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EVROPSKÁ UNIE



MINISTERSTVO ŠKOLSTVÍ,
MLÁDEŽE A TĚLOVÝCHOVY



OP Vzdělávání
pro konkurenceschopnost



INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

British and American Literature

I. Pre-reading activities.

Literature is almost influenced by historical, political or social features of the period. As time went by, literature reflected the opinions and ideas people had and the situations they were in (e.g. invasions by other nations, war, social pressure and injustice, moral degradation, lack of opportunities and uncertain future). These and many more concepts are regular themes appearing in English as well as in American fiction.

There are many different genres of literature. Basically we can divide literature into poetry, prose and drama.

Poetry - is usually written in verses and it expresses the author's feelings, their interpretation often depends on the reader, poetry is a way of outlet for sensitive emotional people who want to express their feelings, people read poems to dream, to imagine and to think about their feelings.

Non-fiction – is literature of fact, e.g. biography or autobiography, travel books, history books, diaries, textbooks, memories, etc.

Fiction – is an invented story made up by the author's imagination, e.g. novels, tales, romances, short stories, adventure stories, thrillers, etc.

- What is your favourite reading material?
- Do you have a book that helps you when you feel under stress?
- Do you like reading sad or tragic stories? Why?
- What do you think of comics?
- Who are your favourite writers from this country?
- Do you know any personalities from British and American literature?

II. English Literature – text.

The development of the English literature can be divided into three stages:

1. Old English Literature

Literature of this period was influenced by Pagan traditions, magic, Christian ideas and moral values. The oldest written work of England is the epic poem *Beowulf*. It is based on German mythology and it describes the fight between a king and a dragon. Other types of literary documents were chronicles, historical records of various battles and legends. Also the *Legends of King Arthur* and the *Knights of the Round Table* were written in that time. English was influenced by Celtic language.

2. Middle English Literature

This title refers to the English literature written approximately between 1100 – 1500. It was period after the Norman conquest of Britain after William the Conqueror's victory in the Battle of Hastings. The English language was transformed and French element was added. Religious literature is represented by **John Wycliffe** who influenced our Jan Hus. Wycliffe criticised the church because of its greed for property. He translated *the Bible* into English. Chivalrous literature is represented by **Sir Thomas Malory** and prose novel – the first one in English literature – *Le Morte D'Arthur (Arthur's Death)*.

INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

The outstanding author of this period is certainly **Geoffrey Chaucer** with his *Canterbury Tales*. It is an unfinished collection of comic and moral stories told by a group of pilgrims while travelling to a religious shrine in Canterbury.

3. Modern English Literature

a/ Renaissance and revolution literature (1500 – 1700)

It is a period between medieval and modern times; marked by a humanistic revival of classical influence, but also architectural development and time of great seamanship. Common forms of literature were: poetic drama, songs, lyrics and ballads.

Sir Thomas More, an outstanding scientist, statesman and philosopher, showed us his vision of an ideal state in his *Utopia*. Many famous writers lived during of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Among them must be mentioned **Edmund Spenser**, **John Lyly**, **Thomas Kyd**, **Christopher Marlow** or **Benjamin Jonson**. The greatest world dramatist also came from this period. We are talking about **William Shakespeare** (see separate topic).

If we would like to choose creative possibilities of the periods of the Renaissance and Humanism we have to speak of the name of the poet **John Milton**. He is an author of the extensive epic *Paradise Lost* which deals with the biblical theme of man's disobedience and the loss thereupon of Paradise, with its prime cause, Satan, who, having revolted against God, has been driven out of heaven.

b/ Classicism (1700 – 1800)

In the 18th century, with the development of the society and economy, journalism, novels and drama developed very much. Fiction of this time uses much more social and political criticism as there was unbelievably huge corruption in the ruling classes. Literature became popular among the middle class and the first authors were from these circles. **Jonathan Swift** was a sharp critic. He wrote satirical pamphlets on all of the unfair events in British society, but his most popular prose was is *Gulliver's Travels* – allegory of Lemuel Gulliver's travelling through imaginary countries. He criticised politics in England, kingdoms, corruption, armies, bad politicians etc. **Daniel Defoe** was a politician, traveller and journalist. His most famous work is *Robinson Crusoe*. Robinson, shipwrecked on a lonely island, represents the qualities which the middle class needed in capitalist competition to be successful. The initiator of the true modern novel was **Henry Fielding**, **Tobias Smollet**, **Laurence Sterne** and **Oliver Goldsmith**.

c/ Romanticism

Characteristic features for Romanticism are: historical topics, love, country, nature, detail, description of weather. The peak of romanticism is expressed by a trio of poets – **George Gordon Byron** (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*), **Percy Bysshe Shelley** and **John Keats**. In prose romanticism is expressed by an interest in the past. **Sir Walter Scott** built the foundation of the modern historical novel. Even now his novels attract young people all over the world. Among his best known works are *Ivanhoe*, *Waverley* and *Rob Roy*.

d/ Realism

Victorian Age produced great novels criticizing various evils of prosperous but imperialistic society. Among the best authors of this period belong **Emily Bronte** (*Wuthering Heights*), **Charlotte Bronte** (*Jane Eyre*), who both dealt with moral and psychological problems. **Charles Dickens** often uses his own experience from his childhood. Among his major novels belong: *Little Dorrit*, *David Copperfield*, *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*.

e/ The First Half of the 20th Century



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Thomas Hardy together with **D. H. Lawrence** represents the naturalistic trend in literature. **Robert Lewis Stevenson** wrote romantic adventurous stories (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Treasure Island*).

