs. Mallard's husband—perhaps a typical husband of his day—dominated his wife.

Repression

Louise Mallard appears to have been a weak-willed woman, one who probably repressed her desire to control her destiny. Consequently, during her marriage, she suffered constant stress that may well have caused or contributed to her "heart trouble," referred to in the first sentence of the story.

Symbolism

Examples of symbols in the story are the following:

Springtime (Paragraph 5): The new, exciting life that Mrs. Mallard thinks is awaiting her.
Patches of Blue Sky (Paragraph 6): Emergence of her new life.

Figures of Speech

Examples of figures of speech are the following:
Revealed in half-concealing (Paragraph 2): Paradox
Storm of grief (Paragraph 3): Metaphor
Physical exhaustion that haunted her body (Paragraph 4): Metaphor/Personification
Breath of rain (Paragraph 5): Metaphor
Song which someone was singing (Paragraph 5): Alliteration
Clouds that had met (Paragraph 6): Metaphor/Personification
The sounds, the scents (Paragraph 9): Alliteration

Thing that was approaching to possess her (Paragraph 10): Metaphor/Personification
Monstrous joy (Paragraph 12): Oxymoron
She carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory (Paragraph 20): Simile
Joy that kills (Paragraph 23): Paradox. The phrase is also ironic, since the doctors mistakenly believe that Mrs. Mallard was happy to see her husband

What's in a Name?

Not until Paragraph 16 does the reader learn the protagonist's first name, Louise. Why the author delayed revealing her given name is open to speculation. I believe the author did so to suggest that the young woman lacked individuality and identity until her husband's reported death liberated her. Before that time, she was merely Mrs. Brently Mallard, an appendage grafted onto her husband's identity. While undergoing her personal renaissance alone in her room, she regains her own identity. It is at this time that her sister, Josephine, calls out, "Louise, open the door!" However, there is irony in Mrs. Mallard's first name: *Louise* is the feminine form of the masculine *Louis*. So even when Mrs. Mallard takes back her identity, it is in part a male identity. (Michael J. Cummings, *Cummings Study Guides*)

Foreshadowing

The opening sentence of the story foreshadows the ending—or at least hints that Mrs. Mallard's heart condition will affect the outcome of the story. Morever, this sentence also makes the ending believable. Without an early reference to her heart ailment, the ending would seem implausible and contrived.

Author

Kate Chopin (1851-1904) is best known for her short stories (more than 100) and a novel, *The Awakening*. One of her recurring themes—the problems facing women in a society that repressed them—made her literary works highly popular in the late twentieth century. They remain popular today.

Study Questions and Essay Topics

1- What was life like for Mrs. Mallard in the home of Brently Mallard?

2- In the report of the train accident, Brently Mallard's name was at the top of the list of fatalities (Paragraph 2). Does this information mean that Mallard was an important citizen in his community? Does it also suggest that perhaps Louise married him, in part, because of his standing in the community?

3- Do you believe Brently Mallard mistreated his wife? In answering this question, keep in mind the following: (1) In Paragraph 13, Louise Mallard recalls that Brently was kind and that "he had never looked save with love upon her." (2) However, Paragraph 8 had previously informed the reader that Mrs. Mallard's face "bespoke repression," and Paragraph 14 says Brently had a "powerful will bending her."

4- How much of Mrs. Mallard's apparent unhappiness in her marriage was her own fault?

5- After Mrs. Mallard receives news that her husband died in a train accident, she goes to "her room." Do these two words mean that she slept separately from her husband? Does the fact that no children are named in the story indeed indicate that she and her husband slept apart?

Literary Terms

Character: The embodiment of a person in a drama or narrative through verbal representation or actions. It is through their dialogs and actions that the readers or audience is able to understand the moral, intellectual and emotional qualities of that character and thus the overall story.

Foreshadowing is the use of hints or clues to suggest what will happen later in literature.

Foreshadowing is a tool used to give the reader or audience a hint of what may happen ahead.

Oxymoron: A literary device in which two words that contradict each other in meaning are used together to form a paradox.

Oxymoron is putting two contradictory words together.

Examples:
hot ice, cold fire, wise fool, sad joy,

Plot: The effect of the structure and relationship of the actions, events and characters in a fictional work.

Point of View: It is a narrative method which determines the manner in which and the position from where, a story is told.

Point of view is the perspective from which a story is told. We may choose to tell our story in:

first person, using "I" or "we";

third person ("he," "she," "it"), which can be limited or omniscient; or

second person, "you," the least common point of view.

First person: limits the reader to one character's perspective.

Third Person Point of View:

Though first person can be powerful, third person is actually the more versatile point of view. Third person allows you to create a much richer, more complicated universe.

Setting is determining Time and Place in fiction.

Setting: Setting refers to the time, place and social circumstances in which a literary work occurs.

SAMPLES OF AMERICAN FICTION:

SHORT STORY

The Tell-Tale Heart

By Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

Plot Summary

By Michael J. Cummings...© 2005

_The narrator has been so nervous that he jumps at the slightest sound. He can hear all things on heaven and earth, he says, and some things in hell. But he maintains that he is not mad. To prove his sanity, he says, he will calmly tell the reader his story.

_One day, he decided to take the life of an old man for no other reason except that he had an eye resembling that of a vulture–"a pale blue eye with a film over it." Over time, it became so unbearable to look upon it that the narrator had no other choice but to get rid of the old man. The way he went about the task, with such calculation and cunning, demonstrates that he is not mad, the narrator says.

