Periods in American Literature
Literature reflects the culture of society.
Overview of Periods

• Native American
• Colonial (Puritan/Planter)
• Age of Reason
• Romanticism
• Transcendentalism
• Realism
• Naturalism (overlaps Realism)
• Modernism/ Harlem Renaissance
• Post-Modernism
Each period is a reaction/response to the previous period.
Native American Period

• ?- 1600’s
• No system of writing until early settlers arrive
• Origin myths
Colonial (Puritan/Planter) Period

- 1650’s - 1750’s
- Genre/Style:
  - Sermons
  - Diaries
  - Personal Narratives
- Effect:
  - Instructive
  - Bible is THE authority

*Historical Context:*
- Fate is determined by God
- Everyone corrupt & needs to be saved by Christ
Age of Reason

• 1750’s- 1800’s
• Genre/Style:
  - Political/“public” pamphlets
  - Travel writing
  - Persuasive writing
• Effect:
  - Patriotism
  - Instills pride
  - Creates common agreement about concerns

*Historical context*:
- Instructs values
- Tells how to interpret reading (to encourage Revolutionary War)
- Reason/rationality over faith
Romanticism

- 1800’s-1860’s
- Genre/Style:
  - Character sketches
  - Slave narratives
  - Poetry
  - Short stories
- Effect:
  - Allows imagination
  - Values feeling over reason
  - Artistic movement
  - Nature important

Historical context:
- More magazines, newspapers, books published
- Slavery debates
Transcendentalism

- 1840’s- 1860’s
- **Genre/Style:**
  - Poetry
  - Short stories
  - Novels
  - Philosophical writings
- **Effect:**
  - Unity of God & nature
  - Individuality & self-reliance
  - Unlimited human potential

**Historical context:**
- Seek beauty of nature, love, life, and contentment even in the midst of evil
Realism

• 1855-1900’s
• Genre/Style:
  - Novels
  - Short stories
  - Objective narrators
• Effect:
  - Change for a specific social matter
  - Views world as is - not ideally
  - Pessimistic

_Historical context:_
- Uses ordinary people
- Harsh realities of American life
Naturalism?

- Overlaps Realism
- Life is controlled by forces we cannot control and do not understand
  - Heredity, environment, chance
Modernism/Harlem Renaissance

- 1900’s-1950’s
- Genre:
  - Novels
  - Plays
  - Poetry
  - experimental
- Effect:
  - Pursuit of American dream
  - Admiration of America
  - Optimism
  - Importance of individual
  *disillusionment
  *lack of trust

Historical context:
- Social classes
- Technology
- Rise of “youth culture”

- 1920’s
- Genre:
  - Allusions to African-American spirituals
  - Structure of “blues” in poetry
  - Stereotyped characters shown to be complex
- Effect:
  - Birth of gospel music
  - Blues and Jazz popularized

Historical context:
- African-American migration to urban areas and to the North
Post-Modernism

• 1950-s-...