3. The Romantic Period
(1830–1870)
3.1 Unique American Literature

3.2 American Romanticism
3.1 Unique American Literature
3.1.1 Background

3.1.2 Writers of Prose

3.1.3 Writers of Verse
3.1.1 Background
Many countries follow the European trends of the major literary and artistic movements:

• European countries copy each other (they copy France especially)
• Everyone in the “New World” from Canada down to Argentina and Chile copy Europe

• Sometimes people even copy others who copy others!
But there comes a time when countries forge a literature unique to their own qualities, and that is sometimes referred to as a “national literature” because it defines them as unique from the literatures of other countries.
With wars (e.g. 1812 USA/England) and revolutions (e.g. the American, and then French in 1789), people moved out of the objectivity of the Enlightenment into a more subjective position to express and fight for the self (personal identity or national identity - hence the revolutions). This movement of independent thought coincided with, or was itself, the Romantic era.
During this era of individualism and personal expression, many countries and regions developed literary characteristics unique to their identity. As Romanticism is connected to nature, much of this identity was also connected with it.
In the case of the United States, the Wild West, the deep South, the mountains of the East, and the unique American landscape were the backdrop for this development. Writers like Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, William Cullen Bryant, George Washington Harris and Thomas Bangs Thorpe were involved in the early stages of this identity forging.
3.1.2 Writers of Prose
Washington Irving (1783-1859)

- Involved in creating an autonomous American style about people, places and things purely American, he was the first to set this mold.
He wrote on a great range of subjects and topography. Three major topics he wrote about were New York State, Christopher Columbus and the West of America.
He is best known for his stories “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” that appear in *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (1819-1820).
In addition to this book, he wrote satirical work at the beginning of this career. He wrote the literary magazine *Salmagundi* with his brother and a colleague (1807). It was a satirical viewpoint about the life and politics of New York (it was here that he gave New York City the name “Gotham”).
• He also wrote *A History of New-York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty, by Diedrich Knickerbocker* in 1809, his first major book, which was another satirical work about New York.
Irving actually wrote it, but put up this fictitious name Knickerbocker, which helped him earn notoriety.
• Irving is also known for his work on Spain. He wrote a biography on Christopher Columbus and other books about Granada and the Alhambra. He was appointed the Minister to Spain, and spent many years there during the tumultuous 19th century on the Iberian peninsula. This left him disheartened and wishing to return home.
In addition to the biography on Columbus, Irving also wrote biographies about George Washington, Muhammad, and Oliver Goldsmith (an 18\textsuperscript{th} century Irish writer)
In the 1830s he also wrote about the American West, such as *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville* and *A Tour on the Prairies*. Some believe he wrote these in response to those who criticized his European trips and interests.
James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851)

• He wrote a lot about the West and about the Navy (he was in the Navy)

• His first work was *The Spy* (1821), about counterespionage during the Revolutionary War.
• He is most famous for his books *The Deerslayer* (1841) and *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), both of which were made movies in the 20th century (*The Deerslayer* a number of times).
• These two books appear in *The Leatherstocking Series*, a series of five historical novels about the difficulties Native Americans faced.
Lederstrumpf-Erzählungen.
George Washington Harris (1814-1869)

• An antebellum (pre – Civil war) humorist

• Wrote about life in the South
• His most famous character is “Sut Lovingood” a poorly educated Appalachian fellow who took joy in lies and tricks on others.

• Written with the characteristics of an exaggerated southern dialect.
• Influenced future writers of the South such as Mark Twain and William Faulkner
Thomas Bangs Thorpe (1815–1878)

• Another antebellum writer form the South
He is most known for his short story “The Big Bear of Arkansas” (1841). It’s about the character Jim Dogget, who hyperbolically explains the superiority of Arkansas though a series of tall tales and anecdotes.
He also wrote *The Master’s House* (1854), an anti-slavery novel. It’s not acerbic in its criticism of slavery, and may even come across as ambivalent to some readers, but it does poise itself as a milder version of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe that was published two years earlier.
3.1.3 Writers of Verse
The aforementioned authors of the new American literary identity were writers of prose.