_At midnight, he would turn the knob on the door of the old man's bedroom. Then he would open the door ever so slowly. In fact, it would take him an hour to open the door wide enough to poke his head into the room. Would a madman have been so cautious? Then he would open a little slot on his lantern, releasing light, to check the hideous eye. For seven straight nights, it was closed, "and so it was impossible to do the work," he says, "for it was not the old man who vexed me but his Evil Eye."

_On the eighth night, the narrator opened the door with greater caution than before. As before, the room was completely dark. He was about to shine the lantern when the old man sat up and said, "Who's there?" The narrator did not answer but remained in place, not moving a muscle, for an entire hour. All the while, the old man continued to sit up, wondering–the narrator speculated–what he had heard. The wind? A mouse? A cricket? Although he did not hear the old man lie down again, the narrow open the lantern slot just a sliver, then wider. The beam fell upon the open vulture eye. Then the narrator heard a low, muffled sound–the beating of the man's heart! Or so he believed. The heartbeat louder–then louder and louder. Would a neighbor hear it?

_Shouting, the narrator rushed into the room. After the old man shrieked, the narrator

quickly threw him to the floor and pulled the bed on top of him. The heart continued to beat, but only softly. Moments later, the beating stopped. The narrator checked his pulse. Nothing. The old man was dead. After moving the bed aside, the narrator took up three floorboards, secured the old man between the joists, and replaced the boards. The narrator felt proud of himself, for there was no blood to wash out, no other task of any kind to do.

_At 4 a.m., just when he had finished his work, the narrator answered a knock at his front door. When he opened it, three policemen entered, saying a neighbor had reported hearing a shriek, possibly indicating foul play. They needed to search the premises. "I smiled," the narrator says, "for what had I to fear?"

_After welcoming the police, he told them the shriek was his own; he had cried out during a dream. He also told them that the old man who lived in the house was away in the country. Next, he took the police all over the house, inviting them to search everything–thoroughly. After they entered the old man's chamber, the narrator pointed out that the old man's possessions had not been disturbed.

In his swelling self-confidence, the narrator brought in chairs and invited the policemen to rest. "I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim," the narrator says.

_The police appeared completely satisfied that nothing criminal had occurred in the house. However, they continued to chat idly, staying much longer than the narrator had expected. By and by, he began to hear a rhythmic ringing in his head. While he was talking with the police, the noise–which had the cadence of a ticking watch but a much louder sound–persisted, becoming more distinct. A moment later, he concluded that the rhythmic ringing was outside of him. Still, he talked on, now more loudly. The policemen did not seem to hear the noise.

_When it grew even louder, the narrator rose and began arguing with the officers about trivial matters, punctuating his conversation with wild hand movements. He also paced back and forth. Then he raved and cursed and dragged his chair over the floorboards, all in an apparent attempt to drown out the noise he was hearing. Meanwhile, it grew still louder, and louder, and louder. How was it possible that they could not hear it?

_In fact, they must have heard it, the narrator decided. And they must have suspected him of a crime all along. Their calm manner and idlechatter were part of a ruse to mock him. Unable to brook their counterfeit behavior any longer, unable to endure the sound any longer, the narrator brought the whole business to a crashing climax.

_"Villains! I shrieked, "dissemble no more! I admit the deed! – tear up the planks! – here, here! – it is the beating of his hideous heart!"

Setting

The story opens in an undisclosed locale, possibly a prison, when the narrator tells readers that he is not mad. To defend his sanity, he tells a story which he believes will prove him sound of mind. His story is set in a house occupied by the narrator and an old man. The time of the events in the story is probably the early 1840's, when Poe wrote the story. The action in the narrator's story takes place over eight days.

Characters

The Narrator: Deranged unnamed person who tries to convince the reader that he is sane. The narrator's gender is not identified, but Poe probably intended him to be a man. Here is why: Poe generally wrote from a male perspective, often infusing part of himself into his main characters. Also, in major short stories in which he identifies the narrator by gender–stories such as "The Black Cat," "The Cask of Amontillado," and "The Fall of the House of Usher"–the narrator is male. Finally, the narrator of "A Tell-Tale Heart" exhibits male characteristics, including

(1) A more pronounced tendency than females to commit violent acts. Statistics demonstrate overwhelmingly that murder is a male crime.

(2) Physical strength that would be unusual in a female. The narrator drags the old man onto the floor and pulls the bed on top of him, then tears up floorboards and deposits the body between joists.

(3) The narrator performs a man's chore by bringing four chairs into the old man's bedroom, one for the narrator and three for the policemen. If the narrator were a woman, the policemen probably would have fetched the chairs. But they did not.

The Old Man: Seemingly harmless elder who has a hideous "evil eye" that unnerves the narrator.

Neighbor: Person who hears a shriek coming from the house of the narrator and the old man, then reports it to the police.

Three Policemen: Officers who search the narrator's house after a neighbor reports hearing a shriek.

Type of Work

Short story in the horror genre that focuses on the psyche of the narrator .

Year of Publication

"The Tell-Tale Heart" was first published in the winter of 1843 in *The Pioneer*, a Boston magazine.

