Expanding the Canon: Diversity in American Literature and in Mythology

Sabbatical Study Project
Margie Whalen
Department of English, Literature, and Journalism
Fall 1996--Spring 1997

This sabbatical project is dedicated in loving memory
of my father,
Oscar Stevenson Whalen,
October 12, 1926--August 31, 1997.

A dedicated math teacher for over forty years, he was a funny and loving man who had a great capacity for joy. He gave me myriad gifts, among them a love of the beaches and swamps of Florida and the woods of Maine, an interest in birds, an affection for people, and an abiding faith in the importance of teaching.

Table of Contents

Sabbatical Project Proposal for Fall 1996-Spring 1997

Submitted by Margie Whalen, English, Literature, and Journalism Department

Background Information

Over the past decade, the literary canon has undergone a radical transformation. The canon--that list of works deemed by scholars and the academic community as being worthy of serious study and admiration--has simply exploded. This is not to say that the works and writers I studied--Hawthorne, Thoreau, Emerson, Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald--have been supplanted or removed. But their voices have been joined by a staggering number of new voices--both contemporary writers and writers of the past whose works had been read but not canonized. In particular, women writers and writers of various races and cultures have gained a place in the canon. Thus an anthology of American literature published today is fundamentally different from an anthology published ten years ago. A look at the recent Heath Anthology of American Literature, Volume 1, is illustrative. It includes Native American tales and chants, journal entries of Spanish explorers, slave narratives, and Mexican American oral tales. Anthologies of the 19th and 20th century are equally changed, including poetry and fiction by a markedly higher number of women and minorities than was the case in past years.

My Project: An Overview

Clearly, in light of the rapid and important changes that have come about in the study of literature, the work that I did as a graduate student 15 years ago is dated and needs to be supplemented. I have worked informally to broaden my expertise in literary studies, focusing particularly on African-American writers. But I need to pursue a more in-depth, systematic course of study if I am

to maintain the level of scholarship that is necessary for my life as a reader and my work as a teacher of literature.

My project will work in two directions. The **Fall 1996** semester will focus on **diversity studies--the study of multi-cultural voices in the American canon.** These studies will begin with a broad overview of the newly emerging canon as it is represented in the Heath and Norton anthologies. These two substantial texts will provide me with a strong background knowledge of many of the writers and texts that have emerged and taken a prominent place in American literature. Having accomplished this overview, I will then focus on three writers and do a more intensive study of their body of work, reading at least three major works by each and reading scholarship on those works. The writers I choose will come out of my preliminary research, but they might include such writers as Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, Harriet Wilson, John Edgar Wideman, Sandra Cisneros, David Wong Louie, and Amy Tan.

The **Spring 1996** semester will broaden my focus yet again, so that I will be focusing on the **internationalization of the canon.** My primary area of interest will be international mythology. While my expertise in the traditional Greek and Roman myths is strong, I want to expand my knowledge of world mythology. I will begin with an overview, examining a major anthology such as Donna Rosenberg's World Mythology. Then I will choose three areas of interest (such as Latin American, African, and Chinese myth) and focus on gaining a more substantial understanding of their myths by reading extensively in those areas. I would expect to read at least one major work (usually 300-500 pages) on each selected area of myth.

The Product of the Project

The visible product of my scholarly research in the **Fall 1996 project** will take two forms: **notes and casebooks**. The **notes** will cover my preliminary overview work; these notes will include pertinent biographical information on the authors, brief summaries of their key works as presented in the anthologies, and notes about recurring images, themes, and issues in their work. The **casebooks** will focus on the selected three authors of my more intensive research. Each casebook will include notes about the author, summaries of the major works studied, lists of recurrent themes and images, a sampling of three to four critical articles about the author, and a list of study questions that would be useful for me or other faculty doing a unit on that author. These products--both the notes and the casebooks--will be useful to me as a learning tool and as a resource for my future studies and teaching.

The visible product of my scholarly research for the **Spring 1997** project--the internationalization of the canon in mythology-- will take the form of **notes** on the mythic patterns for each culture studied. The notes will include summaries of representative myths, lists of patterns and themes, and possible study questions. These notes will be useful for me as a scholar and teacher, and I will gladly share them with any of the several faculty in my department who teach the myth class and who are interested in broadening the scope of the course beyond the traditional Greek and Roman myths.

The final report will compile the notes and case studies for both parts of the project, with a brief introduction and overview. Because of the wide range of my studies, notes and casebooks will be compiled as I move through my studies so that they will be as fresh, accurate, and pertinent as possible.

A time line for my research for both semesters is attached.

Benefits to College and Students

This project will offer benefits to me, to my department, to the college, to my students. My studies will bring me an important base of knowledge which I want as a scholar, as a person who loves to read, and as a teacher of several literature courses, ranging from Introduction to Literature to American Literature to Mythology. In my role as a member of my department's Basic Course Review Committee, I will be able to make stronger contributions to our discussions of curriculum and textbook selection. Perhaps even more important, my notes and summaries will be made available to interested members of the English department to assist them as they, too, struggle to keep abreast of the sometimes daunting changes that have occurred in our field over the past decade. I am also an active member of the Mt. San Antonio Faculty and have participated in workshops though Staff Development in the past and would be glad to share my new knowledge with interested faculty. My students will profit from having courses that better reflect the wide-ranging and powerful voices that make up the new canon.

PROPOSED TIME LINE FOR SABBATICAL PROJECT

Date	Area of Study	Sample Texts
Aug. -Sept. 1996	Overview of the changing American canon through the early 19th century	The Heath Anthology of American Literature, Volume 1 (2920 pp.)
Oct.- Nov. 1996	Overview of the changing American canon, 19th-20th century	The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Volume 2
Nov. -Dec. 1996	Focus on three writers, reading three primary texts by each as well as secondary critical material	Novels such as Harriet Wilson's Our Nig; autobiographies such as John Edgar Wideman's Brothers and Keepers; collections of short stories such as Sandra Cisneros' Woman Hollering Creek.
Jan.- Feb. 1997	Overview of World Mythology	World Mythology by Donna Rosenberg
March 1997	Myths of the Americas	American Myths and Legends by Erdoes and Ortiz Mythology of the Americas by Burland *et al.*
April 1997	Myths of the Far East	Dragons, Gods, and Spirits from Chinese Mythology by Sanders Occidental Mythology by Campbell
May 1997	Myths of Africa	Myth, Literature, and the African World by Soyinka

Statement of Purpose

This sabbatical project focuses on the expansion of the literary canon that has occurred in recent years. The canon--that list of works thought by scholars and the academic community to be worthy of serious study and admiration--has simply exploded, adding to the voices of writers like Hawthorne, Hemingway, and Faulkner a staggering number of new voices, both contemporary writers and writers of the past whose works had been read but not canonized. In particular, women writers and writers of various races and cultures have gained a place in the canon. Similarly, interest among American scholars of myth has broadened, so that scholarship in that field examines the myths of many cultures in addition to the myths of the Greeks.

My interest in these fields springs from several sources. My teaching of these subjects has been both intellectually challenging and satisfying, and like any reader and scholar, I want to know more. This desire for deepening and broadening my knowledge is intensified by my awareness that my graduate studies are now sixteen years in the past. Much of the expansion of the canon has occurred in the intervening years; I needed to pursue my studies further if I wanted to keep current in my field. And it seemed to me that I would be a better teacher of the very diverse student body here at Mt. San Antonio College if I knew a broader range of literature within the American culture and if I knew the rich myths that come from non-western cultures. In short, as a reader, scholar, and teacher, I needed to renew my knowledge of American literature and Mythology.

Summary Statement

These notes reflect my year of reading in American Literature and in World Mythology. I have relied mostly on primary texts, though interest and curiosity led me on many occasions to turn to secondary texts for further information.

The notes on American Literature begin with Native American myths from the pre-Colonial Period and end with the work of contemporary poet Gary Soto and contemporary playwright August Wilson. For the authors I studied, I have included my notes and sets of journal questions, with more extensive materials (including journal articles and reviews) on Zora Neale Hurston, Gary Soto, and August Wilson.

For World Mythology, I read myths from around the world, with more extensive readings in South American, American Indian, and Chinese myth. For the myths, I have included factual information (time frame, culture, source) and interpretive responses as well as journal questions. Because non-western myth was an entirely new topic for me, I have included in a number of instances charts of the more daunting family trees and story lines.

This work should be enormously helpful to me as a teacher in these fields, and I will make it available to other faculty who teach literature courses. The material should be particularly useful for those who teach American Literature 1 and 2, Introduction to Literature, African-American Literature, Mexican American Literature, Images of Women in Literature, and Introduction to Mythology. I will make these materials accessible to my colleagues in both printed and disk form.

The benefits of this project to students will be less direct but no less important. My students in courses including American Literature, Introduction to Literature, and Freshman Composition have all profited by a more wide-ranging syllabus and by more informed and interesting lectures from me. My sense of the texts I studied has broadened and deepened, and that increased understanding has made me a better teacher, a teacher able to provide a context for the richly varied works we are reading.

The benefits to the college come from a number of directions. I am currently on the list of faculty who are willing to be guest speakers at community functions; I will be a better speaker, a better representative of our college as a result of my studies. I am also active in Staff Development training activities and hope to integrate examples from my project in the presentations I do for new faculty and for a collaborative learning course. Finally, a recent incident reveals one of the unexpected but gratifying results of a project like this: a member of our classified staff who had heard of the project asked for information on Louise Erdrich, a contemporary Native American writer, because her book club, which is associated with Mt. Sac personnel, was reading Erdrich and wanted more information. I was grateful to her for the chance to be a "literary ambassador," if you will, and share my new knowledge and expertise with interested readers outside of the classroom. I hope such opportunities will continue, and I am grateful for the support provided by Mt. SAC for my pursuit of this interest so crucial to me as a reader, teacher, and colleague.

APPENDIX A:

NOTES ON AMERICAN LITERATURE

Notes: The Colonial Period to 1700

The central image that most students—perhaps most Americans—have of the Colonial period has emerged in the national holiday of Thanksgiving, with its somberly-clad Pilgrims and its feathered and silent Indians. A closer look at the period and its literature reveals the paucity of that view. From the outset, North American was inhabited by a staggering diversity of people who struggled to establish themselves or, in the case of the Indians, to maintain themselves. When the Europeans arrived in the 15th century, there were perhaps eighteen million people living here. These 350 tribes of Native Americans consisted of patrilineal and matriarchal cultures, nomads and farmers, whose religious and cultural practices varied widely. They spoke well over two hundred different languages and many more dialects. Clearly, they were not the monolithic group depicted in today's popular culture.

The Europeans who arrived here were similarly diverse. The Spanish came in search of colonization and wealth, beginning with Amerigo Vespucci in 1499, and expanded their interests to the conversion of Native Americans to Catholicism. The French followed suit. Ultimately, it was the English who successfully claimed and colonized the land. The English who came in these settlements were not only Puritans; of the 100 who set sail on the Mayflower, only 30 were Separatist Puritans. Men and women came, as well as people of various classes—the wealthy, the merchant class, the working class, and indentured servants. And Africans came, too—as indentured servants to Jamestown in 1619. But they were brought as slaves from the very earliest days; Balboa and Hernando de Soto, for instance, brought slaves with them as early as 1513. By the mid-sixteenth century, roughly ten thousand Africans were being brought to Spanish colonies annually.

Thus, a look at literature from the Colonial Period should include more than the traditional approach, with its focus on sermons, diaries, and letters of English men in power. Native Americans chants and myths, Spanish explorers' narratives, journals and letters of women settlers, and slave narratives are all crucial voices in the early American chorus.

