

Literature Institute

Study Guide

LIT 551 American Literature

Instructions for the Study Guide: Please use the questions to develop a deeper understanding of the text and to review the concepts. As you read, consider the questions. Keeping careful notes or a journal will help you prepare to write the essays at the end of each section as well as the final essay. Your required and supplemental readings can be found in the "Readings" file.

Instructions for Essays: Please write a 1,250 – 1,500 word essay that responds to the essay questions. Then, send your essay to your professor. You may send an outline and drafts to your instructor for feedback and guidance before you send your finished essay.

Instructions for Final Essay: Please write a 5,000 word essay that responds to the essay questions. Then, send your essay to your professor. You may send an outline and drafts to your instructor for feedback and guidance before you send your finished essay.

Required Texts

Bedford Anthology of American Literature. Volume One: Beginnings to 1865. Ed. Susan Belasco and Linck Johnson. NY: Bedford-St. Martins, 2008.

Bedford Anthology of American Literature. Volume Two: 1865 to the Present. Ed. Susan Belasco and Linck Johnson. NY: Bedford-St. Martins, 2008.

Supplemental Reading is optional and is indicated by shading.

UNIT/ WEEKS	WORK	INTRODUCTION
I		Colonial Literature (to 1750)
Overview	Colonial Literature	<p>The arrival of Europeans to North America precipitated a number of different types of writings. For some, the goal was to document encounters and discoveries of people, resources, flora, fauna, and geography. Others had a religious or ideological agenda, and their focus tended to be on the people they encountered, with a goal to "converting" them.</p> <p>The oral literature of Native Americans includes poems, songs, and stories, many of which existed centuries before the arrival of the earliest European explorers in the late-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Although the Europeans could not comprehend the language or the customs and culture, the Native American societies they encountered had long, dynamic, and complex histories. Slave narratives were written by people who came to America against their will, and thus had a different tone and perspective.</p> <p>Some colonists employed narratives to develop a sense of cohesion through a shared belief system that engendered a sense of urgency, as well as destiny.</p>
Bradford	<i>Of Plimoth Plantation</i>	<p>William Bradford was born in March 1590 in Austerfield, a town in Yorkshire, northern England to prosperous farmers. For most of his adult life, Bradford devoted himself to the interests of the "Pilgrims," as he called members of the devout group of Separatists. They established a colony in Massachusetts in 1620, and endured many difficulties.</p> <p>"Of Plimoth Plantation" was written over period of twenty years. He wrote the first ten chapters in 1630, at the beginning of the Great Migration, during which thousands of Puritans emigrated to New England, primarily to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Bradford writes of the smaller Plimoth Colony, with the goal of preserving the history, with the original</p>

goals, intentions, and more.

The exploration and colonization of the Americas was spurred and widely publicized by the emerging print culture of Europe. Travel literature became popular, and many explorers used the power of the printed word to bring to prominence their "discoveries." It is important to keep in mind that narratives that often appear to be simply factual, firsthand accounts of what the European explorers observed and experienced were complicated by a number of factors, and were often influenced by ancient epics and medieval romances, as well as popular books like Mandeville's *Travels*, with imaginary descriptions of the wonders of the East. (p. 61-65)

Bradstreet		Poems
II		Revolution and Republic (1750-1830)
Overview	Early American Literature	<p>Explorers in America often thought of themselves as pioneers embarking on a re-animated version of a Homeric quest, to return home the conquering warrior, or the person who has established new cities and civilizations of untold wealth. A legacy of this mindset is the way that Americans privilege words such as "discovery," "pioneer" and "new frontiers," which connotes a variant of the hero's quest.</p> <p>The Europeans who had settled in North America and had willingly maintained a role as a colony of England in order to maintain trade relations and to obtain protection from threats from other European nations' forces and from the Native Americans they had displaced, were increasingly seeing their relationship with England as destructive. They advocated separation. As a result, pamphlets, treatises, and other documents were printed and widely published.</p> <p>The nation was in the process of self-invention, and, correspondingly, the individuals involved in the construction of the ideal also looked inward and looked at how their own lives interwove with the larger endeavor. Many authors took the opportunity to maintain journals and to introspect and to organize their thoughts, while finding causalities and correspondences between the new, emerging political ideas and their own growth as individuals. This is not to say that all personal writings were so lofty. Some liked to recount their daily routines and become intriguing (and often humorous) snapshots of life in North America.</p>
Franklin	Autobiography	<p>Benjamin Franklin in Boston on January 17, 1706, to a successful soapmaker. After receiving an education in Boston, he was apprenticed to his half-brother, who ran a print shop and who published a successful newspaper. While apprenticed, Benjamin Franklin began to submit anonymous columns to the newspaper, adopting the persona of "Silence Dogood," the independent-minded widow of a country minister. Discovery meant a tremendous clash, and a turning point in Franklin's life. At age 17, he ran away to Philadelphia, where he met with great success. In 1748, Franklin sold his business and dedicated himself to scientific observation and public service. (p. 340-343).</p> <p><i>The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin</i> was published after his death and contains four different volumes, each covering a different stage of his life.</p>
Irving	The Sketch Book	<p>Washington Irving was born in New York City on April 3, 1783. He was fascinated by letters, literature, and history. He is best known for his <i>Sketch Book</i> and <i>The Legend of Sleepy Hollow</i> and <i>The Return of Rip Van Winkle</i>. In addition to fiction, Irving wrote about the western territories, including Oregon, Oklahoma, and Arkansas.</p> <p><i>The Sketch Book</i> is a collection of essays, sketches, and tales written largely in England and in the United States. Influenced by German folk tales, the tales are humorous, satirical, and very insightful. They are</p>

