

# American Literature: A Brief History

# & *Selected Readings*

## 美国文学史概述 及作品选读

□ 主编 刘滢波



高等教育出版社  
HIGHER EDUCATION PRESS

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## 内 容 简 介

本书是根据《高等学校英语专业英语教学大纲》的课程设置而编写的。编者充分考虑到我国英语专业高年级学生的兴趣和爱好,简要介绍美国文学历史阶段的特点以及重要作家和作品。从著名作家的著名作品中选择影响大、流传广、并经过时间考验而脍炙人口的经典片段,引导学生从阅读原著入手,培养学生对文学作品的阅读、赏析能力,进而感受美国文学丰富的思想内涵,并在此基础上提高学生的人文素质。

本书共分七章。介绍了从殖民地时期的文学到战后的文学。每章由概述、作家简介、作品概要、原著选读、注释、赏析点评和思考题等部分构成。

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# 前 言

美国文学虽然至今只有三百多年的历史，远不及中国文学和欧洲文学悠久，但其在世界文学中的地位和影响、为人类文明进步所做出的贡献却举世瞩目。

按照教育部《高等学校英语专业英语教学大纲》的要求，英语专业本科高年级均开设了美国文学课程。对该课程的教学重点，不同学校、不同教师的认识不尽相同。有的偏重文学史的讲解，有的偏重作品阅读，有的则史和作品兼顾。本书根据《高等学校英语专业英语教学大纲》的课程设置，充分考虑我国英语专业高年级学生的兴趣和爱好，简要介绍美国文学主要历史阶段的特点以及重要作家和作品，以期使学生对美国文学有总体的认识和把握。

本书从著名作家的著名作品中选择影响大、流传广、并经过时间考验而脍炙人口的经典片段，引导学生从阅读原著入手，培养学生对文学作品的阅读、赏析能力，进而感受美国文学丰富的思想内涵，并在此基础上提高学生的人文素质。

本书共分七章，介绍了从殖民地时期的文学到战后的文学。每章由概述、作家简介、作品概要、原著选读、注释、赏析点评和思考题等部分构成。编写力求简明扼要，重点突出，文字浅显易懂。

本书由华南理工大学刘涪波教授组织编写，西南大学孙太、申劲松、王永梅、李如平、刘玉，四川外语学院董洪川、蒋花，玉溪师范学院杨云红，华南理工大学任中林等参加了编写工作。各章分工如下：