Questions to Ask about Literature from the Colonial Period

The questions we ask about these works should acknowledge their **antecedents**, their writers' **purpose**, and their intended **audiences** as well as the effects of **culture**, **gender**, and **class**.

In the writings of the explorers, for instance, we see Europeanized metaphors, which describe the land and their exploits in Edenic images, a result of their Christian beliefs and of their calculated interest in getting more funding for further exploration. Their assumptions about the Native Americans (misnamed "Indians" by Christopher Columbus) reveal their Christian hierarchical sensibilities and their Eurocentric values. The Native American works reveal their writers' strong belief in the interdependence of humans and the natural world. Later, in the Puritans' diaries, poems, and sermons, we see clearly "all events as occurring according to providential will, all crises as tests offered by Satan and watched over carefully by God...with a relentless searching for biblical precedent and for God in all events." The slave narratives make use of their writers' adopted Christian views in combination with metaphors from African traditional tales, and those narratives were often directed at garnering the support of powerful abolitionists in the North.

Notes: Native American Works

The rich and varied myths, tales, chants, and poems of the various Native American tribes have not been studied as much as they might have, for reasons in addition to the racist attitudes held by the dominant culture, which initially viewed the Native Americans as savages and brutes; one of the clearest reasons is that these traditional, oral works usually were part of rituals, with performance a deeply integral part of their structure. Translation to English and the printed page is difficult.

As we look at the works and translations available, there are several forms of particular interest:

1) **Myths**

The Creation stories are especially striking, with two clear patterns: the Earth-Diver stories, which come mostly from tribes living in Canada and the East; the Emergence stories, found throughout the southwestern United States. The Earth-Diver stories involve a great flood and an animal that dives below the flood waters to bring up enough mud to create the earth. The Emergence stories, told primarily by agricultural peoples, describe an evolving of order from chaos, light from darkness.

The Hero Stories are fascinating too, with clear parallels to the patterns described in Joseph Campbell's Heroic Cycle.

The myths present a world view fundamentally different from the monotheistic, hierarchical world of the settlers. For the Native Americans, there is no one supreme god, and humans are not radically set apart from animals. Thus interdependence and respect are the proper relationship between humans, their gods, and the animals with which they share the earth.

2) **Historical Narratives** explain the movements of the tribe and often tell of the influx of colonists and their effect on the life of the tribe. These stories often combine legend with actual historical events.

3) **Trickster Tales** in Native American life present the Trickster as alone and wandering, often marginalized socially; the stories often carry with them cultural lessons of behavior.

Notes: "Talk Concerning the First Beginning" (Zuni Creation Myth)

This myth comes from the Zuni tribe, an agricultural people based mainly in New Mexico. An earth-diver story, it tells of the Ahaiyute, the War God Hero Twins, and their descent into the fourth womb of the earth to bring out the people so that they might worship the sun, who was lonely. There is clearly a ritual element in this tale, as certain lines are repeated throughout, giving the story a rhythmic, chanted sound. The words of these lines are significant, too:

1) In the greetings, we have a pattern that demonstrates to listeners the polite and appropriate behavior between hosts and guests—a greeting, a "how are you?" and a polite "fine" response, an invitation to sit down, and a willingness to listen carefully to what the visitor has to say and to value it by remembering it.

2) We see a belief in fate, a notion that humans are given "roads" to travel and that their encounters on that road are ordained.

3) The idea of original chaos is clear as those in the womb repeatedly describe images of disorder in which they live; they want to move toward a more orderly world.

Journal Question on Zuni Creation myth: *You may have found yourself skimming over the lines that are repeated throughout the story. Look again at the lines that are repeated each time the visitors encounter someone new. Consider the significance of those repeated lines. What do they tell us about polite behavior? about the Zuni view of human life and creation?*

In the central part of the story, the twins bring forth the people from the fourth womb, with descriptions of each womb level as they ascend. In the description of their ascent, we see various functions of myth clearly:

a) the charter myth, which explains cultural or political practices. Here, we get clear descriptions of religious rituals—four days of song sequences;

b) the nature myth, which seeks to explain natural phenomena. Here, we get descriptions of the various subterranean levels of earth;

c) the myth of psychological truth. Here, we see images and metaphors of emerging vision and understanding, as the people emerge from the "raw-dust" world, through worlds of soot and fog into the world where they can see clearly.

Notes: "Changing Woman and the Hero Twins" (Navajo story)

There are clearly elements of the charter myth pattern here, as the story begins with specific descriptions of rituals—a description of calls, chants, songs, prescribed periods of time, the configuration in which singers of the Blessingway must stand, and so on. Clearly, the story functions in part as a primer for its listeners in the appropriate ways of worship.

We see that charter function in another way, too, as it explains cultural practices, explaining why Navajo women pull on rope during childbirth: Changing Woman and White Shell Woman pulled on "a drag-rope of the rainbow" in giving birth to the hero twins.

Of most interest, however, is the hero story itself, in which the hero twins go on a quest in search of their father—and of his weapons, which will help them slay the enemies who are devouring the land. The story is striking in its adherence to Joseph Campbell's description of the Heroic Adventure Cycle. They begin in a kind of isolation, separated from their father; they are given a heroic task, fraught with dangers and difficulties. It is interesting to note that the dangers, unlike the monsters in Greek myths, are all natural phenomena: rocks that crush, reeds that cut, cacti that tear, sands that overwhelm and destroy. As they face this sequence of trials, they do so with the aid of a Helper—in this case, Spider Woman, who gives them magic feathers and an incantation that will stave off the dangers they encounter. When they do reach their father, they confront another series of tests, this time devised by him. Again, we see in this story (like those of the Greeks) the psychological truth regarding the tenuous, sometimes adversarial relationship between fathers and sons. At the end of their journey, they are given the elixir (weapons, in this case) that will help them restore order to the world.

Journal questions on the Changing Woman story:

1) In what ways do you see the patterns of Joseph Campbell's Heroic Life Cycle played out in this story?

2) In what ways do you see the various types of myth—charter myth, nature myth, myth as bearer of psychological truth—exemplified in this ancient Navajo story?

Notes: Raven Stories from the Tlingit and Tsimshian

The Raven stories from these two tribes—both of the northwest—are trickster tales. In these tales, the Raven functions as an outsider, a creature who lives (and succeeds) by his wits and verbal skills. The stories here seem unlike the Trickster tales of the African-Americans in that the role of the Trickster figure seems to me to be more conflicted, less clear, while the Anansi and Bre'r rabbit stories that I know often center on themes of the small overcoming the powerful. In those stories, the small creature again and again defeats the proud and mighty with his wits and talk. While there is an element of that, the Raven is not consistently triumphant; nor is he particularly admirable. In the stories, he functions in a cautionary, teaching role—offering lessons about why one shouldn't marry outside of caste in the Tlingit story, teaching the dangers of false shamans or too much gullibility in leaders. But he himself is not necessarily one to be admired, or at least not consistently so.

Journal question on the Raven stories: *Compare and contrast the role of the Raven trickster with that in the Anansi stories popular with those of the early slaves featured in the video narrated by Denzel Washington.*

Notes: Letters and Journals of the Explorers

The letters and journals of Columbus, Cabeza de Vaca, and Pedro Menendez de Aviles are interesting not so much for their literary qualities as for the vivid picture they provide of the various motives and world views held by the earliest European explorers, views that have resonated in the years long after their exploration.

Columbus' journals are stunning in their single-minded interest in the land and its fruits and animals as commodities; nearly everything is judged as for its potential monetary value. Those things or areas that could not be sold are summarily dismissed. His desire for fame and honor also comes through clearly; his tone to the king wavers between bluster and supplication.

Cabeza de Vaca's journals are the most entertaining of those I read. In part, his growing empathy for the Native Americans is more compelling for me than the patronizing tones of the other writers. But his story-telling is also dramatic and engrossing. One of the strongest impressions we get from his journals is the appallingly inadequate preparation of the explorers for the exigencies of travel in the new world.

Pedro Menendez de Aviles' letter to King Philip is a simply astonishing testimony to the desire to proselytize—not merely to convert, but as he says, to "chastise...this wicked sect [He calls the French Huguenots Lutherans] [to] leave us free to implant the Gospel in these parts, enlighten the natives, and bring them to allegiance to your majesty...." He writes with pride of his slaughter (I think that is not too strong a word) of the "Lutherans" whose presence tainted the new world as a stage for the spreading of his Catholic faith.

Journal question on the explorers: *Think about each writer's letter/journal. What are your impressions of his motives for being in the New World? How does he see it? How does he see himself in it? How does he see those who are already there? Think about the audience to whom the letter or journal is directed. How does that audience affect the writer's approach? What is he trying to accomplish by the writing? What about the writing itself? What do you notice about its tone, its metaphors, its style?*

Notes: The Writing of John Smith, Explorer (1580-1631)

Poor Pocahontas. During the last year, nearly 400 years after her encounter with John Smith, the plastic that has been made in her name would fill the streets of Jamestown—and on into the hunting grounds of her father, Powhatan, who is called in some texts an "Indian emperor." The buxom, singing woman who cavorts across the Disney screen is clearly a fantasy figure; when John Smith first met her, he guessed her age as ten.

The readings from Smith about his encounter with Powhatan are a fascinating look at the dangers of trusting in the absolute or literal truth of the "history" in the accounts we have from early explorers and settlers. The first, original version, of 1608—"A True Relation of Such Occurrences and Accidents of Noate as Hath Hapned in Virginia"—is written in first person and focuses on the wealth, power, ceremony, and generosity of Powhatan, emphasizing his cordial and generous reception of Smith into his kingdom. The second version, written 16 years later in 1624—"The General Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles"—is dramatically different, emphasizing Smith's captive status and his fear of the danger and savagery of Powhatan; in this account, Pocahontas intervenes, offering her own life for Smith's. After this rescue, she continues in her role as protector and helper; because of "the love of Pocahontas...all mens feare was abandoned." The fact that it is written in third person is an interesting stylistic choice, clearly meant to improve his status as threatened but beloved hero.

The story receives further embellishment in Smith's letter to the Queen in 1624. In that letter, he describes not only the episode in which she "hazarded the beating out of her own braines to save [his own]"; he describes the continued devotion that this "tender Virgin" showed to him and his men, serving as peace-maker among the men, bringing them supplies, and warning them "with watered eies" of her father's planned attack in 1609.

That she was in essence bartered by her father to another Englishman as his wife, was taken to England, and died before she could return home is only incidental to Smith's various versions, where she serves as a romantic foil in her interactions with him and as an example of the potential for "civilizing" the "savages" through her marriage and conversion to Christianity. Amazing stuff.

Journal question on John Smith: *Compare the three versions of John Smith's descriptions of his encounters with Powhatan and his daughter, Pocahontas. What differences do you see? How do you account for those differences?*

Notes: William Bradford, Governor of Plymouth (1590-1657)

Bradford's book, Of Plymouth Plantation, has long held a central place in the canon of early American literature. Bradford, a weaver who immigrated to America with a group who had first gone to Holland, served as governor of the group he called the Pilgrims with only brief intermissions from 1621 until 1657. His writing is interesting, literate, and powerful, earning him the reputation as the "greatest of American Puritan writers in prose."

In excerpts from his history, we see again and again the Puritan view of "all events as occurring according to providential will, all crises as tests offered by Satan and watched over carefully by God...with a relentless searching for biblical precedent and for God in all events." Bradford's vision of a stern God is clear in his description of the fate of one of the sailors whom he describes as "proud" and "very profane": "it pleased God...to smite this young man with a grievous disease, of which he died in a desperate manner...." In a description of the place where they landed, Bradford makes Biblical allusions, describing "a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and men," drawing comparisons between the settlers and the Israelites in Egypt. An excerpt on the earthquake describes it in apocalyptic terms, seeing the earthquake as a sign of divine displeasure. And the chapter on the year 1642 and the "outbreak of wickedness" posits the idea that the colonies were a battleground between Satan and God and that the very strength of the church made the colonies a particular target for forces of evil.

