

American Literature

I. Briefly explain five of the following terms with the best illustration you can. (20 %)

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| 1. The Way to Wealth | 7. Deism |
| 2. Puritanism | 8. Free verse |
| 3. Letters from an American Farmer | 9. Local color |
| 4. Knickerbockers | 10. The Art of Fiction |
| 5. Leatherstocking Tales | 11. Imagism |
| 6. Thanatopsis | 12. Naturalism |

II. Essay questions: A and B. (80%)

A. Direction: answer any three of the following questions. (40%)

1. In what sense is The Scarlet Letter a romance? Try to elaborate the assumption. You may of course refute the statement and propose your argument.
2. Discuss Edgar Allan Poe's theory of poetry. For illustration use works including The Raven, To Hellen, Ulaume, and The philosophy of Composition.
3. Though she was deeply influenced by the Romantic poets, Emily Dickinson anticipates in some fundamental ways the techniques and attitudes of the modernist generation of American poets. Discuss this relationship.
4. Justify the following statement made by E. Hemingway in The Green Hills of Africa: "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn."
5. Analyze and discuss W. Faulkner's narrative technique in his novels.

B. Direction: answer any two of the following questions. (40%)

1. The American ideals of independence and self-reliance are first clearly articulated in essays like "Self-Reliance," "The Over-Soul," and "The American Scholar" by Ralph Waldo Emerson and then extended and modified by Henry David Thoreau in Walden and the essay

"Resistance to Civil Government." Explain as clearly and specifically as you can what each of these authors means by self-reliance and how each of them justifies a policy of behavior designed deliberately to flaunt the will of the majority.

2. In contrast to most poets of the period, Walt Whitman thought of himself as a great public poet, embodying in his work the attitudes and values which he felt were most distinctive of the United States as a new kind of nation. Explain how the peculiar nature of the United States as a democratic and pluralistic society is reflected in Whitman's choice of verse forms, in the organization of poems like "The Open Road" and "Song of Myself," and in the social and ethical attitudes expressed in such poems.
3. Like their counterparts in fiction and poetry, modern American playwrights like Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller have also been unusually innovative in their handling of theatrical convention, introducing all sorts of new staging techniques in order to express character psychology. Citing specific examples from each dramatist's work, explain how the modern stage has been transformed by these three masters and what their technical innovations have allowed them to express that was impossible for earlier generations of playwrights.
4. Though it has been superseded recently by deconstructionism, reader-response theory, and other "decentering" approaches, the dominant movement in American literary theory from the 1920's through the 1950's was New Criticism. Explain the basic assumptions made by the New Critics in their approach to literary works and the reasons for these assumptions. What was their definition of a literary work, how did they go about analyzing it, and what was their purpose in doing so?
5. Like contemporary European literature, much American fiction and drama since the 1960's can be characterized as "postmodern" either in its form or its content. Though there is certainly no consensus about what the word means, try to explain the ways in which the works of, say, John Barth and Edward Albee, Donald Barthelme and Thomas Pynchon, might be characterized as "postmodern." Among other things, how do postmodern writers differ, in their use of literary form and their attitudes towards experience, from modernists like T.S. Eliot or William Faulkner?