第一章：申劲松（概述、Franklin）、孙太（Freneau）

第二章：王永梅

第三章：刘涪波（概述、Dreiser）、杨云红（James）、李如平（Twain）、任中林（London）

第四章：刘涪波（概述、Frost、Fitzgerald、Faulkner）、刘玉（Pound）、蒋花（Steinbeck）、董洪川（Hemingway）

第五章：孙太

第六章：孙太

第七章：申劲松（概述、Bellow、Salinger、Heller、Updike）、孙太（Kerouac）、任中林（Vonnegut）、王永梅（Tan）

刘涪波负责全书的设计，并对全稿进行了认真、细致的审读和修改。高等教育

出版社外语出版中心的编辑对本教材的编写和出版给予了大力支持，在此谨致以衷心的感谢。

由于编者水平有限，本教材一定还存在缺点和不足，恳望同行专家和广大读者不吝指正。

本书可作为英语专业高年级美国文学课程教材，也可作为非英语专业大学英语提高阶段文学课教材。

编者  
2009年9月

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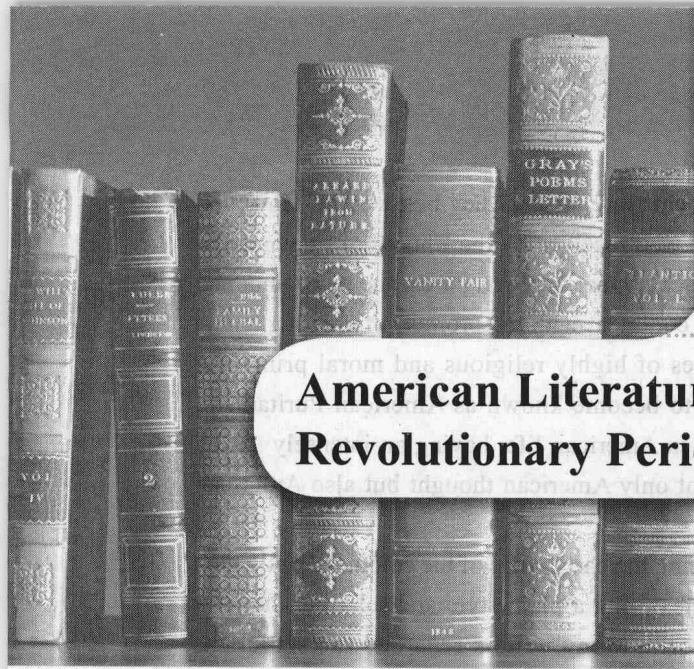
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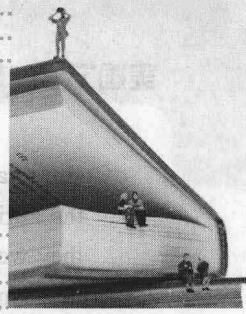
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## Chapter 1



# American Literature in the Colonial and Revolutionary Periods

**W**ith the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus in 1492, a multitude of European explorers came to the vast American continent to seek their fortune and new paradise. Among the earliest settlers were the Dutch, Swedish, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian. It was not until early in the seventeenth century that the English began their settlement of the North American continent, making their contribution, together with other early settlers, to the forming of an American civilization by establishing colonies.

Upon their arrival in the new world, the settlers began to write about their experiences: how they survived their voyages to the new continent; how they adapted themselves to the new, harsh environment; and how they dealt with the native Indians. The unimaginably vast stretches of terrain, the luxuriant forests, the fertile land and many other things new and exotic served as their Muses from whom they obtained imagination and inspiration. In other words, written literature of this period includes “exploration reports which were advertisements of a Brave New World offering land, freedom, wealth, and fame” as well as accounts of “agonies, glories, hopes, meager triumphs and frequent disasters, creating a literature that was large, various, and, in view of the hardships of their daily lives, amazingly rich.” (McMichael et al. 1)

Among the early settlers who were to become the founding fathers of the United States years later were the Puritans, who were originally pious members of the Church of England hoping to “purify” the rituals and to lessen the authority of bishops. To them, religion had the highest priority and man should live, think and act in a way which tended to the glory of God. The doctrines of predestination, original



sin, total depravity and limited atonement were all that they believed in. However, the Puritans' cleansing efforts were not well received by the Church of England and they were severely oppressed — so much so that they sought escape to an untamed new land. Finally, they were on a new continent with the promise of creating a new paradise. These enthusiastic advocates of highly religious and moral principles brought with them beliefs that were to become known as American Puritanism, which, in fact, was a dominant factor in American life, having an intensely strong lasting influence on the shaping of not only American thought but also American literature.

As a result, most of the writings during the early years of the colonists' settlement were personal, serious and religious, featuring a plain style and religious subjects with the focus on a God-centered world. Many writers regarded the settlers as God's agents, and they held the sermon as one of the highest writing forms and created in the average church members a fear and wonder of God's workings. Early poetry, such as *The Bay Psalm Book* (1640, the first book entirely written and printed in the Colonies), *The Day of Doom* (1662, describing the Day of Judgment when vengeful God sentences sinners to punishment in hell), and *New England Primer* (1683, the first and the most successful educational textbook in colonial and the early days of the US history), falls into this category. The most famous literary figures of this period include William Bradford (1590-1657), Anne Bradstreet (1617-1672), Jonathan Edwards (1702-1758), and Edward Taylor (1642-1729).