The American public wanted representation in verse as well. The answer to this call came forth with The Fireside Poets.
The Fireside Poets (also known as the Household Poets and Schoolroom Poets) included Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, William Cullen Bryant, John Greenleaf Whittier, James Russell Lowell, and Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.
Before cable TV, social media and YouTube, and even the radio, there was a time when families and friends would sit around the fire and share in verse, thus appeared the name of this group of poets. The word “Fireside” was also used in the title of some of these poetry collections.
Despite all this talk of originality, however, some considered their style not purely autochthonous in the same regard as the aforementioned writers of prose because they were seen as a mirror of great British poets of the time, such as Shelly, Keats and Lord Byron.
However, despite similarities in form, style and meter to British poetry, the Fireside poets were extremely popular throughout the 19th century for their accessibility and thematic appeal.
The subject matter was focused on the here and now of those times. In general, the poems were about home and hearth, politics and daily life, and were written to a general audience without solipsism or esoteric significance.
Some, nevertheless, criticized the depth and scale of the quality of poems produced, and desired the writers to explore beyond the structured versification and rhythm.
Yet it was such structure that gave these poems their fame: they were relatively easy to memorize and recite, and their cadence was attractive to the ear at home as well as in school. As an example, here is the first stanza of the poem “She Came and Went” by James Russell Lowell:
As a twig trembles, which
a bird
    Lights on to sing, then
leaves unbent,
So is my memory thrilled
and stirred;—
I only know she came and
went.
William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878)

- He was one of the Fireside Poets.
- He is considered one of the first Romantic writers.
• He was also editor of *New York Evening Post* and worked in journalism for some 50 years.

• His first book of poetry was entitled *Poems* (1821).

• His poetry has been described as meditative.
His most famous poem is “Thanatopsis” (a reflection on death). In it he says that we should not fear the end, as it is a natural process of nature and of life. Here is an excerpt:
Yet not to thine eternal resting-place
Shalt thou retire alone, nor couldst thou wish
Couch more magnificent. Thou shalt lie down
With patriarchs of the infant world—with kings,
The powerful of the earth—the wise, the good,
Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past,
All in one mighty sepulchre.
Some lines from other Fireside poets:

Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.
“Daily Trials By a Sensitive Man”

Storms, thunders, waves!
Howl, crash, and bellow till ye get your fill;
Ye sometimes rest; men never can be still
But in their graves.
John Greenleaf Whittier
“Flowers in Winter”

How strange to greet, this frosty morn,
In graceful counterfeit of flower,
These children of the meadows, born
Of sunshine and of showers!
3.2 American Romanticism
3.2.1 Origins, Explanations and One Great Writer

3.2.2 Transcendentalism

3.2.3 More on the Fireside Poets
3.2.4 More Writers of Prose

3.2.5 Even More Writers of Prose

3.2.6 More Writers of Verse
3.2.1 Origins, Explanations and One Great Writer
One literary movement is a reaction to the previous one. There is a general flow of object to subject to object, and so on, in this process. Although each continent, country and region can have its own branch or characteristic division from the trunk of this artistic growth, the major flow in the West follows this pattern from the medieval times into the 20th century.
Putting ourselves on the spectrum of Romanticism, it is a subjective movement between two objective movements (the Enlightenment and Realism). Universal characteristics of Romanticism include supremacy of the individual, feeling, thought and solitude, affinity to nature and the country (reflection and non-urbanism) and personal expression and emotion over collectivism and reason.
Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

• A major American essayist, lecturer and poet
• He went to Harvard and became a Unitarian minister but he wrestled with Christianity, and with religious dogma in general. A speech he gave at Harvard Divinity School in 1838 made this apparent. This is an excerpt from his Harvard address in which places individual moral intuition above religious doctrine:
“The doctrine of the divine nature being forgotten, a sickness infects and dwarfs the constitution. Once man was all; now he is an appendage, a nuisance. And because the indwelling Supreme Spirit cannot wholly be got rid of, the doctrine of it suffers this perversion, that the divine nature is attributed to one or two persons, and denied to all the rest, and denied with fury. The doctrine of inspiration is lost; the base doctrine of the majority of voices, usurps the place of the doctrine of the soul.”
• He published *Nature* in 1836, which became the manifesto of sorts of Transcendentalism

• He supported women’s voting rights and was against slavery, but didn’t participate in group activities to this end (perhaps because of his aversion to collectivism)
• He gave some 1,500 lectures!

• He was the mentor of Henry David Thoreau

• His basic philosophy was a fusion of God (pantheistic), nature and the individual
Here is an excerpt from his poem entitled “Song of Nature”:

Mine are the night and morning,
The pits of air, the gulf of space,
The sportive sun, the gibbous moon,
The innumerable days.