Themes

Theme 1: A human being has a perverse, wicked side–another self–that can goad him into doing evil things that have no apparent motive. This is the same theme of another Poe story, "The Black Cat." The narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart" admits in the second paragraph of the story that he committed a senseless crime, saying: "Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved

the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire." However, he does note that his evil deed, murder, was not entirely unprovoked; for the old man he killed had a hideous eye that unnerved him. Unable to look upon it any longer, he decided to kill the old man.

Theme 2: Fear of discovery can bring about discovery. At the end of the story, the narrator begins to crack under the pressure of a police investigation, hearing the sound of the murdered man's beating heart, and tells the police where he hid the body. Fear of discovery

is the principle under which lie detectors work.

Theme 3: The evil within is worse than the evil without.. The old man has a hideous, repulsive eye; outwardly, he is ugly. But, as the narrator admits, he is otherwise a harmless, well-meaning person. The narrator, on the other hand, is inwardly ugly and repulsive, for he plans and executes murder; his soul is more repulsive than the old man's eye.

Point of View

The story is told in first-person point of view by an unreliable narrator. The narrator is obviously deranged, readers learn during his telling of his tale, even though he declares at the outset that he is sane. As in many of his other short stories, Poe does not name the narrator. A possible explanation for this is that the unnamed narrator becomes every human being, thereby enhancing the universality of the short story. In other words, the narrator represents anyone who has ever acted perversely or impulsively–and then had to pay for his deed.

Prose Beats Like a Heart

From time to time, Poe uses a succession of short sentences or word groups, creating a rhythm not unlike that of a heartbeat. Note the following examples from the story:

Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! Yes, it was this!

I scarcely breathed. I held the lantern motionless. I tried how steadily I could to maintain the ray upon the eye. Meantime the hellish tattoo of the heart increased.

Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God! – no, no? They heard! – they suspected! – they KNEW! – they were making a mockery of my horror! – this I thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! – and now – again – hark! louder! louder! louder! LOUDER! – "Villains!" I shrieked, "dissemble no more! I admit the deed! – tear up the planks! – here, here! – it is the beating of his hideous heart!"

Figures of Speech

As in other works of his, Poe uses many figures of speech. Examples are the following:

Anaphora

Anaphora is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is repeated at the beginning of a clause or another group of words. Anaphora imparts emphasis and balance. Here are boldfaced examples from "The Tell-Tale Heart":

I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell.

With what caution–with what foresight, with what dissimulation, I went to work!

He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not. He had been saying to himself, "It is nothing but the wind in the chimney, it isonly a mouse crossing the floor," or, "It is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp."

There was nothing to wash out–no stain of any kind–no blood-spot whatever.
They heard!–they suspected!–they KNEW!–they were making a mockery of my horror!

Personificaton

Death in approaching him had stalked with his black shadow before him and enveloped the victim. [Here, Death is a person.]

Simile

So I opened it–you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily–until at length a single dim ray like the thread of the spider shot out from the crevice and fell upon the vulture eye. [The simile is the comparsion of the ray to the thread of the spider with the use of the word *like*.
It increased my fury as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage. [The simile is the comparison of the heartbeat to a drumbeat.]
His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness. . . . [The simile is the comparison of the darkness to pitch.]

Alliteration

Hearken! and observe how healthily, how calmly, I can tell you the whole story.
Meanwhile, the hellish tattoo of the heart increased.
It is the beating of his hideous heart!

Irony

I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him.

SAMPLES OF AMERICAN FICTION:

NOVEL

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

By Mark Twain (1835-1910)

Type of Work

_The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is a novel that does not fit neatly into a single genre. However, it does contain elements of the apprenticeship novel, or bildungsroman, because it presents the experiences of a boy as he learns important values and lessons about life. It also contains elements of the picaresque novel, a type of fiction that presents the episodic adventures (each a story in itself) of a person as he travels from place to place and meets a variety of other characters, some of them also travelers.

Composition and Publication Dates

_Mark Twain wrote The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn between 1876 and 1883.

Setting

_The action takes place in St. Petersburg, Missouri, and at various locations along the banks of the Mississippi River in Missouri, Arkansas, and Illinois. The time is the middle of the 19th Century, before the Civil War.

Main Characters

Protagonist: Huckleberry Finn
Antagonist: Society and Its Rules and Laws
Huckleberry Finn: Loyal, cheerful, fair-minded Missouri boy. Because his father abuses him, he runs away and teams with an escaped slave during many adventures on a raft ride on the Mississippi River. Huck is the narrator of the novel.
Jim: The escaped slave who joins Huck. He is a simple, loyal, and trusting man whose common sense helps guide Huck. In a way, he serves as a surrogate father for Huck.
Pap Finn: Huck's drunken, greedy, abusive father, who is nearing age fifty. His racism is symptomatic of the racism that infected society as a whole in nineteenth-century America.
Widow Douglas: Kindly but straitlaced woman who takes Huck into her home.
Miss Watson:The widow's sister and owner of Jim.
Tom Sawyer: Huck's friend. He likes to stage mock adventures of the kind he reads about in books.
Joe Harper,Ben Rogers, Tommy Barnes: Members of Tom Sawyer's gang.
Aunt Polly: Tom Sawyer's aunt.
Judge Thatcher: Judge who looks out for Huck's welfare.

Rev. Mr. Hobson, Attorney Levi Bell, Deacon Lot Hovey, Ben Rucker, Widow Bartley: Other Friends of the Wilks sisters.
Slave Servants of the Wilks
Sally Phelps (Aunt Sally): Tom Sawyer's aunt.
Silas Phelps: Sally's husband.
Old Doctor: Physician who treats Tom's leg wound.