William Bradford is known for his *Of Plymouth Plantation*, which is a compelling account of the Puritan Pilgrims in the tiny colony Plymouth. Anne Bradstreet's *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America* is the first published volume of poetry written by a settler in the American colonies, and her lyrics "remained unsurpassed by any woman writer until the nineteenth century and the coming of Emily Dickinson" (McMichael et al. 87). Jonathan Edwards was "aside from Benjamin Franklin, [...] the most influential of all colonial American writers" (McMichael et al. 223). Edward Taylor was a meditative poet concerned about how his images speak for God.

As Colonial America successfully forged its way through the initial hardships of colonization, a change began to emerge. Tired of the savage and rapacious British colonial rule, an appeal for an independent America began to arise.

The revolutionary era began when the French military threat to British North American colonies ended in 1763. Britain imposed a series of taxes followed by other extremely unpopular laws, which benefited Britain and limited the growth.

of the American economy. In 1772, Patriot groups began to form committees of correspondence, which led to the unifying First Continental Congress in 1774.

The British sent combat troops and fighting broke out in 1775. In 1776, representatives from the original thirteen independent states voted unanimously in the Second Continental Congress to adopt the *Declaration of Independence*, which rejected the British monarchy and established the United States. The Americans signed a treaty of alliance with France in 1778, and Britain lost one battle after another. With the signing of *The Treaty of Paris* in 1783 between Britain and the new national government, British claims to any of the thirteen states ended.

Literary writings of this period “include essays, pamphlets, and political documents for purposes of social reform, revolutionary agitation and philosophical declaration.” (Tomming 39) Writers worthy of special notice include Roger Williams, John Woolman, Thomas Paine, Philip Freneau, and Benjamin Franklin.

Roger Williams (1603–1683) was one of the greatest Puritan dissenters in New England. He published his famous *The Bloody Tenet of Persecution for the Cause of Conscience, Discussed in a Conference between Truth and Peace* in 1644, attacking the requirement of religious conformity and upholding the spiritual freedom of the individual.

John Woolman (1720–1772) “spoke out for simplicity, piety, and goodness, for the abolition of slavery and for the rights of all men to enjoy a fair share of society’s wealth” (McMichael et al. 212).

Thomas Paine (1737–1809) wrote a number of revolutionary and inflammatory works such as *Common Sense* (1776) which “helped to create the national mood that inspired the *Declaration of Independence*” (McMichael et al. 446).

Philip Freneau was a notable representative of dawning nationalism in American literature. He used his poetic talents to serve the national struggle for independence. His “The Rising Glory of America”, in collaboration with a friend, points forward to the intellectual and literary interdependence.

Benjamin Franklin, “as a master of the periodical essay, of satires, political journalism, and letters, [...] helped establish a tradition in American writing of the simple, utilitarian style” (McMichael et al. 272–273).

## Benjamin Franklin

(1706-1790)



The fifteenth child and youngest son in a family of seventeen children, Benjamin Franklin was born in Boston, Massachusetts on January 17, 1706, his father being a tallow chandler and soap boiler who came to Boston in 1862 from England and his mother the daughter of a teacher to the Indians. As he was a small child, his father sent him to Boston Grammar School to cultivate him to be a man of the ministry. However, at 10, Benjamin was forced to leave school and work for his father for lack of adequate financial support.

Much to his father's disappointment, Benjamin detested his father's occupation and threatened to run away to sea, which resulted in his becoming apprenticed to his brother when he was twelve years old. This provided him with access to books and helped him develop his own way of learning by way of voracious reading. He enjoyed his work and learned quickly. At the same time, he acquainted himself with writing and wrote some essays under the pseudonym Silence Dogood which were published by his brother's paper.

However, he could not get along with his brother, who had his father's backing. At the age of seventeen, he broke with his brother and moved to Philadelphia, hoping to make his fortune. Although with little money in his pocket, he looked forward to a bright future. Already an expert printer, he was self-confident and prepared to encounter whatever would confront him. He made mistakes, though. In 1724, for example, he found himself alone and unemployed in London due to misplaced reliance on a man's promises. Two years later, he returned to the colonies and set himself up as an independent printer. He taught himself foreign languages and sought to acquire greater knowledge. Yet, he was practical as well and knew that people did not like to do business with merchants who acted smarter than their customers. Accordingly, he often dressed himself simply and sold papers on the streets in order to show people that he was hardworking and easy to get along with. By the time he was twenty-four years old, he was already the sole owner of a successful printing shop and editor and publisher of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*.