I hid in the solar glory,
I am dumb in the pealing song,
I rest on the pitch of the torrent,
In slumber I am strong.
3.2.2 Transcendentalism
So what is Transcendentalism?

• A movement within Romanticism spearheaded by Ralph Waldo Emerson

• Influenced by Immanuel Kant (German) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (English)
• It was about how individuals should “move beyond” collective thought found in dogmas and doctrines and look within themselves for spirituality.
• The connection with the divine in nature, individual reflection and non-attachment are important
Other transcendentalist writers were Thoreau, Margaret Fuller and Bronson Alcott. They would get together and discuss ideas.
• Non-conformity, reliance on intuition, autonomy of individual spirit and the fomentation of creativity

• The perils of collective reason and restrictions of institutional falsities
The general idea is to detach through nature and meditation, find the inner self, and approach a higher interconnectivity and awareness.

People are inherently good.
• Independence of thought and separation from the constraints of past empirical ways of thinking

• There was even a Transcendental Club and a journal about the movement, *The Dial*
THE GREAT LAWSUIT.

MAN versus MEN. WOMAN versus WOMEN.

This great suit has now been carried on through many ages, with various results. The decisions have been numerous, but always followed by appeals to still higher courts. How can it be otherwise, when the law itself is the subject of frequent elucidation, constant revision? Man has, now and then, enjoyed a clear, triumphant hour, when some irresistible conviction warmed and purified the atmosphere of his planet. But, presently, he sought repose after his labors, when the crowd of pigmy adversaries bound him in his sleep. Long years of inglorious imprisonment followed, while his enemies revelled in his spoils, and no counsel could be found to plead his cause, in the absence of that all-promising glance, which had, at times, kindled the poetic soul to revelation of his claims, of his rights.

Yet a foundation for the largest claim is now established.
Margaret Fuller
(1810-1850)

• Involved in the Transcendental Club

• Well known for her work on women’s rights
• She was an educator in Providence, RI and Boston, MA. At this time she developed her ideas on gender, that roles are learned and not innate.
• She organized discussion groups for women, and eventually put together *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) her major work.
• She worked for the *New York Tribune* and was sent abroad. She married an Italian revolutionary. On their way back to America they died in 1850 when their boat sank. In that accident, she lost an important manuscript on Italy.
Woman in the Nineteenth Century (excerpt)

I solicit of women that they will say it to heart to ascertain what is for them the liberty of law. It is for this, and not for any, the largest, extension of partial privileges that I seek. I ask them, if interested by these suggestions, to search their own experience and intuitions for better, and fill up with fit materials the trenches that hedge them in. From men I ask a noble and earnest attention to anything that can be offered on this great and still obscure subject, such as I have met from many with whom I stand in private relations.
Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

• Fellow transcendentalist with Emerson and major contributor to American letters

• His two most famous works are *Walden* (1854) and *Civil Disobedience* (1848).
Walden (1854)

- Thoreau went into the woods to live with nature. It was on property owned by Emerson. There, he wrote his most famous work, *Walden*. It's a series of reflections on society and the self meant to provoke thought in readers about their own existential state of affairs and choices in life.
• It was well received by readers and catapulted him into fame.

• It’s a mélange of essays and reflections and is categorically hard to place as a genre.
• He puts into practice and further meditates on many of the ideas of Emerson: connection with nature, autonomous spiritualism, etc., and moves beyond that to encompass frugality, separation not only from dogma (Emerson) but also the immediate society around him in which its idea of development (urbanism, materialism) is a bifurcation from development of the self.

• Here is the beginning of *Walden*:
“At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be indefinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of nature”
“I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.”
“In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat Geeta, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial; and I doubt if that philosophy is not to be referred to a previous state of existence, so remote is its sublimity from our conceptions.”
Civil Disobedience (1848)

• Wanting to practice what he preached, Thoreau stopped paying taxes and landed in jail one night for it.
• After this, he developed non-anarchistic ideas on how to protest without compromising one’s position in society, thus penning the seemingly oxymoronic term (to some), “civil disobedience”.

• This was inspiration for the political ideologies of Ghandi and MLK, Jr.
Civil Disobedience (1848)

“If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go...if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine.”
3.2.3 More on the Fireside Poets
John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892)

- One of the Fireside Poets (we saw a poem of his before)
- In addition, he wrote poems against slavery.
Criticized by some for his “instructive” and “sermon-like” style

Categorically under Romanticism for the characteristics he shared with the movement: nature, the individual, reform, nostalgia, etc.
• Whittier was a Quaker, and many of his poems have a religious focus. Some 100 poems of his are now hymns sung in many churches.