Journal question on William Bradford: *Your text describes the Puritan view of "all events as occurring according to providential will, all crises as tests offered by Satan and watched over carefully by God...with a relentless searching for biblical precedent and for God in all events." How do you see that view of the Puritans demonstrated in William Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation?*

Notes: Anne Bradstreet—Puritan, Mother, Poet (1612-1672)

It is in reading the work of Anne Bradstreet that I find myself moving from being interested to being moved. Although I am curious about the thinking and expression of the explorers and leaders of the early settlements, I am touched by the personal world evoked by the poetry of Anne Bradstreet. The first widely recognized woman poet in North American literature, she wrote (after a period of more conventional poetry) poetry on the private themes of family, love, sorrow, faith, and resignation.

Her first book was published in 1650 in London at the insistence of her brother-in-law, John Woodbridge, who wrote a preface assuring readers of the book's authenticity—an affirmation that reads much like the affirmations that would later preface slave narratives. In his preface, Woodbridge carefully asserts that Bradstreet was a good and dutiful mother and wife, pointing out that her poems were not written in neglect of her family duties.

Two of her most famous poems are about her writing: "The Prologue [To Her Book]" and "The Author to Her Book." In "The Prologue," she begins with a series of stanzas that are both apologetic and assertive, announcing her inability (or unwillingness) to treat epic themes, her "simple," "broken" skills, and her situation: she will not change or be elevated by her art; she is "weak" and "wounded." There is a shift from this apologetic tone in the 5th stanza, which begins with a direct assertion, beginning with I: "I am obnoxious to each carping tongue/Who says my hand a needle better fits...." Having established a compliant, meek tone at the beginning, she shifts to a spirited defense of her gender and of her own interest in writing. In the final two stanzas, she shifts from a third person commentary on those (men) who "carp" about her to a first person plea—even a demand: "Preeminence in all and each is yours;/Yet grant some small acknowledgment of ours." In "The Author to Her Book," she again offers apologies for her work, this time couched in female imagery, describing her book as an "ill-form'd offspring."

Other poems not about her life as an writer focus instead on her life as a mother and wife. "Before the Birth of One of Her Children" expresses familiar themes of life's fragility, the sorrow of separation, the desire to be remembered, but these are made all the more affecting by the context—lines spoken to an expected child by the mother who expects her birth soon and who fears the dangers that childbirth will bring. Two other poems, "To My Dear and Loving Husband" and "A Letter to Her Husband, Absent Upon Public Employment," are quite simply wonderful love poems.

Notes: Samuel Sewall, Judge (1652-1730)

Samuel Sewall's place in history and American letters comes primarily from two documents: 1) a public announcement in which he apologized for his role in the Salem witchcraft trials (he was the only judge to do so) and 2) The Selling of Joseph, one of the first anti-slavery pamphlets to be published by a Puritan. In some ways, these documents are less remembered by readers than is his diary. Part of that diary details his courtship of Katherine Winthrop when he was in his 60's and had lost his first wife after a marriage of 41 years and a second wife who died within 6 months of their marriage. The Heath anthology says that his twentieth century editor "regrets that...the courtship has come to seem a rather comical affair," but he does, in fact, sound a bit like an 18th-century Prufrock as he details his long (and ultimately unsuccessful) courtship, recording the monetary gifts bestowed on servants, visits made and gifts proffered to Ms. Winthrop, ruminations about whether or not he does, as she hints, need a wig....I suppose that all of us sound a little pathetic in our accounts of anxious love affairs, but Sewall's account is a welcome light moment in the serious, reflective body of work that has come to us from the Colonial Period.

Notes: Colonial Period, 1700-1800

As the Colonists faced the 18th century, they faced many changes. One of the key factors of change lay in the demographics—mass migrations, with increasing numbers of non-English settlers; a growing slave population (275,000 were brought in during the century); increased life expectancies; and, resulting from these facts, an unparalleled rate of population growth, growing from 52,000 Euro-Americans in 1650 to 3,5000,000 in 1790. As they established themselves in the Northeast, with its prosperous shipping trade, in the Middle Colonies, with its agriculture, and the Lower South, with its farming of staple crops and tobacco, we see in the writings of this period a shift from a focus on survival to concerns with broader issues—debates on the nature of mankind and on government, and an expansion of forms, with poetry and formal autobiographies being written in addition to the journals and diaries of the earliest years. Fiction remained problematic for them because it seemed tied to the European world that they saw as decadent. Thus any fiction written had to be clearly didactic, designed as instruction rather than entertainment.

Although the voices in government, in churches, and in published writing remained largely those of white men, we do begin to hear the voices of those who were almost completely shut out of avenues of power: in the poems from women of the period, the speeches from a number of great Native American orators who argued movingly against the destruction of their cultures, and in the narratives of the slaves. These voices are particularly impressive in light of the oppression they faced: women gave up all property rights upon marriage and could not speak in church; the Native Americans were being pushed further and further from their lands, often to bleak places very different from the lands they had left; slaves were denied even literacy and the right to marry—and were in effect judged to be 3/5 human in the Missouri Compromise. None of these groups could vote. Thus their desire to express and define themselves by writing is a tribute to their courage and hope.

Notes: Olaudah Equiano (Gustavus Vassa) Slave and Freeman 1745-1797

Olaudah Equiano's autobiography is the first of a number of powerful slave narratives that make up part of the early American canon. Kidnapped in Africa with his sister when he was eleven years old, he was a slave in a number of circumstances under a number of owners for ten years. His narrative, entitled The Interesting Narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself, follows the spiritual autobiographical tradition used by men of power before him—men like John Winthrop and Jonathan Edwards—in describing a movement from darkness to light, from bondage to freedom, but it adds a new dimension in its element of social protest.

His two-volume work, read and published widely in its time, is a prototype of the slave narratives that would follow. Even its title sets the pattern of the narratives that would follow it: in the subtitle, Written by Himself, we see both the racism of the day (white readers needed assurance, often found in the form of testimonies from well-known white abolitionists, that the slaves could indeed produce literary works) and the empowerment that the ex-slaves sought in writing their own lives. Having been denied everything—home, family, self-determination, even their own names—they could re-claim themselves, in a way, by writing their own stories. These themes and images would recur in the slave narratives that followed his:

1) emotional descriptions of brutal separations from family and community;

2) detailing of escape attempts, often failed, which make clear the desperation felt by slaves;

3) accounts of physical abuse;

4) descriptions of the naming and re-naming processes which further dehumanized the slaves. (In three chapters, Equiano tells us he was called Michael, Jacob, and Gustavus Vassa, a name that he resisted so much that he was flogged until he acquiesced. For this reason, I find it disturbing that the Heath lists him as Vassa, with Equiano in parentheses. Why not the other way around, in recognition of his desires?)

5) direct addresses to Christians, in which the narrator appeals to Christian charity and conscience in arguing against slavery;

6) a detailed telling of the process by which the narrator was manumitted, often accompanied by transcripts of the documents that freed him/her.

Journal question on Olaudah Equiano: *We have discussed the genre of slave narratives that emerged early in American literature. In what particular ways does Olaudah Equiano's narrative fit that pattern—a pattern that his book established? OR Compare Equiano's narrative to the captivity narrative of Mary Rowlandson, who wrote of her capture by Indians. What parallels do you see between the two works? What differences?*

Notes: Phillis Wheatley, First Black American to Publish a Book (1753-1784)

John Shields, in his essay on Wheatley in African American Writers: Profiles of Their Lives and Works...., constructs a strong argument against the (largely negative) literary reputation of Phillis Wheatley: that she was a derivative writer, that she was so full of piety that she never questioned her adopted Christianity's hypocrisy in condoning slavery, and, perhaps most damning, that she ignored the issue of slavery altogether in her awe and admiration for her white owners and acquaintances. This pseudo-Wheatley, as Shields calls her, was interesting only as a historical or sociological figure—the first black American to publish a book. As a literary artist, she has been dismissed; he points out that in two hundred years of Wheatley commentary, the content of her poems was almost totally ignored. Although Shields mentions a groundbreaking essay appearing in 1953 that did consider (and praise) her voice as a poet, it is the pseudo-Wheatley who remains most familiar. The Heath anthology, for instance, in spite of its reputed radical stance, focuses almost exclusively on her life, her precociousness, and the racism that presented obstacles to her repeated efforts to publish. The Heath commentator begins by noting that she wrote on a variety of subjects, but he ignores those subjects and the poems themselves, focusing instead on her biography. I know, too, that at least one of the anthologies I've used in my African-American Lit class did not even include Wheatley in its chronological presentation of authors. My own reading of Wheatley has dismissed her in exactly the way that Shields argues so powerfully against. Thus I am interested and excited to read (and be persuaded by) his re-reading of her work.

Admittedly, some of his arguments are hard for me to evaluate, particularly those that seek to trace African roots and influences in her poetic forms and images. That her mother may have worshipped the sun seems a long stretch from her regular use of solar images and metaphors. But other arguments seem much more compelling.

Those arguments include the following:

1) her use of the panegyric (poem of praise, often an elegy) reflects her African heritage; Ruth Finnegan calls it "one of the most developed and elaborate poetic genres of Africa," often focusing on political figures, as did Wheatley's poems.

2) a number of her poems reflect the moral function of African folk songs, which "convey a moral—a warning, ridicule, criticism, entreaty, flattery, thanks, abuse, defiance, a demand, repulsion." Thus poems that might at first reading seem obsequious often begin with flattery but end with criticism and entreaty.

3) her poems do NOT represent resignation to her situation as a slave; she does NOT sidestep slavery as an issue but confronts it in a number of poems, most notably the famous but often mis-read "On Being Brought From Africa to America" and "On Imagination." Both insist, assert, admonish. The former poem directly addresses Christians, asserting the equality of her "sable race." (Note the connotations of nobility in the choice of sable.) "On Imagination" offers praise for the freedom and attractions offered by the imagination: "There in one view we grasp the mighty whole,/Or with new world amaze th' unbounded soul." In that word choice—"unbounded"—and in others—"The frozen deeps may break their iron bands"—she uses imagery particular to her situation as a slave, and the message of the poem is clear: imagination is so powerful that it can free her even from her position as a slave, a situation which "forbids [her] to aspire," which "damps the rising fire," which "chills the tides." Her voice is clear and insistent in these poems.

The subtle power of her poems and her courageous efforts to have her voice heard—she made three futile appeals in Boston papers for subscribers and was first published in Britain with the help of a patron—are a tribute to the young woman who was kidnapped into slavery at age seven. Ultimately, I am pleased to have re-read Phillis Wheatley and concur with writer John Shields, who says, "She deserved better then, and she deserves better now."

Notes: Benjamin Franklin, Journalist, Diplomat, Scientist, Writer (1706-1790)

I remember being told as an undergraduate that Benjamin Franklin was the quintessential writer of Colonial America, and that if I wanted to understand American Literature, I had to read his autobiography. I shrugged off that advice as professorial hyperbole, but as I read Franklin now, I can see the point. I understand better why one of the editors of Heath's section on Franklin says "No other autobiography has been so frequently read or so influential in America."

These things stand out as I read:

1) The focus of his works is **didactic**, whether in the aphorisms of Poor Richard's Almanacks, the satires that he published anonymously, even the Autobiography, which he published in part at the urging of friends who believed it would be vitally influential on the young people who read it. In its didactic nature, his work reflects an American appreciation of that which is practical, useful rather than what it beautiful.