Point of View

_Huckleberry Finn tells the story in first-person point of view. His narration, including his accounts of conversations, contains regionalisms, grammatical errors, pronunciation errors, and other characteristics of the speech or writing of a nineteenth-century Missouri boy with limited education. The use of patois bolsters the verisimilitude of the novel.

Summary : Chapter One

_ when I couldn't stand it no longer I lit out. I got into my old rags and my sugar-hogshead again, and was free and satisfied.

The novel begins as the narrator (later identified as Huckleberry Finn) states that we may know of him from another book, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, written by "Mr. Mark Twain." Huck quickly asserts that it "ain't no matter" if we haven't heard of him. According to Huck, Twain mostly told the truth in the previous tale, with some "stretchers" thrown in, although everyone—except Tom's Aunt Polly, the Widow Douglas, and maybe a few other girls—tells lies once in a while.

We learn that Tom Sawyer ended with Tom and Huckleberry finding a stash of gold some robbers had hidden in a cave. The boys received $6,000 apiece, which the local judge, Judge Thatcher, put into a trust. The money in the bank now accrues a dollar a day from interest. Then, the Widow Douglas adopted and tried to "sivilize" Huck. Huck couldn't stand it, so he threw on his old rags and ran away. He has since returned because Tom Sawyer told him he could join his new band of robbers if he would return to the Widow "and be respectable." The Widow frequently bemoans her failure to reform Huck. He particularly cringes at the fact that he has to "grumble" (i.e., pray) over the food before every meal. The Widow tries to teach Huck about Moses, but Huck loses interest when he realizes that Moses is dead. The Widow will not let Huck smoke but approves of snuff since she uses it herself. Her sister, Miss Watson, tries to give Huck spelling lessons. These efforts are not in vain, as Huck does in fact learn to read.

Huck feels especially restless because the Widow and Miss Watson constantly attempt to improve his behavior. When Miss Watson tells him about the "bad place"—hell—he blurts out that he would like to go there, for a change of scenery. This proclamation causes an uproar. Huck doesn't see the point of going to the "good place" and resolves not to bother trying to get there. He keeps this sentiment a secret, however, because he doesn't want to cause more trouble. When Huck asks, Miss Watson tells him that there is no chance that Tom Sawyer will end up in heaven. Huck is glad "because I wanted him and me to be together."

One night, after Miss Watson leads a prayer session with Huck and the household slaves, Huck goes to bed feeling "so lonesome I most wished I was dead." He gets shivers hearing the sounds of nature through his window. Huck accidentally flicks a spider into a candle, and the bad omen frightens him. Just after midnight, Huck hears movement below the window and hears a "me-yow" sound, to which he responds with another "me-yow." Climbing out the window onto the shed, Huck finds Tom Sawyer waiting for him in the yard.

Summary: Chapter 2

Huck and Tom tiptoe through the Widow's garden. Huck trips on a root as he passes by the kitchen, and Jim, one of Miss Watson's slaves, hears him from inside. Tom and Huck crouch down and try to stay still, but Huck is struck by a series of uncontrollable itches, as often happens when he is in a situation "where it won't do for you to scratch." Jim says aloud that he will stay put until he discovers the source of the sound, but after several minutes, he falls asleep. Tom wants to tie Jim up, but the more practical Huck objects, so Tom settles for

simply playing a trick by putting Jim's hat on a tree branch over Jim's head. Tom also takes candles from the kitchen, despite Huck's objections that they will risk getting caught. Huck tells us that afterward, Jim tells everyone that some witches flew him around and put the hat atop his head. Jim expands the tale further, becoming a local celebrity among the slaves, who enjoy witch stories. Around his neck, Jim wears the five-cent piece Tom left for the candles, calling it a charm from the devil with the power to cure sickness. Huck notes somewhat sarcastically that Jim nearly becomes so "stuck up" from his newfound celebrity that he is unfit to be a servant.

Meanwhile, Tom and Huck meet up with a few other boys and take a boat to a large cave. There, Tom names his new band of robbers "Tom Sawyer's Gang." All must sign an oath in blood, vowing, among other things, to kill the family of any member who reveals the gang's secrets. The boys think it "a real beautiful oath," and Tom admits that he got part of it from books that he has read. The boys nearly disqualify Huck because he has no family aside from a drunken father who can never be found, but Huck appeases the boys by offering Miss Watson. Tom says the gang must capture and ransom people, although none of the boys knows what "ransom" means. Tom assumes it means to keep them captive until they die. In response to one boy's question, Tom tells the group that women are not to be killed but should be kept at the hideout, where the boys' manners will charm the women into falling in love with the boys. When one boy begins to cry out of homesickness and threatens to tell the group's secrets, Tom bribes him with five cents. They agree to meet again someday, but not on a Sunday, because that would be blasphemous. Huck makes it home and gets into bed just before dawn.

Summary: Chapter 43 (LXIII)

But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before.
When Huck asks Tom what he had planned to do once he had freed the already-freed Jim, Tom replies that he was planning to repay Jim for his troubles and send him back a hero, giving him a reception complete with a marching band. When Aunt Polly and the Phelpses hear about the assistance Jim gave the doctor in nursing Tom, they immediately unchain him, feed him, and treat him like a king. Tom gives Jim forty dollars for his troubles, and Jim declares that the omen of his hairy chest—which was supposed to bring him fortune—has come true.