In 1733, under the pseudonym Richard Sanders, Franklin published *Poor Richard's*

*Almanack*, which contained both original and borrowed content with witty maxims for achieving wealth as a direct result of hard work and thrift. The book was an immediate success. He continued to write and publish *Poor Richard's Almanack* until the year 1758 when he printed *Father Abraham's Sermon* (also known as *The Way to Wealth*) as the "Preface to *Poor Richard Improved*".

At the age of forty-two, financially independent, Franklin retired. Before his retirement, he had already founded a library, invented a stove, established a fire company, obtained permission to create an academy which later became the University of Pennsylvania, and served as secretary to the American Philosophical Society. After his retirement, he devoted himself to public affairs and natural sciences, especially the phenomena of sound, vapors, earthquakes and electricity.

His remaining years, however, were not spent solely in a lab, but at the diplomatic table in London, Paris and Philadelphia. For more than half of the forty years after his retirement, he was abroad working for the benefits of the colonies and finally for the independence of the colonies from England. In May 1775, when he returned to Philadelphia, he was chosen as a representative to the second Continental Congress, and he served on the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence. In the following year, he was appointed minister to France, where he successfully negotiated a treaty of alliance and became a cult figure of the American people. In 1781 he was a member of the American delegation to the Paris peace conference and signed the Treaty of Paris which brought the Revolutionary War to an end. Then he returned to Philadelphia in 1785 and served as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention. He was the only American to sign the four documents that brought the United States into being: the Declaration of Independence, the Treaty of Paris, the treaty of peace with England, and the Constitution. He died in 1790 and is remembered as one of the most beloved of the founding fathers.

Aside from *Poor Richard's Almanack*, another important work of Benjamin Franklin is *The Autobiography*.

Selected Reading



The Way to Wealth<sup>1</sup>

Preface to *Poor Richard Improved*

Courteous Reader,

I have heard that nothing gives an author so great pleasure, as to find his works respectfully quoted by other learned authors. This pleasure I have seldom enjoyed; for though I have been, if I may say it without vanity, an eminent author of almanacs annually now a full quarter of a century, my brother authors in the same way, for what reason I know not, have ever been very sparing in their applauses, and no other author has taken the least notice of me, so that did not my writings produce me some solid pudding, the great deficiency of praise would have quite discouraged me.

I concluded at length, that the people were the best judges of my merit; for they buy my works; and besides, in my rambles, where I am not personally known, I have frequently heard one or other of my adages repeated with “as Poor Richard says” at the end on’t; this gave me some satisfaction, as it showed not only that my instructions were regarded, but discovered likewise some respect for my authority; and I own, that to encourage the practice of remembering and repeating those wise sentences, I have sometimes quoted myself with great gravity.

Judge, then, how much I must have been gratified by an incident I am going to relate to you. I stopped my horse lately where a great number of people were collected at a vendue<sup>2</sup> of merchant goods. The hour of sale not being come, they were conversing on the badness of the times and one of the company called to a plain clean old man, with white locks, “Pray, Father Abraham, what think you of the times? Won’t these heavy taxes quite ruin the country? How shall we be ever

1 Franklin composed this essay for the twenty-fifth anniversary issue of his *Almanac*, the first issue of which, under the fictitious editorship of “Richard Saunders”, appeared in 1733. For this essay Franklin brought together the best of his maxims in guise of a speech by Father Abraham. It is frequently reprinted as *The Way to Wealth*, but is also known by earlier titles: *Poor Richard Improved* and *Father Abraham’s Speech*.