• An example of abolitionist poetry can be seen in “Song of the Negro Boatman”, written to imitate diatopic phonetics of the period. Here was have an excerpt:
Oh nebber you fear, if nebber you hear
De driver blow his horn!
We pray de Lord: he gib us signs
Dat some clay we be free;
De norf-wind tell it to de pines,
De wild-duck to de sea;
We tink it when de church-bell ring,
We dream it in de dream;
De rice-bird mean it when he sing,
De eagle when he scream.
De yam will grow, de cotton blow,
We'll hab de rice an' corn:
An excerpt from a famous poem of his entitled “Snow-Bound”

Unwarmed by any sunset light
The gray day darkened into night,
A night made hoary with the swarm
And whirl-dance of the blinding storm,
As zigzag, wavering to and fro,
Crossed and recrossed the wingëd snow:
And ere the early bedtime came
The white drift piled the window-frame,
An excerpt from another poem, “The Eternal Goodness”:

Who fathoms the Eternal Thought?
Who talks of scheme and plan?
The Lord is God! He needeth not
The poor device of man.

I walk with bare, hushed feet the ground
Ye tread with boldness shod;
I dare not fix with mete and bound
The love and power of God.
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)

• The most well known of the Fireside Poets

• He translated the first American version of Dante’s *The Divine Comedy.*
Amongst his more famous works are The Song of Hiawatha (1855), an epic poem about the Ojibway Indians and their adaptation to the dominant, colonial presence; “Paul Revere’s Ride” (1860) is an (historically inaccurate) recounting of the patriot’s famous ride; and Evangeline (1847) is a story in verse about an Acadian youth named Evangeline who searches for her lost love during the Expulsion of the Acadians (1755-1764).
3.2.4 More Writers of Prose
Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864)

- Son of one of the judges of the Salem witch trials (the only unrepentant one).
- Joined the transcendentalist community Brook Farm, but then became skeptical of transcendentalism.
• He published *Twice-Told Tales* in 1837, a collection of short stories previously published in newspapers. He published other collections of short stories also.
• He wrote about New England Puritanism, as can be seen in his most well-known novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, published in 1850.
• Other famous works of his are *The House of Seven Gables* (1851), *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), in which he criticized the life of transcendentalism like he saw in Brook Farm, and *The Marble Faun* (1860), a romance mix of different genres: gothic, travel guide, fable.
• His disillusionment with transcendentalist thought is akin to the overall reserve he had about ascribing to a particular doctrine, thus the ambiguity of interpretation in some of his novels, as in *The Blithedale Romance*. 
• His use of allegory (when the characters represent abstract concepts) and metaphor are important.
Some of his more famous short stories are: “Young Goodman Brown”, “The Birth-Mark”, “Ethan Brand” and “The Minister’s Black Veil”.
Although the backdrop to his novels is Puritan New England, there is criticism of Puritanism, as can be seen in many of his works.

- Dark Romanticism
The House of Seven Gables

• The novel is inspired by an actual house in Salem, MA that belonged to Hawthorne’s cousin
• The story is about a house built by Colonel Pyncheon on the same plot where Mathew Maule, an individual sentenced by Pyncheon, curses the house, which has tragic consequences the generations.
Years later is when the novel transpires and how a Hepzibah Pyncheon tries to support her brother, Clifford, after he got out of prison for the murder of his uncle.
• He was framed by judge Jaffrey Pyncheon, who torments and threatens the siblings out of greed. He dies mysteriously also (like the colonel) and eventually the siblings inherit his estate and move out of the house.
• There are other characters, such as Phoebe, who has a romantic interest in Holgrage, and so on.
The book is a social commentary on the haughty pretensions of people in power like the colonel and the judge, and how they veered from traditional Puritan thought for personal gain.
The Scarlet Letter

- It takes place in Puritan New England in the 17th century

- Hester Prynne has a baby (named Pearl) out of wedlock and has to wear an “A” on her front. She won’t reveal who the father of the child is.
• Arthur Dimmesdale, who is Pearl’s father, suffers from guilt and whips himself daily.