Tom makes a full recovery and wears the bullet from his leg on a watch-guard around his neck. He and Huck would like to go on another adventure, to "Indian Territory" (present-day Oklahoma). Huck thinks it quite possible that Pap has taken all his money by now, but Jim says that could not have happened. Jim tells Huck that the dead body they found on the floating house during the flood was Pap. Huck now has nothing more to write about and is "rotten glad" about that, because writing a book turned out to be quite a task. He

does not plan any future writings. Instead, he plans to head out west immediately because Aunt Sally is already trying to "sivilize" him. Huck has had quite enough of that.

12

Samples of American Fiction:
Novel

Themes

Freedom

All human beings are free, independent, and equal members of society. The novel celebrates the spirit of freedom and independence through Huck and Jim, escapees from oppression.

The Primacy of the Moral Law

The moral law supersedes government law. By protecting the black slave Jim, Huck breaks man-made law and feels guilty. But he refuses to turn Jim in because his moral instincts tell him he is doing the right thing.

Intuitive Wisdom

Wisdom comes from the heart, not the head. The educated characters in the novel are often deeply flawed in some way—self-righteous, prejudiced, quixotic, bound to tradition. However, the uneducated—namely, Huck and Jim—exhibit a natural, intuitive understanding of the world. Though ignorant in many ways, they are wise in the ways that count, relying on conscience, common sense, and compassion to guide them.

A Child Shall Lead

A little child shall lead them. Huck is portrayed as a boy who had a better grasp of morality than the often corrupt civilization around him—a boy worth imitating for his virtues.

Love of Money

The love of money is the root of all evil. It is the love of money, Huck's, that prompts Pap Finn to gain custody of Huck. It is the love of money that motivates the Duke and the King to work their scams. And, most important of all, it is the love of money that makes southerners retain the institution of slavery.

Climax

_The climax occurs when Tom and Huck free Jim, and Tom—who has suffered a bullet wound in the leg—tells Huck that a provision in Miss Watson's will has freed Jim.

Structure and Style

_Like the Mississippi River itself, the plot flows around bends, through darkness and fog, and into bright sunlight. The story is full of surprises, moving through many episodes that are little stories in themselves. These episodes form a unified whole that illumines the characters and their values. The mood is sometimes light and buoyant, sometimes deadly serious. The writing (that is, Huck's storytelling and the characters' conversations) is a

delight—richly descriptive, humorous, and suspenseful. .....But it is not true, as some have observed, that Huck's first-person narration and the conversation of the strange mixture of characters represent authentic regional dialects.

_Twain learned to write this way from writers of "local color," an American literary movement of the last half of the nineteenth century. Besides presenting narratives in a regional dialect, local-color writers, or "local colorists," attempted to portray life in the various sections of burgeoning America.

13

Samples of American Drama:

A One-act Play

Trifles

A Play by Susan Glaspell (1876-1948)

Plot Summary

_On a very cold morning, Sheriff Peters enters the dreary kitchen of murder victim John Wright's farmhouse with a man named Hale and the county attorney, George Henderson. With them are the wives of Peters and Hale. After they gather around the kitchen stove to warm themselves, the sheriff asks Hale to recount for Henderson what he saw in the house the previous morning, when he found Wright's body. However, Henderson first wants to know whether anything at the crime scene has been disturbed. The sheriff assures him that everything is the same as it was the day before. He notes, though, that he had sent his deputy, Frank, to the farmhouse earlier to build the stove fire, "but I told him not to touch anything except the stove—and you know Frank."

_Hale then tells his story. While he and a helper, Harry, were on their way to town with a load of potatoes, Hale stopped his wagon at the farmhouse just after eight o'clock to try to persuade Wright to go in with him on a party telephone line. He knocked, thought he heard someone tell him to enter, and went in. He then saw Mrs. Wright in her rocker fidgeting with her apron. She seemed preoccupied. When he asked to see John, she laughed. He repeated his request, and she told him he could not see John.

_"Isn't he home?" Hale asked.

_She said yes.

_“Then why can’t I see him?”
_“ ‘Cause he’s dead,” she said.
_When Hale asked what he died of, she replied, “He died of a rope around his neck.”

_Hale fetched Harry, and the two men went upstairs and found Wright's body lying on the bed. Mrs. Wright, seemingly unconcerned, said someone must have entered the room during the night and strangled him. She didn’t hear anything, she said, because “I sleep sound.”

_At that point, Hale says, Harry went to the Rivers place nearby to call the coroner, Dr. Lloyd. Meanwhile, Mrs. Wright moved to another chair. Shortly thereafter, Harry returned and a little while later Dr. Lloyd and the sheriff arrived.

_“I guess that’s all I know that you don’t,” Hale tells Henderson.
_Henderson looks around the kitchen, then opens a cupboard door and finds a sticky substance. The women go over and take a look, and Mrs. Peters says, .“Oh, her fruit; it did freeze,” she tells Mrs. Hale. Then she tells Henderson that Mrs. Wright used to worry that her jars of fruit would freeze and break if the stove fire went out.
The men then poke fun at the women for showing concern about the preserves at a time when they are investigating a murder.....SHERIFF. Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder and worryin' about her preserves.
_COUNTY ATTORNEY. I guess before we're through she may have something more serious than preserves to worry about.