Another personage of this time was **Oscar Wilde**. He founded the aesthetic cult in London. He was criticized by London society and even put to prison for homosexuality. The rest of life he spent in France. He wrote drama *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Wilde is also famous for his fairy tales – *The Nightingale and the Rose, The Happy Prince*.

Rudyard Kipling was inspired by the wildlife in India to write *The Jungle Book* with his hero Mowgli.

John Galsworthy was a critical novelist, novelist, dramatist and short stories writer. He described the decay of the Victorian upper middle class in the *Forsyte Saga*. **Herbert George Wells** invented a new form of scientific romance, kind of utopian fiction, which gave birth to modern sci-fi literature. (*The Time Machine, The War of the Worlds, The First Man in the Moon*).

During the 20s and 30s some authors tried to reflect the moods and thinking and explore inner aspects of human life, consciousness and subconsciousness. **Virginia Woolf** creates her heroes from the imaginative impression which they evoke in certain moments and people are seen from several different angles. (*The Lighthouse*). **James Joyce** was born in Dublin and he wrote experimental prose using the stream of consciousness. *Dubliners* is a collection of short stories. **George Bernard Shaw** is the most famous personality in drama of this period. He attacked the whole society. In his plays he criticized the false morals of the society. (*Pygmalion, Widower's Houses*).

f/ The Second Half of the 20th Century

John Wain, Kingsley Amis and **John Braine** were members of a group of authors called Angry Young Men. They express disillusionment and emptiness of intellectuals after WWII. They are angry and dissatisfied with the establishment, criticize snobs and people in power. The experimental writing is represented by **William Golding** and his *Lord of the Flies*. **J.R.R. Tolkien** based the stories of his fairy tale novels on his profound knowledge of old German and Celtic myths. **George Orwell** wrote excellent allegory novels criticizing totalitarian society (*Animal Farm, Nineteen Eighty-Four*). **Agatha Christie** is the most widely read author in the world. She is the Queen of a detective story. **Arthur C. Clarke** is well known science-fiction writer.

William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616)

He is considered to be the greatest of all dramatists all over the world. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, he attended the local grammar school. When Shakespeare was 18 years old, he married Ann Hathaway. They had two daughters and the boy but he died when he was eleven years old. In 1592 Shakespeare decided to leave for London. There he became the actor and co-owner of a theatrical company. Shortly his talent and great genius were discovered. At first he rewrote and edited older plays. Later he started to write his own plays. In 1599 he bought the Globe Theatre. Both the Queen Elizabeth I and James I loved him very much. After acting in the theatre and writing plays he returned to his family in Stratford. There he lived with his family in peace and contentment. He is buried at local Trinity Church.

Shakespeare wrote 37 plays and beautiful sonnets. His mastery lies in his human vision which recognizes the complexity of moral questions and in the richness of his language. He wrote comedies, historical plays and tragedies:

Comedies: The comedy of Errors, The Taming of the Shrew, The Merchant of Venice, A Midsummer-Night' Dream, Merry Wives of Windsor, Much Ado about Nothing, As you like It.

Historical plays: Henry VI, Richard III, Richard II, Henry IV, Julius Caesar, Anthony and Cleopatra.

Tragedies: Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, Hamlet, King Lear, Othello.



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INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

The plays and opinions of William Shakespeare inspired a lot of artists of later times, e.g. G. Verdi, S. Prokofiev, P. I. Tchaikovsky. The most successful translator of Shakespeare's plays was Josef Václav Sládek.

III. American Literature

Although the roots of American literature are in the chronicles as early as about 1600, the real history of American literature begins in the time of the American fight for independence which was proclaimed on the 4th July, 1776, in the *Declaration of Independence*, the main author of which was **Thomas Jefferson**. Washington Irving may be considered the real founder of the American literature. He was an essayist, story writer, historian and biographer.

19th Century

The greatest representative of romanticism was **James Fenimore Cooper** who described American wilderness and wrote Indian novels of adventure (*The Last of the Mohicans*).

Herman Melville was the greatest symbolist, his experience at sea were the basis for almost all his novels. The most famous novel is *Moby Dick* which represents the struggle of a man (Captain Ahab) against the infinite power of the universe (the whale).