And because his works are intended to instruct and improve individual readers, we see the American belief in the potential of **individuals** to improve themselves, outside of the realm of religious institutions or authoritarian governments. We see his valuing of individualism, too, in his willingness to throw off the influence of his own family; he is very matter-of-fact about that in ways that someone from another culture might not be.

2) The **values** that lie at the heart of his work—frugality, temperance, and, perhaps most of all, industry—are clearly part of the fabric of the American ethos. The maxims of his Almanacks are still common today. He says of industry, "Lose no Time. Be always employ'd in something useful. Cut off all unnecessary action." Imagine saying something like that to other cultures—the French, for instance, with their love of talk among friends, or Mexicans, with their focus on family. (I think that the glaringly American nature of Franklin's work was lost on me when I was younger because I had not traveled or met people from other countries. I think, for instance, of an Australian who visited us this year and who said that the most striking thing about Americans for him was their focus on work—how it was central in their lives in a way that seemed very strange to him.)

3) There is an underlying **optimism** in his works that lies at the heart of the **American Dream**: it is possible to begin poor (he conjures up the image of himself wandering about, penniless, with only a roll to munch on as he embarks on a new life for himself at a very young age)

and to end up prosperous—if one works hard. And the goal of prosperity and wealth is central and worthwhile; the unapologetic "The Way to Wealth" reflects the notion that material wealth is a central part of the American Dream.

4) Embedded in that optimism is a belief in **method, system**. I find myself thinking of the shelves and shelves of self-help books which line American bookstores. They had a clear predecessor in Franklin's Autobiography, with its tables and check system for developing "the habitude" of thirteen virtues. The "how-to" section on virtues is followed by a section on time management.

5) Part of this system lies in the reflection upon and evaluation of one's everyday living. His identification of the "errata" of his life seems to echo that **searching of one's own soul for sin** that was so important to his Puritan forbears.

Journal Questions on Ben Franklin:

1. Imagine this, if you will: you are a guest star on X-Files. You've been asked to report on an alien culture, focusing on its values—what is important to it, how it sees its members, what it admires, what it deplores. The only evidence you have of this culture is a tattered copy of Poor Richard's Almanacks and some excerpts from Ben Franklin's Autobiography. Write your report.

2. Benjamin Franklin first established himself by his writing, particularly his satires, which sometimes got him in trouble with authorities. Read "A Witch Trial at Mount Holly" and "The Speech of Polly Baker." What is his point in each of these satires? That is, who is the object of his criticism? Why is he leveling that criticism?

Notes: J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, Surveyor, Farmer, Consul, Writer (1735-1813)

Crevecoeur is known for one work, Letters from an American Farmer. This epistolary narrative won him acclaim among French intellectual circles in his day; over a century later, D. H Lawrence called Letters a work as important as Benjamin Franklin's. I see that it is read in its entirety in an early American Lit class at the University of Washington. Why is this work so important?

In his creation of a series of letters by a fictional American farmer named James, Crevecoeur wrote the first American text which sought explicitly to answer the question, "What is an American?" The definition that is presented through this farmer's series of letters is one that is still very much at the heart of American beliefs and ideologies, particularly those that are part of the Romantic perspective. His views have reverberated in American texts and popular culture for two centuries:

1) The containment of Nature—through the construction of "Fair cities, substantial villages, extensive fields of an immense country filled with decent houses, good roads, orchards, meadows, and bridges"—is a good and worthy pursuit. That which is "wild, woody, and uncultivated" should be transformed through human industry.

2) Conversely, the natural world is good, inspirational, offering us moral lessons if we will only see them. He cites the "sagacity of animals" as worthy of our attention and study. The farmer, working closely in nature as he does, is a figure of honor and reverence; his work has an almost mystical quality to it. The narrator also places the Indians in this arena of the simple, natural world.

3) This is a country built by the industry and dreams of the poor. People who were "mowed down by want, hunger, and war" came here and built good lives for themselves.

4) This is a classless society, in sharp contrast to Europe's wide divisions between rich and poor.

5) The ownership of land is central to American identity and happiness.

6) America is a melting pot; he says, "Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men."

7) He recognizes (and eventually despairs about) the stunning gap between American stated ideals and its practices regarding others; one of the most vehement and moving sections describes the horrific conditions of slavery and the hypocrisy of a "free" nation that bases its strength in part on the labor of slaves.

8) He thus combines that peculiar American loyalty and optimism with a dark, critical look at the country.

9) The American Indian is a peaceful, silent, noble being whose simple, natural perspective should be honored; the descriptions (in which the farmer plans to take his family to go live with the Indians) are classic "Noble Savage" images.

10) Again, we see a dichotomy between theory and practice. While praising the Indians and what he sees as their noble life, he makes plans to "reform"—literally, to re-form—them by teaching them to rely more on agriculture, to practice more industry, to accept the Christian faith.

11) Interesting, too, are his descriptions of being ostracized and threatened by those who disagreed with his British sympathies.

The work is full of ideas and perspectives that are strikingly familiar. It presents an archetypal image of what it means to be an American, an image that is a mixture of accuracy and romanticization.

Journal question on Crevecoeur: *Crevecoeur's narrator tackles overtly, for the first time in American letters, the question "What is an American?" List and describe several of the traits with which he answers that question. Which of his ideas about what it means to be an American are ideas that we still hold about ourselves today?*

Notes: John Adams, Politician & Writer (1735-1826) Abigail Adams, Wife and Feminist (1744-1818)

As I read excerpts of John Adams' autobiography and of Abigail Adams' letters and diary, I see them as interesting more as historical than literary figures. To be sure, John Adams, as the first vice-president and second president of this country in its early days, is important, and his (edited) works are interesting and have flashes of dry wit. His disagreements with Jefferson, too, would be illustrative of different views in Revolutionary America. Abigail Adams' letters are interesting in their feminist perspectives; although she in one place is critical of a young woman who is not lady-like because she "faild in that symplicity of manners which is the principal ornament of a Female Character," she is, in her letters to her husband, clear in her desire for equal and fair treatment in the laws which he helped to write.

Generally, though, I think that I would be more likely to use their work (especially the letters) in a paired English-History class than in a literature survey course.

Notes: Thomas Paine, Egalitarian, Radical & Pamphleteer (1737-1809)

Thomas Paine's name is inextricably connected to the American Revolution; his "Common Sense" was the first pamphlet urging separation from England. His "American Crisis" papers—beginning with the famous lines, "These are the times that try men's souls"—helped to spur on the revolution when it faltered early on. These works are powerfully written, combining reason with broad appeals to emotion, unswerving in their disdain for precedent and tradition as guiding forces.

A sampling of his writing across a range of topics reveals how deeply felt was his commitment to egalitarian thought. His **"An Occasional Letter on the Female Sex"** recognizes from the outset that women are both "adored and oppressed"; he goes on to plea eloquently for a change in their degraded position in the world; he closes by imagining what a woman might say, were she only given the chance to voice her longing: " '...Be not tyrants in all: Permit our names to be sometimes pronounced beyond the narrow circle in which we live...and deny us not that public esteem which, after the esteem of one's self, is the sweetest reward of well doing. ' "

"Common Sense," after establishing its author's populist sensibilities (he sounds a little like Ross Perot when he says, "I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense") goes on to argue, point by point, against those who want to retain American ties with and allegiance to England. Among his arguments:

1) This is a new age; the future—not the past—is what matters;

2) Those who argue that Britain has been like a parent are wrong; Britain has not been a loving or attentive parent and has in fact done all for her own self-interest;

3) America is not in truth the child of Britain; the diversity of the American population shows that America is the offspring of Europe;

4) The connection with Britain hurts, rather than helps, American interests abroad, bringing America unnecessarily into conflicts that are not related to her;

5) Too much has happened for reconciliation;

6) "A government of our own is a natural right";

7) Reason and rationality are values that must be upheld; if America does not follow a reasonable, just course of action now, tyranny could break out.

"**The Age of Reason,**" published over a period of several years (1794-1796), is very much consistent with Paine's earlier publications in its radical stance, its commitment to reason, its integral optimism which believed that mankind could improve itself and its situation through the application of reason. In it, Paine presents his own credo—his belief in one god, his belief in a life after death, and his belief in justice and mercy as the central religious duties of mankind. After that, he turns to the ideas that must have shocked his American readers, ideas that eventually led to his condemnation; Theodore Roosevelt called him "that shabby little atheist," and his body was not permitted burial in American soil. He works methodically to argue against popular notions of revelation on which major religions are based, saying that revelation is an individual exchange between one person and God, and that when that revelation is passed on to others, it becomes hearsay. He places Christian beliefs in historical context, saying that the trinity is a natural consolidation of the multiple gods of earlier times. He sees Christ as a "virtuous and amiable man," not a deity. He argues that no good God would demand the sacrifice of his son. He says, "Of all the systems of religion that were ever invented, there is not more derogatory to the Almighty, more unedifying to man, more repugnant to reason, and more contradictory in itself, than this thing called Christianity." Clearly, he was a man of the Age of Reason, a powerful figure in American history who died in ignominy because his beliefs in revolution extended beyond the institution of government and into the institution of the church.

Journal questions on Thomas Paine: *Thomas Paine was a powerful, literate radical whose pamphlets in favor of the American Revolution played a crucial role in garnering support for that war. Answer one of these questions about his pamphlets:*

1) Write a Cliff's Notes version of his arguments in ***Common Sense.*** *What were his central arguments in favor of the American revolution?*

2) In addition to ***Common Sense,*** *Paine wrote other pamphlets that are less well known—but they are equally (perhaps more) radical. Choose one, "An Occasional Letter on the Female Sex" or excerpts from "The Age of Reason" and examine its major precepts. Because of their radical stance, you might want to present them as Martin Luther presented his own radical ideas—as a list of theses (or "truths") to be posted in public places.*

Notes: Hannah Foster, (1758-1840) Anonymous Author of The Coquette

The sentimental novel was enormously popular in the 18th century. Charlotte Temple, for instance, had been published in 40 editions before 1824; by 1905, that number had risen to 200 printings. From 1765-1800, there had been little public expression except for those forms found in the pulpit, the courtroom, and the legislature. The sentimental novel was obviously a sharp break from this. Although there is a clear link with the allegories and morality parables of the pulpit, the sentimental novel was fiction, and focused its narrative on the life of a young woman, most often a young woman of middle or lower class, without ready access to position or wealth of her own. These novels, written most often by women, were read widely by an increasingly literate population.

Who were these people who read so enthusiastically these stories of the seduction and ruin of young women? Cathy Davidson points out in Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America, that in order to understand what was read, we must first know about who was reading and what their world was like. These facts about that world are illuminating:

1) The novels themselves give us some answers about their readership. They address directly "the American fair" or "daughters of United Columbia," and their characters and plots mirrored their readership: young, white, New England, female audience, for the most part unmarried.

2) Because of the Revolutionary War and its subsequent Baby Boom, a full two-thirds of the white population of America was under 24 years of age. Not surprisingly, the mean age of the hero and heroine of pre-1820 novels written in America was 25.

3) The average age of marriage was between 22 and 24; life expectancy was 42. No college opened for women until 1837. Thus women spent at least half their lives in a pre-marital state.

4) Women in their premarital years could earn their money in limited ways: as teachers, domestic workers, factory or mill workers; there was no question of equal pay.

5) When she did marry, laws of coverture in the 18th century provided that a woman's rights would be "covered" by her husband's: she lost her property rights, she lost her legal right to make a will, her signature carried no weight on legal documents. Divorce was not readily available and was definitely not acceptable. Clearly, a woman's wise choice of mate was necessary for survival.

6) The average number of children born to an American woman (not counting miscarriages or stillbirths) was 7.4. Each pregnancy brought with it very real danger to the mother's life.

