British Literature through Time

The Old English/Anglo-Saxon Period: Years: 449-1066	The Middle English Period: (Medieval Period) Years: 1066-1485 (roughly)	The Renaissance Years: 1485-1660 The Elizabethan: 1586-1603 Jacobean Period: 1603-1625	The Neoclassical Period: Years: 1660-1798

Content:
 	
♣ strong belief in fate
♣ juxtaposition of church and pagan worlds
♣ admiration of heroic warriors who prevail in battle
♣ express religious faith and give moral instruction through literature
 	
Style/Genres:
 	
♣ oral tradition of literature
♣ poetry dominant genre
♣ unique verse form
    • caesura
    • alliteration
    • repetition
    • four-beat rhythm
 	
Effect:
 	
♣ Christianity helps literacy to spread
♣ introduces Roman alphabet to Britain
♣ oral tradition helps unite diverse peoples and their myths
	Content:
	
	♣ plays that instruct the illiterate masses in morals and religion
	♣ chivalric code of honor/romances
	♣ religious devotion
	
	Style/Genres:
	
	♣ oral tradition continues
	♣ folk ballads
	♣ mystery and miracle plays
	♣ morality plays
	♣ Stock epithets, kennings, frame stories moral tales…etc.
	
	Effect:
	
	♣ church instructs its people through the morality and miracle plays
	♣ an illiterate population is able to hear and see the literature
	
	Historical Context:
	
	♣ Crusades bring the development of a money economy for the first time in Britain
	♣ trading increases dramatically as a result of the Crusades
		Content:
		
		♣ world view shifts from religion and after life to one stressing the human life on earth
		♣ popular theme: development of human potential
		♣ popular theme: many aspects of love explored
		♣ unrequited love, constant love, timeless love, courtly love, love subject to change
		
		Style/Genres:
		
		poetry:
		♣ the sonnet
		♣ metaphysical poetry
		♣ elaborate and unexpected metaphors called conceits
		drama:
		♣ written in verse
		♣ supported by royalty
		♣ tragedies, comedies, histories
		
		Effect:
		
		♣ commoners welcomed at some play productions (like ones at the Globe) while conservatives try to close the
			Content:
			
			♣ emphasis on reason and logic
			♣ stresses harmony, stability, wisdom
			♣ Locke: a social contract exists between the government and the people. The government governs guaranteeing "natural rights" of life, liberty, and property
			
			Style/Genres:
			
			♣ satire
			♣ poetry
			♣ essays
			♣ letters, diaries, biographies
			♣ novels
			
			Effect:
			
			♣ emphasis on the individual
			♣ belief that humanity is basically evil
			♣ approach to life: "the world as it should be"
			
			Historical Context:
			
			♣ 50% of males are functionally literate (a dramatic rise)
			♣ Fenced enclosures of land cause

Historical Context:

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

A Sampling of Key Literature & Authors:

- Beowulf
- The Venerable Bede
- Exeter Book

- William the Conqueror crowned king in 1066
- Henry III crowned king in 1154 brings a judicial system, royal courts, juries, and chivalry to Britain

A Sampling of Key Literature & Authors:

- Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
- Pearl,
- Doomsday Book
- L'Morte de Arthur
- Geoffrey Chaucer

theaters on grounds that they promote brazen behaviors
- not all middle-class embrace the metaphysical poets and their abstract conceits

Historical Context:

- War of Roses ends in 1485 and political stability arrives
- Printing press helps stabilize English as a language and allows more people to read a variety of literature
- Economy changes from farm-based to one of international trade

A Sampling of Key Literature & Authors:

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

demise of traditional village life
- Factories begin to spring up as industrial revolution begins
- Impoverished masses begin to grow as farming life declines and factories build
- Coffee houses—where educated men spend evenings with literary and political associates

A Sampling of Key Literature & Authors:

