A Survey of American Literature

**Periods of American literary history**

* Colonial America （1607 the first permanent English settlement）
* American Romanticism （The War of Independence 1776-1783）

New England Transcendentalism （1836-1860）

* The Age of Realism （Civil War 1861-1865）
* American Literature from 1914 to 1945 （WWI 1914-1918, WWII 1939-1945）

The Roaring Twenties (1919-1929)

* Contemporary American Literature (After WWII)

**Content of learning**

* major writers and their masterworks
* major literary trends and currents of thought that have dominated the American literary scene at one time or another
* American culture and American history
* improve your English by studying the selected works and stories.

**Part one Colonial America**

**Literary Terms：American Puritanism**

* The first permanent English settlement in North American at James town, Virginia in 1607.
* In 1629 the Puritans established the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

The ship “Mayflower” carried about one hundred Pilgrims (朝圣者， 此指清教徒) and took 66 days to beat its way across the Atlantic. In December of 1620, it put the Pilgrims ashore at Plymouth, Massachusetts.

* Independent War (1776-1783); the formation of a Federative bourgeois democratic republic ---- the United States of America.

The settlement of the North American continent by the English began in the early part of the seventeenth century. These first settlers became the founding fathers of the American nation, and quite a few of them were Puritans. They were a group of serious, religious people. The code of values and the philosophy of life, which they carried with them to America, in time, took root in the New World and became what is popularly known as American Puritanism. American Puritanism was one of the most enduring shaping influences in American literature and has become a part of the national culture.

**What kind of people are the American Puritans?**

The American Puritans were idealists. Although the English government saw the colonization of the North American continent as a means a alleviating (缓解) its own problems and the settlers wish to escape religious persecution, they were also determined to find a place where they could worship in the way they thought true Christians should. When they arrived and saw the virgin forests, the virgin land, the vast expanse of wilderness, they became aware that God must have sent them there for a definite purpose and that, as God’s chosen people, they were meant to reestablish a commonwealth (联邦) based on the teaching of the Bible, restore the lost paradise, and build the wilderness into a new Garden of Eden. Whatever that might jeopardize their endeavor to build their “City of God on earth” was, therefore, not to be tolerated.

The American Puritans are also opportunists. In the grim struggle for survival after their arrival in America, their character underwent a significant change. They became tougher and more practical, and ready for any misfortune and tragic failures that might wait for them.

He was a visionary (梦想家) who never forgets that two plus two equals four; he was a soldier of Jehovah (耶和华) who never came out on the losing side of a bargain.... He was a practical idealist.... He came to New England to found the perfect society and the Kingdom of the elect and never expected it to be perfect, but only the best that fallible men could make.

─ Perry Miller

**The Literary Scene in Colonial America**

* In the early period, American literature began with the works of British adventurers and new settlers, whose main readers are the Europeans. It grew out of humble origins. Diaries, histories, journals, letters, travel books, sermons, in short, personal literature in its various forms, occupy a major position in the literature of the early colonial period.
* In form, English literary traditions were faithfully imitated.

**Writers and their works**

**John Smith (1580-1631)**

**Captain John Smith** usually was regarded as **the first American writer**. He was a soldier and a founder of the English colony of Jamestown.

He wrote about his capture by the Indians and his rescue by the famous Indian Princess, **Pocahontas**. This story has become an American legend.

**Benjamin Franklin** (1706-1790）

Toward the latter part of the seventeenth century, a completely new view of the universe came into being. With the publication of Newton’s laws of motion （运动定律）and his idea of universal gravitation（万有引力）, the universe became, in the mind of thinking people, something mechanical, like a clock, subject to certain physical and mechanical laws, instead of the close supervision of God. This give rise to deism ( [‘deɪɪz(ə)m]自然神论).