7) As is often true in post-war times, there was a shifting and settling of roles, as women who had run their family's farms and lived on their own saw their husbands returning home to resume their positions of authority and leadership.

8) The scene in The Coquette in which Julia reads aloud to Eliza and her mother was a common one; as women did domestic piece work—knitting or weaving or making straw hats or mending boots—they read to each other. Thus the sentimental novel was read not only by solitary women but by women in groups, so that the characters and their lives were a part of the everyday discourse of women.

Hannah Webster Foster, after bearing six children to her husband John Foster, a minister, wrote The Coquette, which was published in 1797—three years after Charlotte Temple. In some ways The Coquette follows closely the tradition established by Susanna Rowson's Charlotte Temple and its predecessors, Samuel Richardson's Pamela and Clarissa; a young woman, innocent and naive, ignores the advice of family and friends and is seduced by a villainous rake. Having succumbed to his advances, she loses her place in society, becomes pregnant, is abandoned by her faithless lover, and dies, alone and penniless, in childbirth. In its broad outlines, it functions clearly as a didactic tale to the "American fair" who are its readers: young women must obey the dictates of society, most especially those rules about maintaining sexual chastity and making appropriate choices of husbands. But the book also subverts the form. It does not merely condemn the young woman—Eliza Wharton—who makes the literally fatal error of giving her heart and virtue to a villain. In fact, the book's total effect is to condemn the society and culture which make Eliza's life and decisions so untenable. In these ways, the book offers a thorough re-visioning of what is tragic about Eliza's situation:

1) Like Austen, Foster understood the restrictions presented to young women who had no money of their own and no way to earn it; marriage was a financial arrangement, the only way a middle-class woman could survive economically.

2) Societal expectations were absolutely rigid for both men and women, with reputation having enormous impact on emotional as well as financial survival. As one critic says, "Decorum stifled the lovely heretic who rejected feminine punctilio, delicacy, and propriety."

3) Although both sexes faced rigid rules of conduct, the book makes clear the double standard with which male and female behavior were

judged. While Sanford is known to be a rake who has "ruined" other women, he is still accepted into polite society—welcomed into their homes, invited to their parties, and even allowed to marry one of their own. Women who disregarded the rules and expectations of the society were given no such latitude; to err as Eliza did is to bring about a free fall from which there is no recovery. This double standard is clear when we consider Benjamin Franklin's autobiography, in which he identifies what he calls "errata" of his youth, arguing that acknowledging and repenting of such errata will re-instate the youth on the path to success. Obviously, this is an option only for young men.

4) The book raises interesting questions about the role of women themselves in maintaining and insisting upon the rules for "True Womanhood." Sharon Harris, in her article "Hannah Webster Foster's "The Coquette": Critiquing Franklin's America," argues forcefully that Lucy Freeman and Mrs. Richman are fully acculturated into the patriarchal values that destroy Eliza: they accept those values; they offer them to Eliza in sometimes-contradictory maxims; and they (especially Lucy Freeman) withdraw from Eliza at the point when she most needs them. I find Harris' condemnation of Freeman too strong; she "abandons" Eliza not merely to focus on her new husband but also, I think, because she is pregnant—a condition that at that time would have not been conducive to travel. I need to think about that further.

5) The book raises serious questions about the extent to which real freedom is possible. Eliza Wharton talks in her letters to Lucy Freeman again and again about her desire for freedom, her guilty pleasure in being out of the shelter (and constriction) of "the paternal roof." It is no accident that Ms. Foster has Lucy Freeman marry and thus give up her heavily symbolic last name. Because Eliza is not willing to do this as she searches for a kind of freedom, she is destroyed. Interestingly, the image of leaving what she calls the paternal roof (even though her father has long been dead) comes up twice in Eliza's letters: once, in her opening letter, when she is full of hope and optimism about her ability to exercise choice in her own life; in the second reference, she has left that roof in shame, and instead of the wide range of freedom of which she had dreamed, she is shut up in a small hotel room—with the word confinement working in several ways—friendless and alone, even on her deathbed. Similarly, her seducer—who is in fact in love with her, who is presented with more sympathy that we usually see for the rake characters—dreams of some kind of freedom, and he is literally imprisoned in his rooms by creditors, unable to go to Eliza's side as she dies. Lucy Freibert in the Heath anthology calls it "a prototype for the American quest-for-freedom novel," and we see that quest flatly denied. Eliza's increasing retreat into silence at

the end of the book is a telling sign that she has abandoned not only her hope for freedom—but even her voice. As Walter Wenska, Jr. says in an article entitled "The Coquette and the American Dream of Freedom," Eliza's quest for freedom is doomed from the start, compromised by biological and economic facts.

Clearly, the sentimental novel's form and formula could not always unambiguously sustain the moral lessons that such fiction was supposed to do. The form supported marriage, but the marriages were often lifeless, restrictive. Later, as is clearly the case in The Coquette, the villainous seducers were fleshed out as more complex characters, torn (like the female protagonists) between love and security, passion and societal obligation. And the young women are betrayed not only by the seducers; they are also betrayed by cruel parents, false advisers, limited opportunities for self-sufficiency, and rigid, unyielding societal expectations.

Journal Questions on Hannah Foster: *Remember to use quotes from the text to give your observations specificity.*

1. You may find it useful to examine the contrasts we see established early in the novel. You might consider any of these possibilities:

a) Contrast the way Eliza sees herself to the way her friends see her.

b) Contrast Boyer to Sanford.

c) Contrast the various views of marriage—Sanford's Vs. Boyer's, Eliza's vs. Lucy Freeman's, men vs. women.

2. How do <u>you</u> see Eliza?

3. One critic calls this a classic "American quest-for-freedom novel." Note carefully any mention of the word freedom. Who uses it? How does that person define it? What obstacles are there to that freedom?

4. Lucy Freeman and Mrs. Richman function as advisors and models for Eliza (and readers of the tale). Examine closely the nature of their advice; note, too, their actions. Is their advice identical? If not, in what ways do they approach Eliza's situation differently? Do you see any contradictions between what they say and what they do?

5. Why do you suppose that Julia Granby is introduced into the story? What is her function? How does she differ from Eliza's other friends, Lucy and Mrs. Richman?

6. America in the 18th century produced a body of works called "conduct literature." Usually, these works were straightforward lists of advice: "Obey your husband" or "Do not learn to romp." Works such as <u>The Coquette</u> can be seen as a novelization of that genre. Examine the ways in which the book does, in fact, function in that way. Then consider ways in which it can be seen, instead, not as supporting but as criticizing society and its values, social system, and political order.

Notes: Susanna Haswell Rowson, Headmistress, Textbook Author, Columnist, and Author of the First American Best-Seller, Charlotte, A Tale of Truth (1762-1864)

The heading of my notes indicates one significant way in which Susanna Rowson was a "first" in American letters: she is the first female author encountered so far who had work outside the home, who is known, not as the wife of a minister or statesman, but as an individual apart from her marriage. Her life story is fascinating: although she spent early years in London, where her loyalist family was sent as part of a prisoner exchange program, she later became one of America's foremost literary women, after having been a governess, actor, and headmistress. Her novel Charlotte, A Tale of Truth (called simply Charlotte Temple in later editions) quite simply took the nation by storm. The book went through over 200 editions, and by many accounts, was as common a possession as a family Bible; in fact, it often had a place of honor in the household, right next to the Bible. Studies of extant copies and their inscriptions indicate that it was a cherished gift among friends and family members.

Critics of today are divided in their reading of the text. It was, for a long time, dismissed altogether by literary folks as pulp fiction interesting only for the clearly conservative didactic function which it served. Others argue that this response is amiss because it can be read as a protest at the powerlessness of women in the culture—and that it was directed at precisely the audience—women of the middle and working class—who lived with and suffered from the limitations faced by Charlotte, the protagonist.

My response is similarly mixed. While the book is praised by some for its conciseness, its devotion to a direct telling of the tale, I find it nearly telegraphic, reading more like a summary of a novel than like a novel itself. It tells, in barest outline form, of the series of events that lead to Charlotte's birth, betrayal by a trusted teacher, seduction and abandonment by a lover, her piteous fall into poverty and death in childbirth. There are a couple of interesting twists in the tale. We see, for instance, that she is betrayed not only by a not-altogether villainous lover. The bigger betrayals come at the hands of her teacher and of her lover's altogether villainous friend, Mr. Belcour. Thus one could say that the book argues that society at large—teachers, soldiers, for instance—bears responsibility for the destruction of Charlotte and girls like her. But that feels like a stretch to me. First, there is the obvious xenophobia of the text: the treacherous teacher is French, the aptly named Madame LaRue (woman of the street, one who brings about events that Charlotte will one day rue). There is even a hint of that in the names of the men who bring

about her downfall—Montraville and Belcour, who are British but whose names have French antecedents. And the book is so focused on plot, rather than character, that we have very little sense of the motives and inner conflicts of the sinners or the sinned-against. For me, the book does indeed offer a much clearer, conservative moral lesson to its readers, raising none of the larger questions about the limited options faced by women in this country. And because its focus is on plot rather than character, it seems to me to be hurt very little by being presented in excerpts in the Heath anthology. That is not the case with The Coquette, which loses much of its power in the excerpted form.

Journal Questions on Susanna Rowson:

1. How does the book follow the patterns of the seduction novel? How does it break from or enlarge upon those patterns?

2. Compare/contrast your readings of The Coquette and Charlotte Temple. What similarities do you see? Differences? Focus only briefly on plot; look more closely at the differences in character development and in the implicit messages or arguments of the two texts.

Notes: The Early Nineteenth Century, 1800-1865

While the key word for the previous period was change, the key words for the early nineteenth century seem to me to be expansion, diversification, complication. Traditionally, the voices studied from this era are those of Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Poe. And those voices are wonderful, stimulating in their explorations of ideas, fiction, and poetry. But I am struck by the fact that the Transcendentalists' journal, The Dial, had only 300 subscribers, and that most of the copies of Thoreau's first book were returned unsold to him by his publisher. A close look at this period reveals it as one of hugely divergent experiences for those who called themselves Americans and those like the 80,000 Mexicans who were granted American citizenship when their lands were annexed by the U.S. Clearly, Emerson and his peers wielded powerful voices in the enclaves of their upper middle class New England world, and their voices have resonated ever since. But the canon as it was taught in the past was clearly skewed in terms of its gender (male), race (white), class (upper and middle class), and geography (Eastern seaboard). That last category is one that does not always immediately come to mind, but it was the East which was the locus of power: it was the place of money, status, and powerful institutions, ranging from the church to governmental offices to universities to publishing houses.

These facts are illuminating about this era of expansion:

1) Opportunities for the education for the general (white) public grew substantially: by the Civil War, the principle of publicly funded primary education had been established almost everywhere but the South; in 1836, Mt. Holyoke was established as a seminary for women; in 1837, Oberlin College became the first co-educational college; by 1860, there were over 3,000 lyceums, educational/entertainment lecture halls, across the country; by 1830, there were 1200 newspapers, with 47 in New York City alone.

2) The country was swept up in the Second Great Awakening, a largely Protestant movement. This Christianity provided a common vocabulary, a common set of allusions, but it was used in incredibly diverse ways: for and against slavery, to elicit sympathy for the plight of women and to condemn the Grimke sisters for speaking their feminism publicly; even to rationalize violent attacks on Irish Catholic immigrants.

3) The debate about slavery was a central one in the writings of the age. These took the form of pamphlets by individuals such as David Walker and by the increasing number of abolitionist societies, black-owned and edited newspapers, autobiographies by ex-slaves such as Frederick

Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, and novels such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin. These voices became even stronger in light of the passage of such laws at the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and the Dred Scott Decision in 1857, which were absolutely untenable in the eyes of those who opposed slavery.