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

British Literature through Time

The Romantic Period Years: 1798 – 1832	The Victorian Period Years: 1832-1900	Modern/Post Modern Period of Literature Years: 1900-1980	Contemporary Period of Literature (Post Modern Period Continued) 1980-Present

Content:
 	
+ human knowledge consists of impressions and ideas formed in the individual's mind
+ introduction of Gothic elements and terror/horror stories and novels
+ in nature one can find comfort and peace that the man-made urbanized towns and factory environments cannot offer
 	
Style/Genres:
 	
+ poetry
  • lyrical ballads
  • Biographia Literaria
 	
Effects:
 	
+ evil attributed to society not to human nature
+ human beings are basically good
+ movement of protest: a desire for personal freedom
+ children seen as hapless victims of poverty and exploitation
	Content:
	
	+ conflict between those in power and the common masses of laborers and the poor
	+ shocking life of sweatshops and urban poor is highlighted in literature to insist on reforms
	+ country versus city life
	+ sexual discretion (or lack of it)
	+ strained coincidences
	+ romantic triangles
	+ heroines in physical danger
	+ aristocratic villains
	+ misdirected letters
	+ bigamous marriages
	
	Genres/Styles:
	
	+ novel becomes popular for first time; mass produced for the first time
	  • bildungsroman
	  • political novels
	  • detective novels (Sherlock Holmes)
	  • serialized novels (Charles Dickens)
	elegies
	+ poetry: easier to understand
	  • dramatic monologues
		Content:
		
		+ lonely individual fighting to find peace and comfort in a world that has lost its absolute values and traditions
		+ man is nothing except what he makes of himself
		+ a belief in situational ethics-no absolute values. Decisions are based on the situation one is involved in at the moment
		+ mixing of fantasy with nonfiction; blurs lines of reality for reader
		+ loss of the hero in literature
		+ destruction made possible by technology
		
		Genres/Styles:
		
		+ poetry: free verse
		+ epiphanies begin to appear in literature
		+ speeches
		+ memoir
		+ novels
		+ stream of consciousness
		  • detached, unemotional, humorless
		  • present tense
		  • magic realism
			Content:
			
			+ concern with connections between people
			+ exploring interpretations of the past
			+ open-mindedness and courage that comes from being an outsider
			+ escaping those ways of living that blinds and dulls the human spirit
			
			Genres/Styles:
			
			+ all genres represented
			+ fictional confessional/diaries
			+ 50% of contemporary fiction is written in the first person
			+ narratives: both fiction and nonfiction
			  • emotion-provoking
			  • humorous irony
			  • storytelling emphasized
			  • autobiographical essays
			  • mixing of fantasy with nonfiction; blurs lines of reality for reader
			
			Effect:
			
			+ too early to tell

Historical Context:

- Napoleon rises to power in France and opposes England militarily and economically
- gas lamps developed
- Tory philosophy that government should not interfere with private enterprise
- middle class gains representation in the British parliament
- railroads begin to run

Key Literature/Authors:

- **Novelists**
  - Jane Austen
  - Mary Shelley

- **Poets**
  - Robert Burns
  - William Blake
  - William Wordsworth
  - Samuel Taylor Coleridge
  - Lord Byron
  - Percy Shelley
  - John Keats

- drama: comedies of manners
- magazines offer stories to the masses

Effect:

- literature begins to reach the masses

Historical Context:

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

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

Effect:

- approach to life:
- "Seize life for the moment and get all you can out of it."

Historical Context:

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

Key Literature/Authors:

- James Joyce
- Joseph Conrad
- D.H. Lawrence
- Graham Greene
- Dylan Thomas
- Nadine Gordimer
- George Orwell
- William Butler Yeats
- Bernard Shaw

Historical Context:

- a world growing smaller due to ease of communications between societies
- a world launching a new beginning of a century and a millennium
- media culture interprets values and events for individuals

Key Literature/Authors:

- Seamus Heaney
- Doris Lessing
- Louis de Bernieres
- Kazuo Ishiguro
- Tom Stoppard
- John Le Carre
- Ken Follett