Edgar Allan Poe, a poet and short story writer, critical essayist, the founder of both science-fiction and the detective story. His best poem *The Raven* deals with the familiar theme of mourning for the death of a beautiful lover.

Ralph Waldo Emerson was the leading philosopher in the transcendentalist movement. It was based on the doctrine of free will, on the individual conscience and the sense of right.

Mark Twain is one of the greatest US authors. In our country he is known for his works *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn*. These books describe the adventures of boyhood. Twain also wrote books that took inspiration from English history, e.g. *The Prince and the Pauper*.

20th Century

The quick development in America at the end of the 19th century in industry, trade and manufacturing goods gave rise to many problems. Authors first try to describe the ugliness of life, where money-making dominates, destroys human character and put aside all human values. Realism and naturalism developed.

Theodor Dreiser showed in his naturalist novels the ugly sides of American life (*An American Tragedy*).

Jack London was a successful sailor, tramp and gold-miner before he started to write. He became very popular due to describing adventurous life at the time of the gold rush (*The Call of the Wild*).

After the World War I a group of writers known as the "Lost Generation" entered literature. They were writers who were influenced by the war. Their experience resulted in disillusionment. The best are **Ernest Hemingway** (see separate topic), **F. S. Fitzgerald**, **W. Faulkner** and **J. Steinbeck**.

Francis Scott Fitzgerald is connected with the Jazz Age of the 20s. He wrote many stories about wealthy people, for whom everything is so easy because of money. *The Great Gatsby* is his best novel.

William Faulkner wrote a cycle of novels dealing with all possible problems of the South.

John Steinbeck tried to uncover the reasons of social injustice. His masterpiece *The Grapes of Wrath* is one of the best American novels on the great Depression after the crisis in 1929. His other works are *Of Mice and Men* and *East of Eden*.

Norman Mailer is one of best authors after World War II. His book *The Naked and the Dead* is based on his own experience in the Pacific. **Joseph Heller** wrote *Catch-22*, an antiwar novel connecting absurd black humour and terrible war experience. **William Styron** is influenced by Faulkner and writes novels on southern themes. His excellent novel *Sophie's Choice* deals with the problems of Nazis concentration camps and conditions of human life in peace influenced by a bitter war experience.



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20th century is famous for a group of poets and artists who gathered around 1956 in San Francisco and are called the "Beats". They practised free life, behaviour and a new use of language. These authors rebelled against the established society, they were disgusted by corrupt, commercial and conventional world around them and hoped they can make their world better by some excitement given by drugs, drink and they were also influenced by Zen Buddhism teaching. Among the best known writers of this era belong **Allen Ginsberg**, **Lawrence Ferlinghetti** and **Jack Kerouac** whose novel *On the Road* was a bible of the Beat Group.

Ernest Hemingway (1899 – 1961)

He was born in Illinois but he did not stay there all his life. Cuba and Paris became his adopted homes. Of course he lived in the U.S.A. as well. Hemingway worked as a newspaper reporter. That is also why he was interested in public affairs. During the First World War he served in a hospital unit. During the Spanish Civil War he remained in Spain as a war correspondent. His life was interesting and full of adventures, he loved hunting, bullfighting and fishing. In 1960 he moved to Ketchum, Idaho where he was hospitalised for uncontrolled high blood pressure, liver diseases and depression which was aggravated by his alcoholism. He committed suicide in 1961 with his favourite shotgun.

His first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, was written in 1924. *A Farewell to Arms* is one of the best novels about the WWI. It is a love story of an American lieutenant in the Italian Ambulance Service and an English nurse. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* he reacted to the Spanish Civil war by celebrating mankind. He showed the danger that threatens people. He described three days of American volunteer Jordan and his relation to the Spanish girl Maria. *The Old Man and the Sea* is about a man's strength to fight both with the external nature and bad sides of his sides of his own character. All this is symbolized by the positions of the little boy and the old man, the differences between generations and finding and searching for something new. Man carries victory hidden inside him. Hemingway was also a master of short stories.

IV. Vocabulary.

influenced	ovlivněn	struggle	zápas
values	hodnoty	infinite	nekonečný
greed	nenasytnost	mourning	smutek
property	majetek	will	vůle
outstanding	vyjímec	conscience	svědomí
pilgrim	poutník	ugliness	ošklivost
shrine	svatyně	injustice	bezpráví
seamanship	námořnictví	disgusted	zhnusení
extensive	rozsáhlý	excitement	vzrušení
deal	pojednávat	lieutenant	poručík
disobedience	neposlušnost	threaten	ohrožovat
consciousness	vědomí	strength	síla
subconsciousness	podvědomí	external	povrchní
establishment	vládnoucí třída	aggravate	zhoršit
profound	důkladný	commit	spáchat
contentment	spokojenost	suicide	sebevražda
proclaim	prohlásit	shotgun	brokovnice



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