4) The 1850's saw the publication of the first four novels by African Americans, with William Wells Brown's Clotel and Harriet Wilson's Our Nig being the most well known.

5) Women's issues were also debated hotly in public speeches and pamphlets, with names like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony at the forefront of the debate; the first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848.

6) Mexican newspapers in Spanish numbered in the hundreds in the Southwest; poetry and stories were a staple of these publications. These papers served a large population in lands that the United States would take over in a thirty-year period: Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, and half of Colorado.

7) We have very little from the thousands of Chinese immigrants who worked the Gold Rush, built the railroads, and did whatever work was not forbidden them by law. They were stalked by racist legislation that systematically denied them the right to work in various fields: in 1854, a foreign miner's tax was passed; later, they were forbidden from buying land; finally, they could work only those jobs that had been "women's work"—laundering, cooking, and domestic service. That we have little writing from a group so beleaguered is hardly surprising.

8) Westward expansion continued, inexorably driving Indians out of their lands through warfare, The Removal Act of 1830, and the Trail of Tears.

****

Clearly, a careful look at the literature of this period should come through a wider lens.

Notes: Edgar Allan Poe, Artist of the Age of Reason and Romanticism (1809-1849)

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) is one of those artists whose life often seems to overshadow his art. Like Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Plath, and Ernest Hemingway, he led an unusual life, and like Plath and Hemingway, it was a life marked by trouble, loss, and a dramatic death. Thus we often—too often, I think—look at his work through the veil of what we know about his life—orphaned at age two, raised by an austere and stern uncle, married to a very young cousin who died early, dogged by poverty and problems with alcohol. Surely these losses affected his view of the world, predisposing him, perhaps, to stories about loss and death. But as the Heath anthology puts it, his works are "far more than the accidental products of a disordered fancy." We cannot assume that the works of Poe reveal Poe himself to us; in fact, he was a profoundly conscious craftsman who argued forcefully that art is not didactic, not an intuitive act of inspiration, but that art is worked out in reason to appeal to our emotions. A look at his position in history, both literary and cultural, can allow us to see his works through a wider lens.

Ages of Reason (1600-1800) & Romanticism (1789-1914)

Poe demonstrates for us the blurring of the edges of the "Ages" into which we sometimes divide history. Consider the traits of the Age of Reason: its trust in rationality, logic, mathematics, induction and deduction—its faith in the human brain. We see that in Poe's poems, with their mathematical precision, their repetition, their patterns. We see it even more in his detective stories; he is known in American fiction as the Father of the Detective Story. In one of his most famous, "Murders on the Rue Morgue," Dupin, the detective, reasons out the solution to the "insoluble"mystery based on physical evidence. He takes us (and his admiring assistant/narrator) step by step through his own reasoning out of the mystery. He exemplifies the ratiocinative (rash-e-OC-i na tive) method—the method based on reason.

But he is not only of that age. His dates (1809-1849) give us some hint that he would also exemplify the thinking of the next Age: Romanticism. One of his poems tells us outright that we cannot neatly classify him as an Age of Reason poet:

To Science

Science! true daughter of Old Time thou art,
Who alterest all things with thy peering eyes.
Why preyest thou upon the poet's heart,
Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?
How should he love thee? or how deem thee wise,
Who wouldst not leave him in his wandering
To seek for treasure in the jeweled skies,
Albeit he soared with an undaunted wing?
Hast thou not dragged Diana from her car,
And driven the Hamadryad from the wood
To seek a shelter in some happier star?
Hast thou not torn the Naiad from her flood,
The Elfin from the green grass, and from me
The summer dream beneath the tamarind-tree?

Romanticism is characterized by the following traits:

•Seeks not to grasp by objective rational analysis of classical models but from subjective, individual, emotional, even mystical responses to present experience.

•Values individualism, emotional, subjective truths, focus on the individual, alienation, melancholy, comfort in nature. Looks to the exotic.

•In his stories, Poe values a single emotion or impact—he sought to evoke a particular emotional reaction. With his romantic interest in emotion, he believed that the writer of a short story should have "conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out...[and invent] such incidents ...as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect." For him, unity of mood was as important as unity of time and space.

•In his poems, Poe valued brevity, music, and beauty—all in keeping with his Romantic views—but in keeping with his ties to the Age of Reason, he also believed that a poem may be composed logically.

Journal Questions on Edgar Allan Poe:

1. Identify elements of Romanticism in the stories we read, demonstrating ways in which Poe reveals his Romantic values.

2. Choose two of the works we've read and compare them, examining ways in which they deal with similar themes.

3. In what ways does "The Purloined Letter" or "Murders on the Rue Morgue" seem to be a bridge between Romanticism and the Age of Reason?

4. If you are a reader of mysteries, you might consider the patterns for detective fiction that Poe established in his Monsieur Dupin stories.

5. Read Poe's review of Hawthorne's work. Then consider ways in which the theory he expounds upon there is played out in his own work.

Notes: The Oral Tradition in America

African-Americans

Forbidden by law and practice access to written language, the slave culture found expression in the oral traditions of song and story. The folktales and spirituals of African-American slaves served several important functions in their culture. The folktales were a carry-over of a strong story-telling tradition in Africa, and like most folklore, they served etiological and entertainment purposes. The spirituals were lively expressions of faith. But both these forms served a more important function: protest. The folktales told over and over again of the trickster—as the diminutive Br'er Rabbit or a slave—who outwits his more powerful opponent. These power struggles involved the use of language, humor, wit—all to defeat the arrogant and powerful opponent. The spirituals dealt with power, too. They often drew parallels between the slaves and the Israelites, promising divine justice from an avenging god. They offered other promises, too—of escape, particularly in the form of flight, and of escape to heavenly rewards. These spirituals also gave slaves a way to express loss—of home, of family, of belonging. Thus the folktales and spirituals gave slaves a code with which to express their anger and pain.

Notes: Voices Speaking for Change
Frederick Douglass (1818-1895)
Ex-Slave, Autobiographer, and Abolitionist Leader

Frederick Douglass is clearly established as one of the most prominent men of his time, and certainly one of the most eloquent. Following his 1838 escape from slavery, he moved north, and in three years emerged as a powerful spokesman for the abolitionist movement. His autobiography in many ways set the standard and pattern of the slave narrative.

In the genre as he established it, these patterns are included: a testimonial preface written by a white person to vouch for the character and to attest to the authorship of the black writer; descriptions of the painful separation of families; an account of the perils of slave life, including detailed accounts of physical and psychological cruelty; an emphasis on the discovery and acquisition of the forbidden powers afforded by literacy; an appeal to sympathetic white readers, questioning directly the hypocrisy of slavery in a Christian people; an account of escape and the relief of freedom. His narrative was also marked by what Beth Doriani in the June 1991 American Quarterly describes as traits particular to the slave narratives of men: "the narrator traditionally built his story around a presentation of himself that emphasized, for the most part, the qualities valued and respected by white men: courage, mobility, rationality, and physical strength....the male slave's story tended to focus on the isolated heroism of the subject, the slave portraying himself as self-initiating, self-propelling, and self-sustaining. [Thus they] defined their humanity in terms of prevailing concepts of American male identity." This is true enough, and lends an interesting perspective with which to read the piece. But that doesn't for me dilute the power of his autobiography or the courage it took for him—who had been directly and violently denied even the barest access to literacy—to take that literacy in his own hands and use it with stunning eloquence to define himself, to make himself an individual with a voice, and to argue passionately against the system that had blighted the first twenty years of his life.

Journal Questions on Frederick Douglass

1. Douglass' narrative looks at both the physical and the psychological suffering of slaves. What forms do these two kinds suffering take in his narrative? Examine examples of each, and discuss their impact. Does one or the other seem to predominate in his narrative? What is the effect?

2. Douglass' most famous line is "You have seen how a man was made a slave; now you shall see how a slave was made a man." Read carefully the section that follows that, especially through the paragraph that begins, "This battle with Mr. Covey was a turning point...." What does that section say or imply about what manhood and selfhood mean for Douglass? How does one become a man, in his eyes?

3. Many slave narratives begin with descriptions of auctions, whippings, and enormous cruelty (especially physical). Douglass takes a more complex approach in Chapter X, showing us several owners/masters, not all of whom are viciously cruel/violent. Yet in showing us different masters, Douglass shows us the various forms that the "bestiality of slavery" could take. Examine his various masters, looking at the different forms of oppression that they represent. You may want to arrange your response in emphatic, rather than chronological, order, discussing the master you see as the worst last. This "least-to-most" kind of arrangement is a very useful strategy for many essays.

4. Some critics of the Douglass narrative label the work <u>historically</u> rather than <u>critically</u> important. Yet Douglass' power as an orator and writer made him a leader in the abolitionist movement. What literary qualities do you see in his work that might make you dispute the critics? You might, for instance, look at his use of metaphor or his structuring of his autobiography.

5. Discuss how Douglass uses his aunt and his grandmother to represent the plight of all women, all blacks.

6. Discuss the contrast Douglass presents between the working conditions of the North and the South.

7. Quest novels and epics usually trace the growth of a character though various trials and ordeals. At each structural climax ("passage point") the hero learns something about himself and life. In terms of this and what you know of the epic as a genre, examine ways in which Douglass as the protagonist of his book can be seen as an epic hero on a classic quest. (Ask about getting a copy of Joseph Campbell's heroic journey cycle if you're interested in this topic.)

8. Note carefully any mentions of language and literacy in the text. What role does literacy play in Douglass' life? Go beyond a summary of the incidents in which literacy is denied him. What is the significance of those incidents—to his masters and to Douglass himself?

Notes: Voices Speaking for Change
Harriet Jacobs, (1818-1896) Ex-Slave and Author of Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

Harriet Jacobs' slave narrative, written under the pseudonym of Linda Brent, exemplifies clearly what Henry Louis Gates, Jr. says of black autobiography—that it has been a central genre for blacks because it has provided a way, from the earliest days—perhaps especially in those early days—for African-Americans to claim themselves, to render their own lives, to declare the selves that had been denied by a culture that had denied them even claim to humanity. This narrative—unusual because it is a slave narrative from a woman's perspective—is from the outset a claiming of power over self: Jacobs names herself (a right denied to her as a slave) and chooses the life she will tell—it is incidents, after all; even in the title, she is claiming author-ity.

This courageous stance is made even more interesting by the form that Jacobs chose to use for her narrative. Though there are certainly elements of her narrative that follow the patterns established by Douglass, ultimately she makes a distinctive choice: her narrative makes use of the seduction novel form that was so widely (and wildly) popular in her day. It is a logical choice—much of her suffering as a slave resulted from the unrelenting sexual advances of her master—and it is an astute choice, given that she wrote largely for an audience of white women: what better way to attract those readers than to couch her story in ways which would appeal to them? Ultimately, it is perhaps most of all a political choice: she appropriates the form used most by the culture that has oppressed her—and her book convicts both men like her would-be seducer and their wives—and turns that form upside down. While most seduction novels, like The Coquette and Charlotte Temple, end in the pitiable death of the deceived heroine or in her seducer's repentance and their subsequent marriage, Jacobs/Brent defiantly tells us 1) that rather than succumb to the advances of her unwanted and all-powerful suitor, she chooses sexual intimacy with another man—a man who will not marry her but who cares for her—as a way of claiming her right to choose; 2) that her life has had as its goal not marriage but personal and economic independence for her and her children.

The book is thus a clear repudiation of the model of the "true" American woman of the day, which insisted that women be pious, pure, submissive, domestic, with sexual chastity being of paramount importance. Jacobs instead points out that slavery makes chastity for female slaves impossible, and that this situation is made possible through the

acquiescence of Southern women—who, in being submissive, must allow their men to seduce, rape, and make mistresses of their slaves. In her determined assertion of self and her dogged efforts to avoid her seducer (she spends years hidden in her grandmother's attic) she is also repudiating the ideals of submissiveness and helplessness.

