
UNIT 4: The Romantic Period (Days 35-43)

Assigned Selections:

“The Devil and Tom Walker” by Washington Irving
“Rip Van Winkle” by Washington Irving
“Thanatopsis” by William Cullen Bryant
“The Tide Rises, the Tide Falls” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
“A Psalm of Life” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
Excerpt from *Snow-Bound* by John Greenleaf Whittier
“The Chamber Nautilus” by Oliver Wendell Holmes
“Old Ironsides” by Oliver Wendell Holmes

Overview:

Students will continue their study of American Literature by reading representative selections from the American Romantic Period. After a brief introduction to the history of the period, they will read selections with a view toward understanding the rise of the beginnings of a truly unique American literature, which reflects a unique American character.

Objectives:

- Read a variety of writings from the American Romantic Period
- Establish a relationship between the history and the literature of this period
- Review literary terms critical to these selections: romanticism, foreshadowing, setting, motif, satire, tone, theme, plot, conflict, image, scansion, meter, foot, iamb, idyll, apostrophe, symbol, irony, blank verse
- Discuss selections in class
- Practice literary analysis writing skills

Skills Attained:

- Understand the relationship between the history of a period and the literature that reflects that history
- Learn about the contributions of the early American Romantics to the fabric of American literature
- Understand the structure of American Romantic short stories and poetry
- Trace the continuing development of a uniquely American character

UNIT 4: *The Romantic Period (Days 35-43)*

Day 35:

Objective: Students will read about the beginnings of the American Romantic Period and will gain an understanding of how a uniquely American literature began to develop.

Topic: The topic will be the introductory background for the American Romantic Period.

Procedure(s): Methods will include journal writing, small group discussions, silent reading, **Worksheet 4:1**, and class discussion.

Motivation: See **Worksheet 4:1** for an introduction to the Romantic Period and for lecture material expanding upon these points. To begin, ask students to review the list of writers for this period and write about a page detailing their knowledge of those writers. Once again, this activity asks students to access their prior knowledge on the topic before actually reading and helps them to develop “hooks” on which to attach new knowledge. You may want to do this as a small group activity so weaker students will have the benefit of listening to students who may have more knowledge about this period than they do. Allow about 10 minutes for this activity (or close it whenever a majority of the students have ceased writing). Invite discussion from their writing, noting important points on the board or an overhead transparency.

Description: You will find your students probably have a passing knowledge of Washington Irving, “the Father of American Literature,” and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who has come to be recognized as America’s unofficial “poet laureate.” You can use their familiarity with “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” by Irving and “The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere” by Longfellow as stepping-stones to a discussion about this period.

The American Romantic movement began around 1800 as writers searched for ways to give a distinct identity—separate of that of the European romantic writers—to the writing they were beginning to produce. However, the writing of this period is not totally original. For example, Washington Irving often took German folktales and re-worked them with an American setting and American characters. One of his primary themes is the Faustian theme, which may be defined as “selling one’s soul to the devil.” In addition, the poets of the period often emulated the writing of European Romantic poets, although they themselves dealt with themes and settings that reflected American thought of that day.

Romanticism can be defined as a style of writing that depicts life as one wishes it would be rather than the way it really is and that values imagination and intuition over reason. Romanticism developed primarily as a reaction against rationalism and against the burgeoning cities of Europe and the Eastern seaboard in America—areas that romanticists felt had corrupting influences on humankind. Romanticists placed a high value on nature and the wilderness and felt that humankind flourished best in a natural environment.

America’s first major novelist, James Fenimore Cooper, was a product of the American Romantic movement. His character Natty Bumppo, also known as Leatherstocking, the Deerslayer, and the Pioneer, is recognized as the first truly American hero.

UNIT 4: *The Romantic Period (Days 35-43)*

The “Father of American Poetry,” William Cullen Bryant, wrote his masterpiece “Thanatopsis” as a teenager and became known as the unofficial leader of a group of five poets dubbed the “Fireside Poets.” This group, consisting of Bryant, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and James Russell Lowell, were so named because they considered their poetry to have such an appeal to the common person that families would read their works around the fireside at night for entertainment. However, critics today consider these poets to have been somewhat limited by their reliance on European styles and themes rather than creating a uniquely different American poetry.