written in the persona of Geoffrey Crayon, a dilettante and writer from the United States living in England

Ashbridge	<i>Some Account of the Fore Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge</i>
Equiano	<i>The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, the African</i>
Wheatley	<i>Poems</i>
Sedgwick	<i>Cacoethes Scribendi</i>

III Romanticism (1830-1865)

Overview American Renaissance (1830-1865) American literature in the early nineteenth century privileged authors who were able to capture the emerging spirit of America and give it voice through enacting the kinds of experiences and relationships that one might have in a society that was increasingly mobile, and yet increasing uncomfortable with itself as the rate of social and technological change began to accelerate.

Tensions between an agrarian and an industrial society gave rise to imaginative enactments in fiction that often resulted in either a protagonist who went far beyond what was prudent, or whose focus became increasingly inward, resulting in a tight, claustrophobic existence.

In the early 19th century, the concept of "Manifest Destiny" began to shape American policy. Manifest Destiny, which holds that Americans were chosen by destiny to take the American continent and use it to put in place a great new experiment which was expressed by various American documents. This resulted in a sense of euphoric entitlement for some members of American society. For others, however, it was not so positive. Instead of feeling liberated, they felt engulfed.

Much of the literature reflected the desire to reform society and to created an ideal world. Reformers sought to improve working and living conditions, and to improve access to education.

Emerson ***Selected Essays*** Few individuals have had as great an influence on American literature as Ralph Waldo Emerson. Born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1803, Emerson attended Harvard College and Divinity School and embarked on a career as a Unitarian minister. This career came to an end when his increasingly radical religious beliefs put him at odds with his church. The rest of his life was largely devoted to literary and philosophical pursuits. He died in 1882 in Concord, Massachusetts, where he had lived for nearly fifty years. (Source: Introduction To Literature Resource Center)

As one of the leaders of what is known as the Transcendentalist movement, Emerson advocated for a literature that was more distinctively American and less influenced by the European past. He was one of the thinkers who introduced Eastern spiritual ideas to an America readership, and his writings on the sacredness of nature have helped shape America's understanding of its natural landscape. Poems such as "Concord Hymn," "The Rhodora," and "The Snow-Storm" are American classics. (Source: Introduction To Literature Resource Center)

Early Nineteenth-Century Autobiography

Douglass ***Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass***

Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), American author, abolitionist, and lecturer wrote three autobiographies during his life-time; A Narrative on the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave (1845), My Bondage and My Freedom (1855), and Life and Times of Frederick Douglass (1881).

Despite concern that the information might endanger his freedom, in 1845 Douglass published his autobiography, ***Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written By Himself***. Three years later, after a speaking tour of England, Ireland, and Scotland, Douglass published the first issue of the North Star, a four-page weekly, out of Rochester, New York.

Thoreau ***Walden***

Early Nineteenth-Century Fiction

Hawthorne ***The Scarlet Letter***

The Scarlet Letter author **Nathaniel Hawthorne** was born on July 4, 1804 in Salem, Massachusetts. Hawthorne's childhood was marred by the tragic death of his father, and Hawthorne, his mother, and his siblings moved to Maine to reside with relatives. Supported by his uncle, Hawthorne attended Bowdoin College in Maine and graduated in 1825. After graduation, Hawthorne returned to Salem where he spent twelve years as a literary apprentice. He self-published his first novel, Fanshawe (1828), but later confiscated and burned all printed copies. Hawthorne was happier with his following literary efforts, and he began publishing short stories in 1830. (Source: Introduction to Literature Resource Center)