Jacobs also makes use of the domestic novel form popular at the time. Beth Doriani says that the domestic novel "differed from the seduction novel in its portrayal of the heroine who developed the capacity to survive and surmount her own troubles; her success was a function and reflection of her own efforts and character. Helped occasionally by people in her community, the heroine also called on God for strength as she mustered her own internal resources." (I think immediately of Jane Eyre.) Clearly, Jacobs' Linda Brent does this, and the story emphasizes the help she received from her grandmother, the emotional support she received from her children, the assistance she received from members of the community who helped her finally escape, and the financial support she received from abolitionists in the North. In this way, her narrative differs from Douglass' narrative, with its focus, as one critic puts it, on "rugged individuality, physical strength, and geographic mobility."

In her determination to tell her own story on her own terms, in her unwillingness to present herself as "powerless and passive," in her stunning subversion of the formulaic novels of the day, Harriet Jacobs takes her place beside Frederick Douglass as a writer of one of the most compelling slave narratives of American literature.

Journal Questions for Harriet Jacobs

1. In what ways is Jacobs' narrative like Frederick Douglass' narrative? You may find it most useful to consider which elements or themes appear in both.

2. One scholar has said that Douglass' narrative values the "rugged individuality, physical strength, and geographical mobility" of a "isolated," "solitary" man. Thus, that critic argues, Douglass defines himself as a man by using the prevailing criteria for manhood of the time. Does Jacobs value the same things? What values are implicit in her narrative? As she tries to claim her "self," what are the qualities of that self?

3. Compare Jacobs' narrative to one of the seduction novels we have examined. What elements of the seduction novel does she use? What elements does she change? What is the effect?

4. Jacobs' narrative is an unusual one in that it is about women and for women. Consider the interplay of the various women who comprise the subjects and the readers of this text. What does Jacobs have to say about (and to) each group? Consider, for example, the slave, the freed slave, the slave owner's wife, the female slave owner, the abolitionist woman reader.

5. Compare the two passages in which Douglass and Jacobs write of holidays—4th of July for Douglass and New Year's Day for Jacobs.

6. Choose one passage that you found especially compelling and do a close reading of it, explaining its importance for you as a reader and its importance to the text itself.

Notes: Voices Speaking for Change
Native American Voices of the 19th Century

As we look back at the last half of the 19th century, slavery looms as the central issue of the day, both in politics and in literature. Increasingly, literary scholarship has recognized the power, value, and beauty of the powerful slave narratives and the abolitionist tracts of the time. This comes in part from a shift in perspective, moving away from the notion that "belles lettres" are superior to the more overtly political, persuasive writing found in letters, speeches, and essays. We have begun to recognize the limitations of the criteria by which we had deemed works "valuable" and worthy of study: we have favored the public (not private); the written (not oral); the "beautiful" (not the hortatory); the "universal" themes (not those which addressed the issues of particular groups—say, women, blacks, Indians....in short, those without power); the products of powerful white men educated in elite institutions of the Northeast (not those who had no access to these institutions or the power they conferred). My own interest has largely been in the African-American voices, ranging from the spirituals to the folktales to the narratives of writers like Douglass and Jacobs. So it has been interesting to read the voices of another group which struggled to survive in the 19th century, a group whose writing is sometimes overshadowed by those that grappled with the stunning injustice of slavery; that group is the Native Americans.

Even the list of key figures is unfamiliar to me: **Samson Occom**, (Mohegan) whose A Sermon Preached at the Execution of Moses Paul, an Indian, was the first Indian bestseller when it was published in 1772; **William Apes** (Pequot) who published A Son of the Forest, the first autobiography by a Native American; **George Copway** (Ojibwa) whose 1847 autobiography—The Life, History, and Travels of Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh—follows the spiritual confession tradition; **Elias Boudinot** (Cherokee), editor of the first American Indian newspaper, the Cherokee Phoenix, first published in 1828; **Seattle** (Suquamish), who made his famous address in 1853 in response to the governor of the Washington territory; **John Rollin Ridge** (Cherokee), essayist and poet who published the first Native American fiction in 1854, a romance fiction called Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta, the Celebrated California Bandit. (I do notice that there are no women here; none are included in the Heath anthology, though one woman is mentioned in my Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature: **Sarah Winnemucca [Hopkins]**, whose Life Among the Piutes was published in 1883, a combination of ethnohistory and personal experience.)

Journal Questions: Native Americans, 19th Century

William Apes' "An Indian's Looking-Glass for the White Man"

1. In his "Looking-Glass," Apes identifies a number of problems faced by his people. What are those problems? He also identifies the causes of a number of those problems. What are the causes?

2. Apes is a skillful, powerful writer who uses a number of arguments and rhetorical techniques to make his point. Examine several of the lines of reasoning and writing techniques that he uses. Note in particular any ways in which his methods and message are like those you have seen in the slave narratives and abolitionist materials we have read.

Elias Boudinot's "An Address to Whites"

1. Boudinot reveals an astute sense of his audience in this piece. Read the section that begins, "There are three things of later occurrence, which must certainly place the Cherokee Nation a fair light...." Boudinot, unlike Apes, is not arguing for changes in white behavior by reminding them that true Christians behave humanely; instead, Boudinot asserts that the Cherokees <u>deserve</u> better treatment because they had "advanced so far and so rapidly in civilization." Read his description carefully. How do he (and his audience) define civilization? What are the values inherent in the civilization that he describes?

Chief Seattle's Speech

1. Contrast the values presented by Seattle with those presented by Boudinot. If Seattle is describing Native American life as it was, and Boudinot is describing it as it was becoming, what are the differences?

John Rollin Ridge's editorial, "Oppression of Digger Indians" & his poems, "The Atlantic Cable" and "The Stolen White Girl"

1. Ridge's works reveal a number of contradictions and tensions in his values and loyalties. Clearly, he was ambivalent, torn between a desire to assimilate (a cause for which he was attacked by Cherokees who opposed him) and a pride and longing for the traditions of his people. Examine ways in which you see that ambivalence played out in this sampling of his writing.

Notes: Voices Speaking for Change
Abolition and Women's Rights

It may seem odd, at first glance, that these two causes are presented in tandem, but in fact, the two movements became increasingly connected, as many of the most active abolitionists in the North were white women who came to see that, without the vote, without property rights, without full rights of citizenship, their voices, whether speaking on behalf of the slaves or of themselves, were muted. It was at times a thorny, complicated alliance, one which was repeated a century later in the 1960's, when some in the civil rights movement felt that feminists' work shifted the attention from the fundamental issue of civil rights and represented the concerns of white, middle class women at the expense of the needs of blacks in America, particularly black women. But clearly, in the 19th century, women in the movement were fighting against entrenched systems that vigorously resisted change. Their primary weapons were not money or political clout but words, and women like **Lydia Child**, the **Grimke** sisters, **Sojourner Truth**, **Harriet Jacobs**, **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** and **Frances Ellen Watkins Harper** made powerful use of their words in tracts, speeches, letters, and books.

Lydia Marie Child was an early and important American woman of letters: she edited annuals and anthologies and an abolitionist newspaper, wrote poetry and short stories, edited the first periodical for children in the United States called Juvenile Miscellany, wrote and published tracts in defense of Indians, edited and published an anthology by and about blacks called The Freedman's Book, and, interestingly enough, wrote books of practical advice for women like the 1830 The Frugal Housewife. Her name is a familiar one to students of African-American literature because she edited and wrote a preface for Harriet Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, having befriended Jacobs after Jacobs had unsuccessfully solicited the help of Harriet Beecher Stowe in getting her autobiography published. Many American children know one of her works, if not her name: she wrote the words to the song, "Over the river, and through the woods to grandmother's house we go...."

Angela Grimke Weld (1805-1879) and **Sarah Moore Grimke (1792-1873)** were active speakers and workers in the movements for abolition and women's rights. In addition to their written texts, the lives they wrote for themselves—breaking from their South Carolinian roots in taking an abolitionist stance, writing tracts, and perhaps most important, speaking against slavery in public halls before audiences of men and women—served as inspiration for women who followed them. Rebuked publicly for being interested in the public rather than the domestic life,

both women were committed and influential as feminists and as abolitionists.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) is perhaps a more readily recognized name. Like other women in the movement, she came to a political role through her interst in abolition, but when women delegates to the World Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840 were not seated, she resolved, with Lucretia Mott, to organize a convention in the future that would focus on women's rights. The result, the Seneca Falls Convention, was a pivotal moment, producing among other things a Declaration of Sentiments, which appropriated and made fresh the language of the Declaration of Independence in its assertions of women's rights.

Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) was perhaps one of the most charismatic leaders of the suffrage and abolitionist movement. Born a slave, sold three times before she was twelve, raped by one master, she is an astonishing testimony in her strength of character and in her ability to write the text of her own life. For instance, when her son was sold in New York one year before laws forbade slavery there, she escaped with her infant, contracted herself to one year's labor with another master, and then sued (successfully) for the custody of her son. Later, she traveled as the self-named Sojourner Truth, speaking as an abolitionist, an evangelist, a proponent of the rights of freed slaves (raising money for Negro soldiers, for instance, and working later to integrate public transport) , and a believer in the rights of women. She is most remembered today for her stirring, spontaneous speech at a woman's rights convention, a speech which we have today as it was transcribed by Frances D. Gage, a convener of that meeting. It is usually presented as the "Ain't I a Woman?" speech, though the Heath presentation shows it to be the contraction for are not—*a'nt.* The transcription is somewhat problematic; Gage presents the speech in dialect form, the effect of which feels patronizing today. As a modern reader, I feel uneasy with Gage's choice, which seems designed to present Truth as a quaint but eloquent "darky" whose Southern and unlettered diction charms in a way that offsets the threat that readers and listeners of the 19th century might have felt for the direct criticism and clear demands made in the speech. Despite these reservations, for me and for many readers, the speech reverberates with power, eloquence, and common sense, even a century later.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911), the child of free parents, was an activist and writer who has been called "the most popular black poet between Phillis Wheatley and Paul Laurence Dunbar." Her 1859 short story, "The Two Offers" is believed to be the first short story published by a black person in the United States, and her 1892 novel Iola Leroy; or Shadows Uplifted followed Harriet Wilson's 1859 Our Nig as one of the first full-length novels written by a black woman in the U.S.

Journal Questions

1. You may want to try in this journal an overview or summary of the reading we have done recently. What are the central issues and the arguments concerning them? How do the various uses of language—letters, speeches, poems, short stories—contribute to your understanding of the situations faced by the readers? After you summarize, you could talk about which writer evoked the strongest response from you, and why.

Lydia Marie Child

1. What impressions do we get of New York City from Child's Letter #14? What impressions do we have of Child herself?

2. In her ironically titled " Slavery's Pleasant Homes," Child presents slavery as an institution that is broadly destructive, damaging not only slaves but also their owners. For her, slavery is a web of intricate and destructive relationships. Examine all of the relationships and connections which are destroyed in this story.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

1. In its form and language, the Declaration of Sentiments should sound familiar to you; it clearly echoes the Declaration of Independence. What is the effect of that rhetorical choice? Why was it so effective?

Sojourner Truth

1. Consider the speech itself. What arguments and support does Sojourner Truth raise? Which of these are similar to the things said by other activists such as Child, the Grimkes, and Stanton? Which are new issues?

2. Consider the speechmaker as she is presented to us through the perspective of Frances D. Gage? Look again at Gage's presentation of the events that preceded the speech, her physical description of Sojourner Truth, and her use of dialect. What are the effects of these choices?

