The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century, 1660-1785

- The Restoration period begins in 1660, the year in which King Charles II (the exiled Stuart king) was restored to the English throne.
- England, Scotland, and Wales were united as Great Britain by the 1707 Act of Union.
- The period is one of increasing commercial prosperity and global trade for Britain.
- Literacy expanded to include the middle classes and even some of the poor.
- Emerging social ideas included politeness—a behavioral standard to which anyone might aspire—and new rhetoric of liberty and rights, sentiment and sympathy.

The Context of Ideas
- King Charles II authorized two new companies of actors. Women began to appear on stage in female roles.
- Writers (including women) began to advocate for improved education for women during this period.
- Increased importance was placed on the private, individual life, as is evident in literary forms such as diaries, letters, and the novel.

Conditions of Literary Production
- Copyrights were typically held by booksellers.
- Thanks to greatly increased literacy rates (by 1800, 60-70 percent of adult men could read, versus 25 percent in 1600), the eighteenth century was the first to sustain a large number of professional authors.
- Reading material, though it remained unaffordable to the laboring classes, was frequently shared. Circulating libraries began in the 1740s.

Literary Principles
- Literature from 1660 to 1785 divides into three shorter periods of 40 years each, which can be characterized as shown below.
  - 1660-1700 (death of John Dryden): emphasis on "decorum," or critical principles based on what is elegant, fit, and right.
  - 1700-1745 emphasis on satire and on a wider public readership.
  - 1745-1784 emphasis on revolutionary ideas.

Restoration Literature, 1600-1700
- Dryden was the most influential writer of the Restoration, for he wrote in every form important to the period—occasional verse, comedy, tragedy, heroic plays, odes, satires, translations of classical works—and produced influential critical essays concerning how one ought to write these forms.
- Simultaneously, Restoration literature continued to appeal to heroic ideals of love and honor, particularly on stage, in heroic tragedy.

Eighteenth-Century Literature, 1700-1745
- The Augustan era of writers like Swift, Defoe, Pope, Addison, and Steele was rich in satire and new prose forms that blended fact and fiction, such as news, criminal biographies, travelogues, political allegories, and romantic tales.
- Early eighteenth-century drama saw the development of "sentimental comedy" in which goodness and high moral sentiments are emphasized, and the audience is moved not only to laughter, but also to sympathetic tears.

The Emergence of New Literary Themes and Modes, 1740-1785
- Novelists became better known than poets, and intellectual prose forms such as the essay proliferated.
- Late eighteenth-century poetry tends to emphasize melancholy, isolation, and reflection, in distinction to the intensely social, often satirical verse of earlier in the period.