_HALE. Well, women are used to worrying over trifles.....“And yet, for all their worries, what would we do without the ladies?” Henderson says, washing his hands. Noting how disorderly the kitchen looks—with its unwashed pans, a dish towel on the table, and the dirty towels with which he wipes his hands—he comments, “Not much of a housekeeper, would you say ladies?”
_Mrs. Hale points out in Mrs. Wright's defense that there is a lot of work to be done on a farm.

_When Henderson questions her about her relationship with Mrs. Wright, Mrs. Hale says she hadn’t seen the woman in more than a year even though they were neighbors.
_“It never seemed a very cheerful place,” she says. She adds that John Wright wasn’t exactly a cheerful person.

_The sheriff notes that his wife will be picking up some clothes for Mrs. Wright and taking them to the jail. Henderson gives his approval but says he will want to see what she takes. After the men go upstairs to view the crime scene, Mrs. Hale defends Mrs. Wright for "not having things slicked up when she had to come away in a hurry." She also retrieves a jar of cherry preserves and says Mrs. Wright will feel bad when she finds out it is the only jar of fruit still intact after she worked so hard on her canning.

_After they gather the clothes—including a shawl and an apron that Mrs. Wright requested—Mrs. Hale examines a skirt, then observes that Mr. Wright was a penny-pincher. That may have been the reason that Mrs.Wright kept to the house rather than taking part in local social activities. Before she married John Wright, she says, Minnie Foster wore pretty clothes and belonged to the church choir. "But that—oh, that was thirty years ago."

_Mrs. Peters says, "Do you think she did it?"

_"I don't think she did. Asking for an apron and her little shawl. Worrying about her fruit."

_Mrs. Peters says her husband wants to find a motive for the murder, like anger, but Mrs. Hale says she sees no signs of anger. She adds that "it seems kind of sneaking" to lock her up and then come out and go through her house. As they examine piecework that Mrs. Wright apparently planned to use to make a quilt, Mrs. Hale notes, "It's log cabin pattern. Pretty, isn't it? I wonder if she was goin' to quilt or just knot it?"

_Just then, the men come downstairs. The sheriff, overhearing the women's conversation, says, "They wonder if she was going to quilt it or just knot it." The three men laugh. Then they go out to the barn to investigate.

_While the women sit at the kitchen table, Mrs. Hale examines the blocks to be used for the quilt. All had been sewn evenly except one.

_"It's all over the place! Why, it looks as if she didn't know what she was about!" Mrs. Hale says.

_She pulls out some stitches, threads a needle, and begins to finish it properly. Meanwhile, while looking in a cupboard for paper and string with which to wrap Mrs. Wright's belongings, Mrs. Peters finds a bird cage and asks her companion whether Minnie had a bird. Mrs. Hale doesn't know, but she remembers that a man was in the neighborhood the previous year selling canaries. Mrs. Peters notes that a hinge on the cage door had been pulled a part.

_"Looks as if someone must have been rough with it," Mrs. Hale says.

_She puts down her sewing and expresses regret that she did not visit Mrs. Wright in the past year. She says John Wright was an upright man who didn't drink and was

good to his word. However, he was also a “hard man,” she says, “like a raw wind that gets to the bone.”

_Mrs. Hale suggests that Mrs. Peters take the quilting material to the jail with her so Mrs. Wright will have something to do. Mrs. Peters thinks it’s a good idea. When they rummage through the sewing basket for the required material, Mrs. Hale finds a box containing a piece of silk wrapped around a dead bird with a wrung neck. The women are horrified. When they hear the men approaching, Mrs. Hale hides the box under quilting pieces.

_As the sheriff and the county attorney enter, the latter notices the cage and says, “Has the bird flown?”

_Mrs. Hale says she thinks a cat got it, then ran away.

_Henderson reports that there was no sign that anyone broke into the house and that the rope appeared to belong to the Wrights. When he and the sheriff go back upstairs, Mrs. Hale tells Mrs. Peters that Mrs. Wright apparently liked the bird and was going to bury it in the box. It was John Wright who killed it, she concludes, because he didn’t like it—“a thing that sang. She [Mrs. Wright] used to sing. He killed that, too.” Mrs. Peters says, “We don’t know who killed the bird . . . [and] we don’t know who killed him [Wright].”

_To have a bird sing for you in such a dreary house, Mrs. Hale says, must have lifted Mrs. Wright’s spirits. It must have seemed very quiet after the bird died.

_"I know what stillness is," Mrs. Peters says. "When we homesteaded in Dakota, and my first baby died—after he was two years old, and me with no other then—"

_But, she says, “The law has got to punish the crime, Mrs. Hale.” Mrs. Hale recalls when Minnie sang in the choir and wore nice clothes. “Who’s going to punish that?” she says, implying that John Wright was responsible for causing Minnie to withdraw from society.

_They decide to wrap the jar of preserves with her other belongings and allow her to think that all of her canned fruit remains intact.

_When the men come down, Henderson remarks that “everything is perfectly clear” except the motive. The jury will need a motive. Hale reenters from the outside and says the team of horses is ready. Henderson says he will remain behind to study the crime scene more carefully. When the sheriff asks him whether he wants to inspect the items the women gathered for Mrs. Wright, Henderson says, “Oh, I guess they're not very dangerous things the ladies have picked up.”