2 vendue: auction or sale.

able to pay them? What would you advise us to?" Father Abraham stood up, and replied, "If you'd have my advice, I'll give it you in short, for *a word to the wise is enough, and many words won't fill a bushel*, as Poor Richard says." They joined in desiring him to speak his mind, and gathering round him, he proceeded as follows:

"Friends," says he, "and neighbors, the taxes are indeed very heavy, and if those laid on by the government were the only ones we had to pay, we might more easily discharge them; but we have many others, and much more grievous to some of us. We are taxed twice as much by our idleness, three times as much by our pride, and four times as much by our folly; and from these taxes the commissioners cannot ease or deliver us by allowing an abatement. However, let us hearken to good advice, and something may be done for us; *God helps them that help themselves*, as Poor Richard says, in his Almanack of 1733.

"It would be thought a hard government that should tax its people one-tenth part of their time, to be employed in its service. But idleness taxes many of us much more, if we reckon all that is spent in absolute sloth, or doing of nothing, with that which is spent in idle employments, or amusements, that amount to nothing. Sloth, by bringing on diseases, absolutely shortens life. *Sloth, like rust, consumes faster than labor wears; while the used key is always bright*, as Poor Richard says. *But dost thou love Life, then do not squander time, for that's the stuff life is made of*, as Poor Richard says. How much more than is necessary do we spend in sleep! forgetting that *the sleeping fox catches no poultry*, and that *there will be sleeping enough in the grave*, as Poor Richard says.

"*If time be of all things the most precious, wasting time must be*, as Poor Richard says, *the greatest prodigality*; since, as he elsewhere tells us, *lost time is never found again; and what we call time enough, always proves little enough*: let us then up and be doing, and doing to the purpose; so by diligence shall we do more with less perplexity. *Sloth makes all things difficult, but industry all easy*, as Poor Richard says; *and he that riseth late must trot all day, and shall scarce overtake his business at night; while laziness travels so slowly, that poverty soon overtakes him*, as we read in Poor Richard, who adds, *drive thy business, let not that drive thee; and early to bed, and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise*.

"So what signifies wishing and hoping for better times. We may make these times better, if we bestir ourselves. *Industry need not wish*, as Poor Richard says, *and he that lives upon hope will die fasting. There are no gains without pains; then help hands, for I have no lands*, or if I have, they are smartly taxed. And, as Poor

Richard likewise observes, *be that hath a trade hath an estate; and he that hath a calling, hath an office of profit and honor*; but then the trade must be worked at, and the calling well followed; or neither the estate nor the office will enable us to pay our taxes. If we are industrious, we shall never starve; for, as Poor Richard says, *at the workingman's house hunger looks in, but dares not enter*. Nor will the bailiff or the constable enter, for *industry pays debts, while despair increaseth them*, says Poor Richard. What though you have found no treasure, nor has any rich relation left you a legacy, *diligence is the mother of goodluck*, as Poor Richard says, and *God gives all things to industry. Then plow deep, while sluggards sleep, and you shall have corn to sell and to keep*, says Poor Dick. Work while it is called today, for you know not how much you may be hindered tomorrow, which makes Poor Richard say, *one today is worth two tomorrows*, and farther, *have you somewhat to do tomorrow, do it today*. If you were a servant, would you not be ashamed that a good master should catch you idle? Are you then your own master, *be ashamed to catch yourself idle*, as Poor Dick says. When there is so much to be done for yourself, your family, your country, and your gracious king, be up by peep of day; *let not the sun look down and say, inglorious here he lies*. Handle your tools without mittens; remember that *the cat in gloves catches no mice*, as Poor Richard says. 'Tis true there is much to be done, and perhaps you are weak-handed, but stick to it steadily; and you will see great effects, for *constant dropping wears away stones, and by diligence and patience the mouse ate in two the cable; and little strokes fell great oaks*, as Poor Richard says in his Almanack, the year I cannot just now remember.