Application/Reflection: Because this is the first complete unit of creative writing, you may want to assign students to do a Literary Analysis paper on a selection from the unit. There are a number of approaches to this assignment (see **Worksheet 4:2.**)

Assessment: Students should complete **Worksheet 4:1**. Follow up with a quiz.

For homework, instruct students to read “Rip Van Winkle.”

Day 36:

Objective: Students will read and react to a classic American legend, paying particular attention to Romantic elements in the story. They will also observe Irving’s use of satirical parallels between Rip’s situation and the American Revolution.

Topic: The topic will be “Rip Van Winkle” by Washington Irving.

Procedure(s): Methods will include the use of the DR-TA, student predictions, silent reading, Reader’s Response, and class discussion.

Motivation: An effective way to approach a work of fiction such as “Rip Van Winkle” is through the use of the Directed Reading-Thinking Activity, which was suggested for the selection by Mary Rowlandson in Unit I. Once again, to begin this activity, have students scan the title and look at any illustrations, captions, and the like editors may have included to assist them with the selection. Allow 2-3 minutes for this activity. Then ask students to make predictions based on their observations. It is good to ask students to write predictions down in notebooks so they can share them with the class; next, ask for oral contributions from various students, presenting not only their predictions but also why they believe they will find their predictions to be accurate.

Remember, it is important at this point that the teacher not refute any incorrect predictions. The point is not to “guess it right” but to have some prior expectations before reading. These expectations will actively engage students in the reading process as they read to discover whether they were right. Instruct students to refine or even change their prediction as they read and find evidence that points them in a more specific direction. Again, you might read aloud the first page or so for your students to get them into the flow of the narrative. After you have reached a pre-determined point, ask them if they have changed any of their predictions and allow time for responses. Ask students to keep their notebooks close by so they can refine their predictions as they discover new

UNIT 4: *The Romantic Period (Days 35-43)*

evidence. Students who follow this procedure are very actively involved in their reading, resulting in a more complete understanding of the piece and retention of details.

Description: A favorite of American readers from 1800 to the present, Washington Irving is best remembered for his tales “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” Irving was a colorful character who wrote in a variety of styles and under a variety of pen names. As Jonathan Oldstyle, Irving satirized those British writers who persisted in degrading the rising new American writers with their innovative characters and voices. As Diedrich Knockerbocker, Irving satirized the whole American past, especially the Dutch settlers of the area now known as New York. As Geoffrey Crayon, Irving wrote his famous collection *The Sketch Book*, in which his two famous masterpieces were first printed. However, these were not original stories created by Irving, but rather were adaptations of German folk tales, set in the American countryside and peopled with distinctly American characters. It is largely because of the success of *The Sketch Book* that Washington Irving earned for himself the title of “Father of American Literature.”

- **Application/Reflection:** A good follow-up activity, especially for works of fiction, is the use of the Reader’s Response format (see **Worksheet 4:3**). Asking students for their reaction to what they read, before you discuss the selection in class, lets them know that their reactions are valid and that neither the teacher nor the teacher’s manual is the final authority on how they should respond to literature. Rather than having students write on the handout, you might ask them to file it in their notebooks for use with later selections and instead to write their responses in paragraph form in their notebooks. Allow 5-10 minutes for students to respond to the questions and always allow time for volunteers to share their responses orally with the class. You will find that students often zoom in on the exact points that you were going to make about the selection to begin with so their responses will lead quite naturally into a discussion of the work.
- **Assessment:** End with **Worksheet 4:4** and a quiz.

For homework, instruct students to read “The Devil and Tom Walker.”

Day 37:

Objective: Students will read and discuss the use of symbolism and various types of irony in a classic American short story.

Topic: The topic will be “The Devil and Tom Walker” by Washington Irving.

Procedure(s): Methods will include the DR-TA, student predictions, silent reading, Reader’s Response, and class discussion.

Motivation: Again, an effective way to get students involved in a story is the use of the DR-TA (Directed Reading-Thinking Activity), which you used for Rip Van Winkle. This technique can be used with any fictional selection and should be used often to help students learn to monitor their own reading. Remember to allow time to share predictions orally before having students read each time you use this technique.