_At the sheriff's suggestion, he and Henderson check the windows in another room for clues. Meanwhile, Mrs. Hale snatches up the box containing the canary and puts it in her coat pocket.

_When the men return to the kitchen, the sheriff says jokingly, “Well, Henry, at least

we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to—what is it you call it, ladies!"
_"We call it—knot it, Mr. Henderson," Mrs. Hale says.

Glossary of Literary Terms: Drama
Act: A major section of a play. Acts are divided into varying numbers of shorter scenes. From ancient times to the nineteenth century plays were generally constructed of five acts, but modern works typically consist of one, two, or three acts. Examples of five-act plays include the works of Sophocles and Shakespeare, while the plays of Arthur Miller commonly have a three-act structure.
Characterization
The means by which writers present and reveal character. Although techniques of characterization are complex, writers typically reveal characters through their speech, dress, manner, and actions. Readers come to understand the character Miss Emily in Faulkner's story "A Rose for Emily" through what she says, how she lives, and what she does.
Climax
The turning point of the action in the plot of a play or story. The climax represents the point of greatest tension in the work.
Comedy
A type of drama in which the characters experience reversals of fortune, usually for the better. In comedy, things work out happily in the end. Comic drama may be either romantic--characterized by a tone of tolerance and geniality--or satiric. Satiric works offer a darker vision of human nature, one that ridicules human folly. Shaw's Arms and the Man is a romantic comedy; Chekhov's Marriage Proposal is a satiric comedy.
Conflict/Plot is the struggle found in fiction. Conflict/Plot may be internal or external and is best seen in
(1) Man in conflict with another Man:
(2) Man in conflict in Nature;
(3) Man in conflict with self.
Dialogue
The conversation of characters in a literary work. In fiction, dialogue is typically enclosed within quotation marks. In plays, characters' speech is preceded by their names.
Foreshadowing is the use of hints or clues to suggest what will happen later in literature.

Hyperbole is exaggeration or overstatement.
Opposite of Understatement
Example:
I'm so hungry I could eat a horse.
He's as big as a house.
Irony is an implied discrepancy between what is said and what is meant. The use of words to convey the opposite of their literal meaning; a statement or situation where the meaning is contradicted by the appearance or presentation of the idea.

Three kinds of irony:
1. verbal irony is when an author says one thing and means something else.
2. dramatic irony is when an audience perceives something that a character in the literature does not know.
3. irony of situation is a discrepency between the expected result and actual results.
Monologue
A speech by a single character without another character's response.
Soliloquy
A speech in a play that is meant to be heard by the audience but not by other characters on the stage. If there are no other characters present, the soliloquy represents the character thinking aloud. Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech is an example.
Scene A subdivision of an Act of a drama, consisting of continuous action taking place at a single time and in a single location. The beginnings and endings of scenes may be indicated by clearing the stage of actors and props or by the entrances and exits of important characters.
The first act of William Shakespeare's Winter's Tale is comprised of two scenes.
Tragedy
A type of drama in which the characters experience reversals of fortune, usually for the worse. In tragedy, catastrophe and suffering await many of the characters, especially the hero. Examples include Shakespeare's Othello and Hamlet; Sophocles' Antigone and Oedipus the King, and Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman.

Samples of American Drama:

A One-act Play

Trifles

A Play by Susan Glaspell (1876-1948)

Setting

_The time is the early twentieth century during cold weather. The action takes place in the kitchen of a farmhouse in the American Midwest. The author describes the scene and the characters as follows:

The kitchen in the now abandoned farmhouse of John Wright, a gloomy kitchen, and left without having been put in order—unwashed pans under the sink, a loaf of bread outside the breadbox, a dish towel on the table—other signs of incompleted work. At the rear the outer door opens, and the Sheriff comes in, followed by the county Attorney and Hale. The Sheriff and Hale are men in middle life, the county Attorney is a young man; all are much bundled up and go at once to the stove. They are followed by the two women—the Sheriff's Wife first; she is a slight wiry woman, a thin nervous face. Mrs. Hale is larger and would ordinarily be called more comfortable looking, but she is disturbed now and looks fearfully about as she enters. The women have come in slowly and stand close together near the door. (Glaspell)

Characters

John Wright: Murder victim who lived with his wife in a farmhouse. He was said to be an upright but "hard" man.

Minnie Foster Wright: Wife of John Wright and his accused murderer. She is being held in the county jail. The dialogue in the play suggests that her husband, though honest and clean-living, was a taskmaster and a miser who made life miserable for his wife. Apparently, he wrung the neck of a canary that his wife kept in a cage to sing and brighten her dreary life. In retaliation, the dialogue suggests, Mrs. Wright killed her husband in similar fashion, wringing his neck with a rope.

Mr. Hale: Man who tells the the sheriff and the county attorney that he stopped at the Wright place on his way to town with a wagonload of potatoes. With him was his helper Harry. Hale planned to ask John Wright to share with him the cost of a party telephone line. After entering the Wright farmhouse, Hale and Harry discovered the body of John Wright. The county attorney calls upon Hale to recount what he saw.

Harry: Mr. Hale's helper.

Sheriff Peters: County lawman who holds Mrs. Wright in jail.

