

British Literary Timeline

I. The Old English/Anglo-Saxon Period (Years: 449-1066)

A. Themes/Influences:

1. strong belief in fate
2. juxtaposition of church and pagan worlds
3. admiration of heroic warriors who prevail in battle
4. express religious faith and give moral instruction through literature

B. Style/Genre/Literary Elements:

1. oral tradition of literature
2. poetry dominant genre
3. unique verse form
4. caesura
5. alliteration
6. repetition
7. four-beat rhythm

C. Effect Literature Had on Culture:

1. Christianity helps literacy to spread
2. introduces Roman alphabet to Britain
3. oral tradition helps unite diverse peoples and their myths

D. Historical Context:

1. life centered around ancestral tribes or clans that ruled themselves
2. at first the people were warriors from invading outlying areas: Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Danes
3. later they were agricultural

E. A Sampling of Key Literature & Authors:

◆ *Beowulf*

◆ *The Venerable Bede*

◆ *Exeter Book*



II. *The Middle English Period (Medieval Period)*-Years: @1066-1485

A. Themes/Content/Influences:

1. plays that instruct the illiterate masses in morals and religion
2. chivalric code of honor/romances
3. religious devotion

B. Typical Genres/Literary Elements Used:

1. oral tradition continues
2. folk ballads
3. mystery and miracle plays
4. morality plays
5. tock epithets
6. kennings
7. frame stories
8. moral tales

C. Effect Literature Had on the Culture:

1. church instructs its people through the morality and miracle plays
2. an illiterate population is able to hear and see the literature

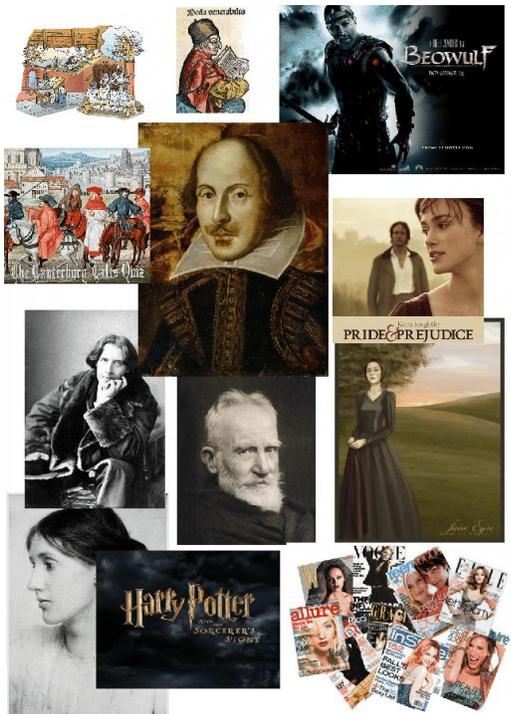
D. Historical Context:

1. Crusades bring the development of a money economy for the first time in Britain
2. trading increases dramatically as a result of the Crusades
3. William the Conqueror crowned king in 1066
4. Henry III crowned king in 1154 brings a judicial system, royal courts, juries, and chivalry to Britain

E. A Sampling of Key Literature & Authors:

- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl*
- *Domesday Book*

- *L'Morte de Arthur*
- Geoffrey Chaucer



III. The Renaissance (Years: 1485-1660)

- The Elizabethan Period: the reign of Elizabeth I, 1586-1603
- Jacobean Period: the reign of James I of England, 1603-1625

A. Themes/ Content/Influences:

1. world view shifts from religion and after life to one stressing the human life on earth
2. popular theme: development of human potential
3. popular theme: many aspects of love explored
4. unrequited love
5. constant love
6. timeless love
7. courtly love
8. love subject to change

B. Style/Genres:

1. poetry
2. the sonnet
3. metaphysical poetry
4. elaborate and unexpected metaphors called conceits
5. drama
6. written in verse
7. supported by royalty
8. tragedies, comedies, histories

C. Effects Literature Had on the Culture:

1. commoners welcomed at some play productions (like ones at the Globe) while conservatives try to close the theaters on grounds that they promote brazen behaviors
2. not all middle-class embrace the metaphysical poets and their abstract conceits

D. Historical Context:

1. War of Roses ends in 1485 and political stability arrives

2. Printing press helps stabilize English as a language and allows more people to read a variety of literature
3. Economy changes from farm-based to one of international trade

E. A Sampling of Key Literature & Authors:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| ➤ William Shakespeare | ➤ John Donne |
| ➤ Thomas Wyatt | ➤ Christopher Marlowe |
| ➤ Ben Jonson | ➤ Andrew Marvell |
| ➤ Cavalier Poets | ➤ Robert Herrick |
| ➤ Metaphysical Poets | ➤ Katherine Phillips |



IV. The Neoclassical Period (Years: 1660-1798)

- *The Restoration: the reign of Charles II, 1630 - 1660 (after his restoration to the throne in 1630 following the English Civil War and Cromwell)*
- *The Age of Enlightenment (the Eighteenth Century)*

A. Themes/Content/Influences:

1. emphasis on reason and logic
2. stresses harmony, stability, wisdom
3. Locke: a social contract exists between the government and the people. The government governs guaranteeing "natural rights" of life, liberty, and property

B. Style/Genres:

1. satire
2. poetry
3. essays
4. letters, diaries, biographies
5. novels

C. Effects:

1. emphasis on the individual
2. belief that humanity is basically evil
3. approach to life: "the world as it should be"

