

American Literary History: Native American Period: 20,000 BC–Present Characteristics: The literature is as diverse as the cultures that created it, but there are often common elements such as stories explaining creation or natural forces. The literature of this period comes to us in the forms of tracts, polemics, journals, narratives, sermons, and some poetry

Revolutionary Period: 1765–1790 Characteristics: The Revolutionary period usually refers to writings that are politically motivated, either in support of British rule, in support of American patriotism and independence, or relating to the Constitution. The literature of this period comes to us in the form of letters and journals written by explorers as well as Native American tribal leaders

Colonial Period: 1607–1765 Characteristics: The Colonial period was dominated by Puritan beliefs and thus literature of this period is usually historical, religious, or didactic. Romanticism was a literary and artistic movement of the nineteenth century that arose in reaction against eighteenth-century Neoclassicism and placed a premium on fancy, imagination, emotion, nature, individuality, and exotica.

Exploration Period: 1492–1607 Characteristics: The literature is composed of European writings that describe the explorers' travels and impressions of the continent and its Native people. The writing at this time is dominated by political documents, speeches, and letters

1750–1800 is also known as the Period of Enlightenment because there is a lack of emphasis and dependence on the Bible and more use of common sense (logic) and science.

Age of Transcendentalism: 1836–1860 Characteristics: Transcendentalism was an American literary and philosophical movement of the nineteenth century. Imaginative literature was rare; in some colonies, it was banned for being immoral.

American Literary History: Romantic Period (American Renaissance): 1828–1865 Characteristics: This period was the first major explosion of a distinctly American body of literature.