George Henderson: County attorney. He and Peters scour the farmhouse for clues that will hold up in a court trial.
Mrs. Hale: Wife of Mr. Hale. While the sheriff and the county attorney search the Wright property for evidence, Mrs. Hale and the sheriff's wife discover clues to the murder among trivial items they find in the kitchen.
Mrs. Peters: Wife of the sheriff.
Frank: Deputy sheriff.
Dr. Lloyd: County coroner.

Type of Work and Year of Publication
Trifles is a one-act play centering on two women who discover murder clues that county officials regard as trivial. But the play is not a murder mystery. Rather, it is a cultural and psychological study that probes the status of women in society and their intuitive grasp of reality. Glaspell wrote the play in 1916 for the Provincetown Players, a Massachusetts acting group that she and her husband, George Cram Cook, founded in Massachusetts in 1915.

The Title's Meanings
The title refers to more than the items in the Wright home that Peters, Henderson, and Hale regard as irrelevant and Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale regard as significant. It also refers to the men's view of the women as trifles and their observations as unimportant. It is likely also that the murder victim regarded the bird as an annoying trifle. To Mrs. Wright, it was apparently one of her few sources of joy.
Climax
_The climax occurs when the two women discover the dead bird, enabling them to envision the events leading up to the murder of John Wright.
Symbols
Bird: Mrs. Wright's spirit.
Cage: John Wright's oppression (or immuration) of his wife and her spirit.
Stove, Cold House, and Broken Jars: When the stove fire goes out, the house temperature drops below freezing and all but one of the jars of preserves break. The stove fire appears to represent John and Minnie Wright's marriage. The fire probably goes out just before or immediately after the murder. The resulting freezing temperatures crack the jars of preserves, apparently representing Minnie's mental well being. The jar that remains intact seems to symbolize the modicum of sanity left

to her and the hope for a brighter future that Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters envision for her.

Unevenly Sewn Quilt Block: Mrs. Wright's disturbed mental condition.

Rope: Minnie Wright's usurpation of male power. Strangulation is a man's method of killing. In her rebellion against her domineering husband, Minnie musters the strength to murder like a man, thus perversely asserting her equality.

Themes

Casting Off Male Oppression

_In 1916, when Glaspell wrote Trifles, male-dominated society continued to deny women the right to vote and severely limited their opportunities in offices, industries, legislatures, and the marketplace. In the home, the husband was king and the wife a mere vassal. In carrying out one of the most important and demanding tasks in all of society, rearing children, she frequently received little or no help from her spouse. The typical lower- or middle-class wife spent much of her time in the kitchen, cooking, baking, canning, and stoking the stove fire. In "leisure" hours, she sewed, knitted, darned, and quilted. Women who worked outside the home usually held jobs as secretaries, clerks, waitresses, nannies, housekeepers, washerwomen, and manual laborers in factories. There was no minimum wage for these women. Rare was the female physician, lawyer, archeologist, business executive, or professional athlete. However, thanks in large part to pioneering work by women social reformers in the nineteenth century, the women of the early twentieth century began to demand fairer treatment and equal rights. Glaspell's play presents one radical woman rebel, Mrs. Wright, who goes to the extreme to free herself of male domination. It also presents two quiet rebels, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, who side with Mrs. Wright and withhold evidence that the sheriff and the county attorney need to establish a motive for Mrs. Wright's alleged crime.

Women's Intuition

_So-called women's intuition demonstrates its power in this play when Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters discover household items, which the men regard as trifles, that lead to the establishment of a motive for Mrs. Wright's crime. The implication here is that women possess abilities that can complement and augment those of men. A society that limits women's use of their talents is the poorer for doing so.

Irony

_Sheriff Peters and County Attorney George Henderson pride themselves on their powers of detection and logical reasoning. But it is the two women, Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale, who discover the clues and establish a motive amid seemingly innocuous items in the Wright home. The trifles with which the men say the women concern

themselves turn out to be the key evidence that the men are looking for. The story ends with an ironic exchange between Henderson and Mrs. Hale:
COUNTY ATTORNEY (facetiously). Well, Henry, at least we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to—what is it you call it, ladies!
MRS. HALE (her hand against her pocket). We call it—knot it, Mr. Henderson

Study Questions and Writing Topics

1_Analyze the following passage from the play, then answer the question that follows it:
MRS. HALE. Well, I guess John Wright didn't wake when they was slipping that rope under his neck.
MRS. PETERS. No, it's strange. It must have been done awful crafty and still. They say it was such a --funny way to kill a man, rigging it all up like that.
MRS. HALE. That's just what Mr. Hale said. There was a gun in the house. He says that's what he can't understand.....Why didn't Mrs. Peters use the gun instead of the rope to kill her husband?
2_Mrs.Peters hesitates to cover up for Minnie Wright, twice reminding Mrs. Hale that the killer must answer for the crime. However, she ....has a change of heart. Find the passage in the play (near the end) indicating that she has decided to go along with a coverup.
3_Imagine what life was like for Minnie Wright when John Wright was alive. Then write a page of dialogue that begins when Mrs. Wright ....asks her husband for money to buy new clothes.
4_Write an essay that compares and contrasts life for a typical American wife of the early twentieth century with life for a typical ....American wife of the twenty-first century.
5_If Mrs. Wright is found innocent for lack of incriminating evidence, do you believe her conscience will eventually make her confess the ....crime?
6_If Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters change their minds and decide to testify against Minnie Wright, would the evidence they discovered be ....enough to conflict Mrs. Wright of murder?.