"Methinks I hear some of you say, "must a man afford himself no leisure?" I will tell thee, my friend, what Poor Richard says, *employ thy time well, if thou meanest to gain leisure*; and, *since thou art not sure of a minute, throw not away an hour*. Leisure is time for doing something useful; this leisure the diligent man will obtain, but the lazy man never; so that, as Poor Richard says, *a life of leisure and a life of laziness are two things*. Do you imagine that sloth will afford you more comfort than labor? No, for as Poor Richard says, *trouble springs from idleness, and grievous toil from needless ease. Many without labor, would live by their wits only, but they break for want of stock*. Whereas industry gives comfort, and plenty, and respect: *fly pleasures, and they'll follow you. The diligent spinner has a large shift;<sup>3</sup> and now I have a sheep and a cow, everybody bids me good morrow*; all which is well said by Poor Richard.

3 shift: wardrobe.

“But with our industry, we must likewise be steady, settled, and careful, and oversee our own affairs with our own eyes, and not trust too much to others; for, as Poor Richard says,

*I never saw an oft-removed tree,  
Nor yet an oft-removed family,  
That throve so well as those that settled be.*

And again, *three removes<sup>4</sup> is as bad as a fire*; and again, *keep thy shop, and thy shop will keep thee*; and again, *if you would have your business done, go; if not, send*. And again,

*He that by the plough would thrive,  
Himself must either hold or drive.*

And again, *the eye of a master will do more work than both his hands*; and again, *want of care does us more damage than want of knowledge*; and again, *not to oversee workmen is to leave them your purse open*. Trusting too much to others' care is the ruin of many; for, as the Almanack says, *in the affairs of this world, men are saved, not by faith, but by the want of it*; but a man's own care is profitable; for, saith Poor Dick, *learning is to the studious, and riches to the careful, as well as power to the bold, and heaven to the virtuous, and farther, if you would have a faithful servant, and one that you like, serve yourself*. And again, he adviseth to circumspection and care, even in the smallest matters, because sometimes *a little neglect may breed great mischief; adding, for want of a nail the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe the horse was lost; and for want of a horse the rider was lost, being overtaken and slain by the enemy; all for want of care about a horseshoe nail*.

“So much for industry, my friends, and attention to one's own business; but to these we must add frugality, if we would make our industry more certainly successful. A man may, if he knows not how to save as he gets, keep his nose all his life to the grindstone, and die not worth a groat<sup>5</sup> at last. *A fat kitchen makes a lean will*, as Poor Richard says; and,

4 removes: moves.

5 groat: a silver coin worth about four pence.



*Many estates are spent in the getting,  
Since women for tea forsook spinning and knitting,  
And men for punch forsook hewing and splitting.*

*If you would be wealthy*; says he, in another Almanack, *think of saving as well as of getting: the Indies have not made Spain rich, because her outgoes are greater than her incomes.*

“Away then with your expensive follies, and you will not then have so much cause to complain of hard times, heavy taxes, and chargeable families; for, as Poor Dick says,

*Women and wine, game and deceit,  
Make the wealth small and the wants great.*

And farther, *what maintains one vice would bring up two children.* You may think perhaps, that a little tea, or a little punch now and then, diet a little more costly, clothes a little finer, and a little entertainment now and then, can be no great matter; but remember what Poor Richard says, *many a little makes a mickle*;<sup>6</sup> and farther, *Beware of little expenses; a small leak will sink a great ship*; and again, *who dainties love shall beggars prove*; and moreover, *fools make feasts, and wise men eat them.*

“Here you are all got together at this vendue of fineries and knickknacks. You call them goods; but if you do not take care, they will prove evils to some of you. You expect they will be sold cheap, and perhaps they may for less than they cost; but if you have no occasion for them, they must be dear to you. Remember what Poor Richard says; *buy what thou hast no need of, and ere long thou shalt sell thy necessaries.* And again, *at a great pennyworth pause a while*: he means, that perhaps the cheapness is apparent only, and not real; or the bargain, by straightening thee in thy business, may do thee more harm than good. For in another place he says, *many have been ruined by buying good pennyworths.* Again, Poor Richard says, *'tis foolish to lay out money in a purchase of repentance*; and yet this folly is practiced every day at vendues, for want of minding the Almanack. *Wise men*, as Poor Dick says, *learn by others' harms, fools scarcely by their own*; but, *felix quem faciunt aliena*

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6 mickle: lot.