# American Literature



**American Literature** 

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# A LETTER TO THE STUDENT

American Literature is an anthology, a collection, of fiction, poetry, drama, and nonfiction. Three organizing ideas stand behind this anthology, and understanding them will help you to see how the book is put together.

First, all the selections are by Americans, to draw a vivid portrait of the unique and varied culture that is America. Second, the selections are strung together chronologically—that is, in order of time—to trace the changes in attitudes, ideas, and styles that have occurred in our culture over the past several centuries. Third, the selections represent some of the finest writing by the finest authors America has produced, to offer you examples of the greatest ideas and the most influential creations of the American mind.

Whether you are writing it or reading it, literature demands thinking. In fact, along with enjoyment, thinking about literature should be one of your

principal goals as you read. To help you think in an organized way, this book provides you with short biographies of the authors and a statement to focus your thinking. After each selection, three kinds of Study Questions help you recall the details of a selection, interpret the meaning of those details, and extend that meaning into your own experience. A special feature called Viewpoint will introduce you to other people's thoughts about what you have read and will encourage you to think further. Another special feature called Model for Active Reading shows you how reading and thinking form a valuable partnership.

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