D. Historical Context:

1. 50% of males are functionally literate (a dramatic rise)
2. Fenced enclosures of land cause demise of traditional village life
3. Factories begin to spring up as industrial revolution begins
4. Impoverished masses begin to grow as farming life declines and factories build
5. Coffee houses—where educated men spend evenings with literary and political associates

E. A Sampling of Key Literature & Authors:

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| ▪ Alexander Pope | ▪ Samuel Johnson |
| ▪ Daniel Defoe | ▪ John Bunyan |
| ▪ Jonathan Swift | ▪ John Milton |

V. *The Romantic Period (Years: 1798 - 1832)*

A. Content/Themes/Influences:

1. human knowledge consists of impressions and ideas formed in the individual's mind
2. introduction of Gothic elements and terror/horror stories and novels
3. in nature one can find comfort and peace that the man-made urbanized towns and factory environments cannot offer

B. Style/Genres:

1. poetry
2. lyrical ballads

C. Effects Literature Had on the Culture:

1. evil attributed to society not to human nature
2. human beings are basically good
3. movement of protest: a desire for personal freedom
4. children seen as hapless victims of poverty and exploitation

D. Historical Context:

1. Napoleon rises to power in France and opposes England militarily and economically
2. gas lamps developed
3. Tory philosophy that government should NOT interfere with private enterprise
4. middle class gains representation in the British parliament
5. railroads begin to run

E. Key Literature/Authors:

1. Novelists : Jane Austen and Mary Shelley

2. Poets

- 1) Robert Burns
- 2) William Blake
- 3) William Wordsworth
- 4) Samuel Taylor Coleridge
- 5) Lord Byron
- 6) Percy Shelley
- 7) John Keats



VI. The Victorian Period -(Years: 1832-1900)

A. Themes/Content/Influences:

1. conflict between those in power and the common masses of laborers and the poor
2. shocking life of sweatshops and urban poor is highlighted in literature to insist on reform
3. country versus city life
4. sexual discretion (or lack of it)
5. strained coincidences
6. romantic triangles
7. heroines in physical danger
8. aristocratic villains
9. misdirected letters
10. bigamous marriages

B. Genres/Styles:

1. novel becomes popular for first time; mass produced for the first time
2. *bildungsroman*
3. political novels
4. detective novels (Sherlock Holmes)
5. serialized novels (Charles Dickens)
6. elegies
7. poetry: easier to understand
8. dramatic monologues
9. drama: comedies of manners
10. magazines offer stories to the masses

C. Effects on the Culture:

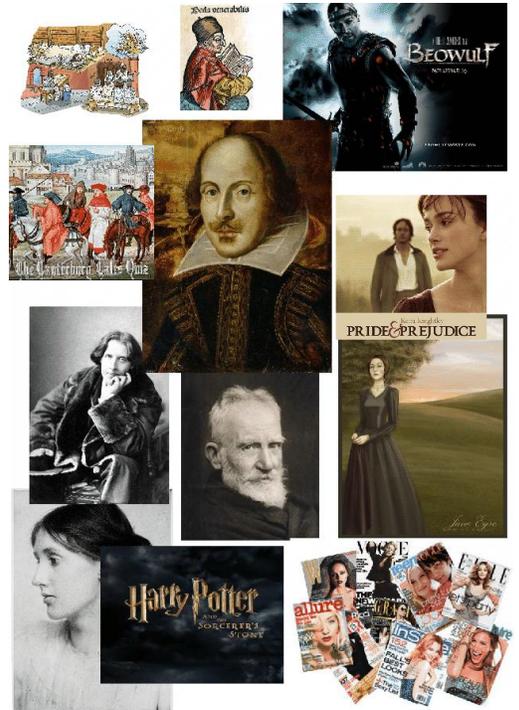
1. literature begins to reach the masses

D. Historical Context:

1. paper becomes cheap; magazines and novels cheap to mass produce
2. unprecedented growth of industry and business in Britain
unparalleled dominance of nations, economies
and trade abroad

E. Key Literature/Authors:

- Charles Dickens
- Thomas Hardy
- Rudyard Kipling
- Robert Louis Stevenson
- George Eliot
- Oscar Wilde
- Alfred Lord Tennyson
- Charles Darwin
- Charlotte Bronte
- Robert Browning



VI. *The Modern Period: (Years: 1900-(subject to debate)*

A. Content(still evolving):

1. Dystopia/utopia
2. Freedom/protests/anti-government sentiment
3. Racial tensions
4. Technology
5. Politics—democracies/global challenges
6. Interconnectedness

B. Genres/Styles:

- poetry: free verse
- epiphanies begin to appear in literature
- speeches
- memoirs
- novels
- stream of consciousness

C. Effects:

D. Historical Context:

1. British Empire loses 1 million soldiers to World War I
2. Winston Churchill leads Britain through WW II, and the Germans bomb England directly
3. British colonies demand independence

E. A Sampling of Key Literature and Authors:

- | | | |
|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| ❖ James Joyce | ❖ D.H. Lawrence | ❖ George Orwell |
| ❖ Virginia Woolf | ❖ Graham Greene | |
| ❖ T. S. Eliot | ❖ Dylan Thomas | |
| ❖ Joseph Conrad | | |