The deists (自然神论者) hold that God is indeed the creator of the universe, “the maker of the clock,” but he has left it operate according to natural law. Thus the best way to worship God is to study its handiwork, namely, the natural world and the human world, and to do good things to mankind. All these ideas were very much in the air of America then, and no one represented them better than Benjamin Franklin. With Franklin as its spokesman, eighteenth-century America experienced an age of enlightenment (or the Reason and Revolution Period).

Rationalism (理性主义) was the dominant spirit. The enlighteners were favorable to the secular( ['sekjʊlə]世俗的) literature. The secular ideals of the American Enlightenment were exemplified in the life and career of Benjamin Franklin.

Franklin’s claim to a place in literature rests chiefly on his *Poor Richard’s Almanac* ( [‘ɔːlmənæk]历书) and *Autobiography*.

From 1733 to 1758, Franklin wrote and published his famous *Poor Richard’s Almanac*. A good many sayings in it became, very quickly, household words.

*The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* was probably the first of its kind in literature.

**Proverbs from *Poor Richard’s Almanac***

* Lost time is never found again
* A penny saved is a penny earned
* God help them that help themselves
* Fish and visitors stink in three days
* Early to bed, and early to rise, make a man healthy, wealthy, and wise
* God gives all things to industry.
* 时光逝去不再来
* 节约一分就是多赚一分
* 神救自救者
* 鱼放三天臭，客住三天嫌
* 早睡早起，健康富足又聪明
* 天道酬勤

**13 virtues from *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin***

1. Temperance. Eat not to dullness（迟钝） and drink not to elevation（高度）.

2. Silence. Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself. Avoid trifling（微不足道的） conversation.

3. Order. Let all your things have their places. Let each part of your business have its time.

4. Resolution. Resolve to perform what you ought. Perform without fail（务必）what you resolve.

5. Frugality（节俭）. Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e. Waste nothing.

6. Industry. Lose no time. Be always employed in something useful. Cut off all unnecessary actions.

7. Sincerity. Use no hurtful deceit（欺骗）. Think innocently and justly; and, if you speak, speak accordingly.

8. Justice. Wrong none, by doing injuries or omitting the benefits that are your duty.

9. Moderation. Avoid extremes. Forebear（克制）resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.

10. Cleanliness. Tolerate no uncleanness in body, clothes or habitation.

11. Tranquility. Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.

12. Chastity（节欲）. Rarely use venery（纵欲） but for health or offspring; Never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation.

13. Humility. Imitate Jesus and Socrates.

一、节制。饭不过饱，酒不喝高。

二、缄默。不说于人于己不利的话。避免闲谈。

三、秩序。东西各归其位，做事各按其时。

四、决心。下定决心做该做的事情，并坚持到底。

五、节俭。不花于己于人无用的闲钱，既杜绝浪费。

六、勤奋。珍惜时光。忙于有益之事。杜绝无谓之举。

七、诚信。不害人，不欺诈。思想坦荡，公正；表里如一，言行一致。

八、正义。不做令人蒙冤的伤人之事，不忘自己当行之义举。

九、温和。避免走极端。即使对方罪有应得，也不要愤然伤害对方。

十、清洁。身体、衣着、居所，不容污秽。

十一、平静。不可为小事、常事或难免之事搅乱了方寸。

十二、节欲。不可纵欲，除非为了健康或传宗接代；万不可搞得头脑昏沉，身体虚弱，或者伤害自己和他人的平静或声誉。

十三、谦卑。效法耶稣和苏格拉底。

**Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)**

Thomas Jefferson’s thought and personality have influenced his countrymen deeply. This Virginian planter-aristocrat（大种植园贵族），just like Franklin, was a product of the Enlightenment.

He drafted The Declaration of Independence.

He won the presidential election of 1800 and served for two terms of president.

He sold ten thousand of his volumes to the national government and provided the foundation of the national library (now the Library of Congress).

He is the founder of the University of Virginia.

**The Declaration of Independence**

...

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable ( [ʌnˈeɪliənəbl]不可剥夺的) Rights, that among these are **Life**, **Liberty** and the **pursuit of Happiness**. …That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish ( 废除) it, and to institute (建立) new Government…