In 1836, Hawthorne moved to Boston where he and his sister began writing children's books. He continued to publish short stories, but took various jobs such as weigher and surveyor in order to support himself financially. These jobs took a toll on his writing career, and after marrying in 1842, Hawthorne moved to Concord where he associated with Transcendentalists Thoreau, Emerson, and Alcott, yet after only three years, the Hawthorne family returned to Salem. Hawthorne was maturing as a writer and published the now classic ***The Scarlet Letter*** in 1850. Like most of his previous writings, Hawthorne's second novel explored the themes of sin, guilt, and forgiveness through the use of symbolism. Though he continued to publish novels and short stories, none of Hawthorne's succeeding works surpassed *The Scarlet Letter* in critical acclaim. He died on May 19, 1864 in Plymouth, New Hampshire, leaving behind three unfinished works. (Source: Introduction to Literature Resource Center)

Poe ***Fall of the House of Usher***

Melville ***Bartleby, The Scrivener***

Alcott ***The Brothers***

Early 19th-century Poetry

Whitman ***Song of Myself***

Walt Whitman is often regarded as the most "American" of poets, since both his subject matter and his verse style were shaped by his views of his country and its potential. Born on Long Island, New York, in 1819, Whitman became first a printer, then a teacher, a journalist, and finally an editor. In 1855 he published *Leaves of Grass*, the book of poems that he would revise and add to for the rest of his life. He died in Camden, New Jersey, in 1892. (source: Intro to Literature Resource Center)

Song of Myself is the most famous of Whitman's works and was one of the original twelve pieces in the 1855 first edition of ***Leaves of Grass***. Like most of the other poems, it too was revised extensively, reaching its final

version in 1881. "Song of Myself" is an expansive blend of biography, sermon, and poetic meditation. Whitman's expansiveness could be seen to reflect the concept of Manifest Destiny. Likewise, Emerson's essay, "Circles" could be viewed as an expression of a belief in the power of the mind to achieve unity between people, or, conversely, to engulf. In the process, both Whitman and Emerson map the extent of the "American Self." The American Self is vast, all-encompassing and achieves unity with the divine. In response, literature begins to reflect a horror of engulfment by an ideology or mindset that invades and possesses. Given that, one can claim that the American psyche in the early days of the country is very outgoing and positive, but there is definitely a dark or "gothic" side.

Dickenson	<i>Poems</i>	
IV Realism (1865-1914)		
Overview	American Realism	<p>The "get rich quick" narrative is classic in American literature. "Getting rich quick" is an underpinning of many of the narratives that lured individuals to American, and then into high-risk, high-reward endeavors, or even into a life of crime, which would include the gangster or the outlaw as depicted in American fiction. Authors include Mark Twain, Herman Melville.</p> <p>How do some writers ironize or parody the belief that it is possible to get rich quick? How do their narratives question the very foundation or basis of the beliefs that would make a "get rich quick" scheme possible in the first place? What are the connections between people who believe in the idea of "get rich quick" and those who prey upon them – the con artists, the scam artists, grifters, and opportunists?</p>
Twain	<i>Life on the Mississippi</i>	<p>Samuel Clemens, better known as Mark Twain, was born in 1835 in Florida, Missouri and grew up on the Mississippi River in Hannibal, Missouri. After his father died, Clemens was forced to leave school to help support his mother and siblings. Although he was only twelve years old, Clemens began working for a local printer, a job that greatly shaped his future career. Despite his lack of formal education, Clemens' various jobs and travels provided him with a vast array of knowledge and skills, and he referred to his journeys along the Mississippi River as his "university." Clemens received honorary master's and doctoral degrees from Yale University (1888, 1901), University of Missouri (1902), and Oxford University (1907). (Source: Introduction to Literature Resource Center)</p> <p><i>Life on the Mississippi</i> is an autobiographical account of Mark Twain's life working on a steamship on the Mississippi. His record is a valuable historical and cultural document, which chronicles a unique time in American history.</p>
James	<i>Daisy Miller</i>	<p>Henry James was American novelist and, as a naturalized English citizen from 1915, a great figure in the transatlantic culture. His fundamental theme was the innocence and exuberance of the New World in clash with the corruption and wisdom of the Old, as illustrated in such works as <i>Daisy Miller</i> (1879), <i>The Portrait of a Lady</i> (1881), <i>The Bostonians</i> (1886), and <i>The Ambassadors</i> (1903).</p>
Chopin	<i>At the 'Cadian Ball</i>	<p>Kate Chopin was American novelist and short-story writer known as an interpreter of New Orleans culture. There was a revival of interest in Chopin in the late 20th century because her concerns about the freedom of women foreshadowed later feminist literary themes.</p>
Wharton	<i>The Other Two</i>	
Crane	<i>The Open Boat</i>	
London	<i>The Law of Life</i>	

V**Modernism (1914-1945)**

Overview

American
Modernism

The 1913 Armory Show in New York City provided a venue and an audience for a new aesthetic in art and photography – one which countered old ideas about representational art, or art created with the idea of reinforcing the dignity of the aristocracy or landed gentry. Abstract art was viewed as a brave, new way to liberate individuals from the tyranny of class, hierarchy, and history. Part of the energy was expressed in Italy in works such as Marinetti's "Futurist Manifesto" in which he described a new art that would help reshape the world. The writers who returned from Europe after WWI were largely discouraged and disenchanting. Although the goal of dethroning the monarchy had succeeded, replacing monarchies with other forms of government (socialism, communism), had resulted in a heavy toll on human life and enterprise.