• Hester’s husband, Roger Chillingworth, returns and discovers all
The three (Chillingworth excluded) want to flee, but Dimmesdale dies after confession to the congregation, then Chillingworth dies, Pearl marries well, and Hester stays in the cottage for the rest of her life. She is buried next to Dimmesdale with an “A” above their gravesite.
Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

- Writer of fiction, poetry, and literary criticism
- Known best for his Gothic short stories
- He is believed to be the inventor of the detective story, and influential in science fiction
• When he was in his upper 20s he married a cousin of his that was 13 (in 1836). She died a couple years after of tuberculosis.
A writer that tried to make his writing his style of living, but considering his style of writing, this was dangerous. He died as mysteriously as he lived: he was found dead on a street in Baltimore.
One of the most influential writers of the 19th century, he influenced generations of writers around the world: Faulkner, Baudelaire, Dostoyevski, Kafka, Darío, Maupassant, Borges, Cortázar, and obviously writes of mystery and horror like Lovecraft and Arthur Conan Doyle.
• His most famous poem is “The Raven”
• It’s a narrative poem about a Raven’s midnight visit to a distressed lover and how this lover slowly loses his wits thinking about his lost love, Lenore.
• It has supernatural, mythological, classical and religious elements about it.

• The constant repetition of the Raven saying “Nevermore” when the narrator asks it questions is staple in its meaning.
• The narrator wants the Raven to leave but it doesn’t move from where it is posed, and the narrator concludes his own soul is trapped there forever:
And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
   And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon’s that is dreaming,
   And the lamp-light o’er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
   And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
   Shall be lifted—nevermore!
Some of the short stories that are must-reads are (you may already be familiar with some of them):

“The Cask of Amontillado”
“The Tell-Tale Heart”
“The Fall of the House of Usher”
“The Murders in the Rue Morgue”
“The Black Cat”
“The Pit and the Pendulum”
• Poe is also known for his work as a literary critic. He wrote a popular essay entitled “The Philosophy of Composition”, which is sometimes cited and used in classes.
One of the more famous things he has said is that art should be enjoyed on one sitting. This might explain his love writing short stories.
3.2.5 Even More Writers of Prose
Herman Melville
(1819-1891)

• Writer of novels, short stories, essays and poetry

• Darker style of Romanticism
• Use of metaphors, imagery and symbols

• Dense Baroque style

• Allusions to religion, mythology, literature, etc.
In his youth, he worked as a sailor. Many of his works reflect his time at sea.

*Typee* (1846), his first novel, is a travel narrative about the South Pacific.

*Moby Dick* (1851), his most well-known novel, is about a whaling crew’s failed experience at sea.
Typee

• An adventure novel that takes place in Polynesia, loosely based on his own experiences.

• It recounts the experiences of the narrator, Tommo, and his shipmate, Toby, as they live among a group of cannibals.
• It shows sympathy toward the natives, somewhat along the lines of the myth of the noble savage.
Moby Dick

- Considered Melville’s masterpiece.
- Dedicated it Nathaniel Hawthorne
- Partially inspired by a real whale, Mocha Dick
• A novel that describes whaling life

• References to the Bible and Shakespeare

• Some themes in the novel are religion, revenge, literature, fate and free will.
Ishmael is the narrator of the story. He travels with Captain Ahab aboard the whaling ship Pequod to hunt a white sperm whale named Moby Dick. The diverse crew also includes Queequeg, from Polynesia, and Starbuck, the first mate. They all perish in the hunt except for Ishmael, who lives to tell the tale.
“Call me Ishmael. Some years ago—never mind how long precisely—having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen and regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet;...”
Other important works by Melville include a series of short stories in *The Piazza Tales*, particularly "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1853), *The Encantadas* (1854), and *Benito Cereno* (1855).
"Bartleby, the Scrivener" is narrated by a lawyer who hires Bartleby to accompany his existing workers, Nippers and Turkey. Productive at first, Bartleby eventually does nothing and responds to all requests as “I would prefer not to”. Bartleby in the end dies of starvation in jail. It was revealed he worked in the dead letter office before that job. The story is about depression, isolation, and the work place.
The Encantadas

- A novella broken into ten parts or “sketches”

- It is a philosophical look at the Galapagos Islands off of Ecuador.
• It describes the desolate nature of the islands and some of their history, and, through some narrative sequences, how it affects humans that happen upon these cruel and isolated islands.
Benito Cereno

• It is about mutiny aboard a Spanish slave ship.

