

Literary Period	Approximate Dates	Focus/Subjects/Themes	Characteristics	Examples
Medieval - Anglo Saxon - Middle English	A.D. 500-1500	Focuses on the heroic ideal Christian in its themes after 7th C.	Anglo-Saxon literature Based on oral storytelling Written for aristocracy	Beowulf
		Everyday people/situations Christian in its themes after 7th C.	Middle English period Written for lower-class people	<i>The Canterbury Tales</i> by Geoffrey Chaucer
Johannes Gutenberg created the Movable Metal Type Printing Press by in 1439, which encouraged authors to write in the local vernacular rather than in Greek or Latin classical languages. This widened the reading audience and promoted the spread of Renaissance and Reformation ideas.				
Renaissance/ Reformation	1500–1660	Age of exploration and expansion • Classical learning/humanities • Function of true religion • Form and structure of government • Focus on love (both romantic and Platonic) • Psychological and moral analysis	• Bold, intricate plots • Early poems used elaborate technique • Later poetry featured odes and sonnets	William Shakespeare Edmund Spenser John Donne Anne Bradstreet
Neoclassical	1660–1800	• Saw man as a limited being in a hierarchical society • Discover meaning in the order of things • Placed society before the individual • Valued human reason over natural passions	• Simplicity, clarity, order • Restraint, regularity • Imitated Roman writers such as Virgil	Benjamin Franklin Daniel Defoe Jonathan Swift
Romantic	1800–1865	• Saw the individual as god • Belief in mankind’s innate goodness, equality, and potential for achievement • Nature as a symbol of freedom • Scenic beauty as a model for harmony	• Emotion, imagination, and intuition valued above reason and restraint	Sir Walter Scott James Fenimore Cooper Henry David Thoreau
Realist - Naturalist	1840–1914	• Saw the individual as a common man • Realists sought to portray the world and man realistically • Interested in the relationship between traditional religion and new philosophies such as Darwinism	• Works dealt with issues such as industrialization, poverty, and inequality	Charles Dickens Brontë sisters Mark Twain
		• Saw the individual as a helpless animal for whom free will was only an illusion • Belief that chance, rather than Providence or Fate, determined man’s destiny	• Naturalism is a form of Realism • Heroes were those on the fringe of society	Jack London Stephen Crane
Modernist	1900–1945	• Belief that all traditional structures of human life—religious, social, political, economic, and artistic—had either been destroyed or proven false	• Fragmented form • Aimless and frustrated protagonists	F. Scott Fitzgerald Ernest Hemingway Willa Cather
Many writers have characteristics from more than one period, After World War II, the Modernist movement split into fragments such as Postmodernism, Imagism, the Harlem Renaissance, Surrealism, Beat poets, Postcolonialists, and others. It is not clear which, if any, of these will prove dominant in historic hindsight.				