Modern American Poetry

Eliot**Selected Works**

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1888, **Thomas Stearns (T. S.) Eliot** moved first to Boston, Massachusetts, where he attended Harvard University, and then (after a time on the European continent) to England, where he lived until his death in 1965. His life was a series of apparent contradictions: arguably the most influential American poet of the twentieth century, he became a British citizen; a conservative in religion and politics, he produced some of the most revolutionary work of the modern age. (Source: Introduction to Literature Resource Center)

Eliot viewed the modern world as fragmented and ruined, and his poetry is in many respects an attempt to recognize this problem and to deal with it in some way. His long poem ***The Wasteland*** (1922), for example, uses fragments, quotations from older literature, and bits of popular songs to give a sense of the chaos he saw overtaking Europe. The height of Eliot's critical reputation came in the 1940s, when he published his last major work, *The Four Quartets*, and received the Nobel Prize in Literature. In addition to his poetry, he was also an influential literary critic and dramatist. (Source: Introduction to Literature Resource Center)

What does the structure of T. S. Eliot's work show us about fragmentation and chaos? How does it contrast with Hemingway? Are both considered minimalism? What does minimalism suggest about the psychological state of the thing being depicted?

Frost**Poems**

Robert Frost's poetry provides an example of how literature linked to a given region can appeal to an entire nation. Though born in San Francisco, California, in 1874, Frost located most of his poems in New England, where he grew up. Critical and popular acclaim came slowly to Frost, who taught and farmed to make ends meet while writing on the side. In 1912, Frost moved with his family to England, where he devoted himself full time to writing. By the time he died in 1963, Robert Frost was the most popular poet in America and had been awarded the Pulitzer Prize four times.

Stevens**Poems****Williams****Poems****Pound****Poems****Hughes****Poems**

Modern American Drama

O'Neill***The Emperor Jones***

Modern American Fiction

Fitzgerald *The Great Gatsby* **F. Scott Fitzgerald** (born Sept. 24, 1896, St. Paul, Minn., U.S.—died Dec. 21, 1940, Hollywood, Calif) was an American short-story writer and novelist famous for his depictions of the Jazz Age (the 1920s), his most brilliant novel being *The Great Gatsby* (1925). His private life, with his wife, Zelda, in both America and France, became almost as celebrated as his novels

The Great Gatsby examines the dark side of The American Dream – windfall earnings, fast cars, fast women, and a nouveau riche lifestyle to interrogate the material achievement, and to view it within a primarily nihilistic prism.

Porter	<i>Flowering Judas</i>
Toomer	<i>Cane</i>
Wright	<i>Almos' a Man</i>

VI Contemporary Literature (1945 – present)

Overview Contemporary Literature Literature in the post WWI era encouraged individuals to take political action to change working and living conditions. The people who had been marginalized were given voice. Women and African-Americans were depicted in works that brought the realities of their situation to the surface, and they revealed what had long been hidden.

Many narratives show the world to be in chaos following WWI due to nuclear conflagration and the emergence of the Cold War.

Postmodernism rejected the orderly, yet bleak, world of causality and grand-scale objectivity of modernism. It posited the following: 1. identity is multiple; 2. teleology is suspect; 3. reality is a construct; 4. causality breaks down to a world of random, aleatory chance; 5. "truth" is socially determined.

Contemporary Poetry

Bishop *Poems* Born in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1911, **Elizabeth Bishop** was one of the most important American poets of the post-World War II era. Her father died when she was very young and her mother was confined to a mental institution, so Bishop lived with sympathetic relatives until she went away to school. She worked for most of her life as a freelance writer and teacher. She died in Boston, of a stroke, in 1979.

Ginsberg *Howl*

Berryman	<i>The Dream Songs</i>
Brooks	<i>A Street in Bronzeville</i>
Ashbery	<i>Poems</i>

Contemporary Drama

Miller *Death of a Salesman* **Arthur Miller** is widely recognized as one of the preeminent twentieth-century American playwrights. He was born in 1915 in New York City, New York . Miller began playwriting while at the University of Michigan and had early critical success winning the university's prestigious Avery Hopwood Award for his plays in both 1936 and 1937. He received his A.B. in 1938. Miller died in 2005. (Source: Introduction to Literature Resource Center)

Some of Miller's best-known plays include *All My Sons* (1947), *Death of a Salesman* (1949), and *The Crucible* (1953). In 1999, *Death of a Salesman* won a Tony Award for Best Revival. (Source: Introduction to Literature