• Amassa Delano narrates the odd situation on board Captain Benito Cereno’s vessel, the San Dominick.

• The slaves roam freely on deck and the Spaniards are reclusive.
• The captain is followed by Babo, his servant, who, when it is revealed in the end, is actually the leader of the revolt and is making Benito take the slaves back to Africa.

• The novella is a criticism of the American slave trade.
Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896)

• She was a school teacher in CT, an abolitionist

• The most famous is *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1851)
In 1853 she published *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, with real-life stories on which her fictional characters were based.

She published subsequent antislavery novels: *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (1856) and *The Minister’s Wooing* (1859).
*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

- Sold about 300,000 copies in the first year in the US, and a million in Great Britain
- The most popular novel of the 19th century
• A sentimental novel (rely on emotions in the characters and readers)
• Denounces the evils of slavery
• Other themes are Christianity and motherhood
• At the time, the novel was criticized by some Southerners as overly-exaggerating slave life on plantations

• Abolitionists criticized the ending when some of her characters decided to immigrate back to Africa.

• Modern interpretations vary
Frederick Douglass (1818-1895)

• African American abolitionist author and orator.

• His autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) is his most famous work.
Some of his other works are *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) and the novella, *The Heroic Slave* (1853), among others.
Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave

• The most famous in the slave narratives written of the 19th century

• A very influential work of the abolitionist movement
• Written to educate people on the hypocrisies and inhumanity of slave ownership.

• People were impressed at his perception and insight, all which were reinforced in the speeches that he gave.
3.2.6 More Writers of Verse
Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

• A New Yorker in spirit and heart, he was the poet for all Americans
• A superlative of his time
• Niched between transcendentalism and realism
• The father of free verse
Leaves of Grass is his main work (1855, plus multiple subsequent revisions). Some later revisions considered controversial.

Later, a writer for the Civil War and admirer of Lincoln
Walt Whitman Style

• A deist at heart, had a pantheistic view on the world. Influenced by transcendentalism

• Subjectivism evident in 1st person voice and reflections on the self. This is the Romantic influence in him.
• Objectivism evident in the social awareness and universal voice in his poetry. This is the philosophical realist influence in him.
Like Poe, a very influential writer for future minds such as Wallace Stevens, T.S. Eliot, Fernando Pessoa, Federico García Lorca, Hart Crane, Jorge Luis Borges, Pablo Neruda, Ernesto Cardenal, Allen Ginsberg.
“A Song to Myself” (excerpt)

I CELEBRATE myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good
belongs to you.

I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a
spear of summer grass.
My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil,
   this air,
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and
   their parents the same,
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
Hoping to cease not till death.
“Beat! Beat! Drums!” (excerpt)

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!
Through the windows—through doors—burst like a ruthless force,
Into the solemn church, and scatter the congregation,
Into the school where the scholar is studying,
Leave not the bridegroom quiet—no happiness must he have now with his bride, Nor the peaceful farmer any peace, ploughing his field or gathering his grain, So fierce you whirr and pound you drums—so shrill you bugles blow.
“I Hear America Singing” (entire poem)

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,  
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,  
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,  
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,  
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat,  
the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,  
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
The wood-cutter’s song, the ploughboy’s on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown, The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing, Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else, The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly, Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.
Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911)

• An African-American abolitionist known for her poetry.

• Many of her themes were taken from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*
• Fought for the rights of African Americans and women

• Her poems are inspirational and a voice for the African American experience in America
“Eliza Harris” (excerpt)

Like a fawn from the arrow, startled and wild,
A woman swept by us, bearing a child;
In her eye was the night of a settled despair,
And her brow was o’ershaded with anguish and care.

She was nearing the river—in reaching the brink,
She heeded no danger, she paused not to think!
For she is a mother—her child is a slave—
And she’ll give him his freedom, or find him a grave!
Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

• A reclusive person
• Wrote some 1,800 poems in her life
• Not recognized in life
• Now considered one the Great American poets of all time
• Her style is unique: use of capital words, dashes and spaces, half rhymes, lack of titles, short lines, etc.

• Her themes surround death, nature, the self, poetry, and immortality.
Poem 479 (excerpt)

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 –
Poem 359 (excerpt)

A Bird, came down the Walk -
He did not know I saw -
He bit an Angle Worm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw,

And then, he drank a Dew
From a convenient Grass -
And then hopped sidewise to the Wall
To let a Beetle pass -