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

1. In her poem "The Slave Mother," Harper effectively uses a number of poetic devices. Discuss them. You might consider, for instance, her use of repetition, metaphor, and a shift in viewpoint between stanzas 1-3 and the rest of the poem.

Notes: Nathaniel Hawthorne, Fiction Writer (1804-1864)

I'd forgotten how much I like reading Hawthorne. His stories are quite wonderful, a provocative blend of introspection into the complexities of human nature and an interest in the values of romanticism.

Hawthorne's Puritan, American sensibilities are clear; he is profoundly interested in the nature of guilt, the inevitable human flaws, an interest probably shared by the grandfather who was a judge at the Salem witchcraft trials, but unlike the Puritans, Hawthorne presents guilt in shades of gray. These explorations of guilt shine most mightily in The Scarlet Letter, but they are also present in his stories, most especially "The Minister's Black Veil" and in the more subtle but more powerful "Rappacini's Daughter." In the latter story, for instance, guilt for the death of Beatrice is most obviously laid at the feet of her father, a scientist who willingly sacrifices love for knowledge. But upon closer examination, it's clear that her death can also be laid to Giovanni, the young man who has loved her but in a brutal fit of egoism rejects her as monstrous. Also guilty is Professor Baglioni, whose ambition and pride blind him to the human grief of Beatrice's circumstances.

Even while he is exploring guilt or the hypocrisies of institutional religion, Hawthorne's Romantic values are clear. These values appear in a number of his stories: 1) nature is good, a powerful source of wisdom and solace; 2) emotion is valued more than intellect; 3) individualism; 4) an interest in the exotic and foreign; 5) an admiration for youth, not age; 6) an interest in revolution and change; 6) an aversion to technology as a destroyer of nature.

These two aspects of his work—his interest in guilt and in romanticism—provide useful entry points into reading his works. Other themes pointed out by critics include the connection of the past and present; the struggle between individuals and society; the importance of self-knowledge; the "fortunate fall" or lost innocence at the price of mature awareness; the impossibility of earthly perfection; the ambiguity of the world and its appearances; the need for warm human relationships; the long-lasting effects of sin.

Journal Questions on Nathaniel Hawthorne

1. While he often is credited with creating strong heroines like Hester in The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne also reveals in his stories a deep ambivalence about women, often presenting them as dangerous in their sexuality. Support or defend this idea by examining the women in the stories we have read.

2. In what ways do you see the influence of Romanticism on Hawthorne? Explore examples from several stories, remembering these central values of the Romantic view: 1) nature is good, a powerful source of wisdom and solace; 2) emotion is valued more than intellect; 3) individualism; 4) an interest in the exotic and foreign; 5) an admiration for youth, not age; 6) an interest in revolution and change; 6) an aversion to technology as a destroyer of nature.

3. Clearly, the notion of guilt is a central theme in Hawthorne's stories as well as The Scarlet Letter. Examine the "guilty parties" in one or more of his stories. Who is guilty? Of what? Remember to notice the ways in which he explores "gray" areas of guilt. In "Rappacini's Daughter" for instance, explore all those who are guilty of Beatrice's death.

4. One of the most common themes in literature is initiation. An initiation is an experience that leads a person to a new understanding; in many instances, it is a painful experience that leads the person toward adulthood. After reading the definitions below, evaluate the level of initiation of the protagonist of one of Hawthorne's initiation stories, "Young Goodman Brown" or "My Kinsman, Major Molineaux." What sort of initiation has the young man undergone?

*a) **a tentative initiation**—The person is led to the threshold of maturity and understanding but does not quite cross it. In this kind of initiation, the person is often quite young, and the experience is a shocking one for him/her;*

*b) **an incomplete initiation**—These go a little further; the person moves across the threshold of maturity and understanding but is left enmeshed in a struggle for certainty;*

*c) **a decisive initiation**—The person moves firmly toward maturity and understanding.*

5. Explore one of these themes in one (or several) of Hawthorne's short stories: the connection of the past and present; the struggle between individuals and society; the importance of self-knowledge; the "fortunate fall" or lost innocence at the price of mature awareness; the impossibility

of earthly perfection; the ambiguity of the world and its appearances; the need for warm human relationships; the long-lasting effects of sin.

Notes: Realism of the late 19th Century

The fiction of the early 18th century, which often had elements of the romantic, the gothic, the sentimental, with what the Heath calls a "leisurely narrative pace, use of allegory, and symbolism" began to lose favor, particularly under the leadership of W.D. Howells, who argued for realistic fiction—that is, fiction that focused on everyday life and Americans, the use of American language and dialect, without the heavy reliance on melodrama and coincidence such as that found in Dickens. Howells expressed his aims in "Novel-Writing and Novel-Reading: "Then I said to myself that I would throw away my English glasses, and look at American life with my own American eyes, and report the things I saw there, whether they were like the things in English fiction or not....I could not commend any other [plan] to the American novelist."

Those who might be considered as realists include disparate writers, from Twain, with his presentation of some of the enduring problems of the day—divisions between race and class, social pretensions and hypocrisy, violence and crime—in the dialect of a young Southern boy; to James, with his interest in the psychological struggles of the upper class faced by rapidly changing world; to Stephen Crane, with his journalist's eye turned to fiction. A natural outgrowth of this interest in realism was regional writing, which is discussed later in these notes.

Notes: Edith Wharton, Fiction Writer (1862-1937)

Interestingly enough, Edith Wharton's career began in a rather traditional way, with the publication in 1897 of a domestic how-to book called The Decoration of Houses; her work after that took a decidedly different turn and at its best excoriated the wealthy New York society which would have valued highly the "right" decoration of its homes. Wharton published more than thirty novels and collections of short stories and an autobiography on a variety of themes, but she is most remembered for her novels of manners and for her "ghost" stories. In particular, she is remembered for those novels of manners that criticize the rigid and shallow mores of the upper class in New York.

It is puzzling to me, then, that the Norton anthology includes for Wharton Ethan Frome, her 1911 tragic novel that focuses on the story of Ethan Frome, a man living in despair on one of the "derelict mountain villages of New England." Although it is a powerful work, it is not characteristic in setting, theme, or protagonist. I am much more interested in The House of Mirth (1905) or the Pulitzer Prize-winning The Age of Innocence (1920), which are more representative and more interesting in their social criticism, their humor, the complexity of their characters, and their examination of the problems of untraditional young women in a restrictive and heavily coded society. These novels and the short stories "Roman Fever" and "The Other Two" are better representations of her most common themes, described in the Heath anthology as "the rapaciousness and vulgarity of the *nouveaux riches*, the timidity and repression of the established upper class, the contrast between European and American customs and values, and the inequality and repression of women, which often manifested itself in patriarchal culture...in hostility and rivalry among women."

Journal Questions on Edith Wharton

1. In "The Other Two," we see situations and characters through the eyes of Mr. Waythorn. Describe his growing ambivalence about his wife: What has he always valued n her? What are the causes of his growing reservations about her? How did you react as you read the story; whose side are you on?

2. Consider the story "The Other Two" not as Wharton's criticism of the too-malleable Mrs. Waythorn but as a criticism of the culture that produced her. In what ways is the story an exploration of the problems of women in a patriarchal culture?

3. After you have read "Roman Fever" with its delicious and surprising ending, read it again: what clues do you see now that might have led you to expect the final line of the story?

4. Explore as fully as you can the hatred of the two women in "Roman Fever." How is it evidenced? What is its source? What is the source of the source?

5 On the one hand, "Roman Fever" can be read for the simple pleasure of its surprising plot twist. On the other hand, it can be read at another level, as an exemplar of the themes most common in Wharton's work. One scholar describes Wharton's themes in this way: "the rapaciousness and vulgarity of the nouveaux riches, the timidity and repression of the established upper class, the contrast between European and American customs and values, and the inequality and repression of women, which often manifested itself in patriarchal culture...in hostility and rivalry among women." How do you see those themes played out in "Roman Fever"?

6. Consider the fiction of Edith Wharton with which you are familiar—both the short stories and the films based on her work. What are the central themes of her work? You might consider what her work suggests about her views of the effects of class on behavior, the institution of marriage, women's desire for (and exclusion from) freedom, particularly economic and sexual freedom, and the resultant complexity of the relationships between women.

7. As a student of literature, you'll find it useful to know some of the terms used by critics in their discussion of novels. The following three terms could be used to describe ***Edith Wharton's*** ***The House of Mirth****. Choose ONE of these terms—the one that you find most useful or illuminating—and write an essay in which you explain why it is an appropriate description of Wharton's novel.*

novel of manners*—a novel which has among its dominant forces the social customs, manners, conventions, and habits of a definite social class at a particular time and place. The social mores of a specific group are defined and described in detail and with great accuracy, and these mores become powerful controls over characters. The novel of manners is often satiric.*

bildungsroman*—a novel that deals with the development of a young person as s/he grows up.*

naturalism*—novels that are called naturalistic tend to involve either a biological determinism, with an emphasis on the animal nature of humans, particularly heredity, portraying the protagonist as an animal engaged in the endless and brutal struggle for survival, or a socio-economic determinism, portraying the protagonist as the victim of environmental forces and the product of social and economic factors beyond his/her control and full understanding.*

Notes: Henry James, Novelist and Critic (1843-1916)

Henry James is a writer's writer, I think, a novelist who is often described in terms of highest praise: a "literary master" who "stands alone among nineteenth century United States writers." He published major novels, short fictions, autobiographies, and critical works over a period of thirty years; those works and his ideas on fiction influenced writers for years after him.

James is almost always mentioned in tandem with Edith Wharton, which is not surprising: they were contemporaries and close friends who wrote voluminous correspondence, much of which we still have today; they were concerned with some of the same themes, most especially sharing an interest in the shallow and restrictive values of the nouveaux riche in New York, an interest in the contrasting values of Europe and the American naïf, and an interest in psychological subtleties which they often played out in ghost or horror stories. Almost always, however, it is James who is seen today as the master, perhaps THE major writer of his day, though in his own time his works were not widely popular in the United States, while Wharton received wide acclaim, including a Pulitzer Prize.

Why the disparity in their reputations? One reason may be that, while they were both prodigious writers, James maintained his power throughout his writing career, in fact producing what many see as his masterpieces in the final years of his life; Wharton, in contrast, wrote her best works early in her career, losing some of her power as she shifted away from her early focus on criticism of the upper class. Surely, too, the critical school that came later, with its modernist respect for the intellectual and the abstruse, would particularly value James' works, with their (sometimes maddening) subtleties of plot and their delicate, complexly phrased sentences. Finally, he is honored for his articulation of a theory for fiction, an insistence that the novel was an art form, not merely pulp entertainment, and that attention should be paid to its form and craft.

This might be seen as his central contribution—alongside the masterfully crafted novels of his final years.

For students, perhaps the best introduction to James would be to read "Daisy Miller: A Study" and "Turn of the Screw." These are fairly accessible and exemplify not only his craft but three of his most common concerns: the naive young American girl unable to understand (and thus survive) European values; the problems with failing to engage fully in life and love; the psychological horrors endured by the powerless, especially children and young, naive women.

Journal Questions on Henry James

1. The subtitle of "Daisy Miller" is "A Study." The most obvious thing to be studied is Daisy herself, but in order to understand Daisy and her circumstances, we are asked to study those around her. As you read, jot your impressions of the various characters you encounter—Daisy, her mother, her brother, Winterbourne, and the American ex-patriates who surround them, particularly Winterbourne's aunt Mrs. Costello and his friend Mrs. Walker. Notice lines and details that seem especially revealing to you.

This story is part of what critics call James' "international period" in which he examined the tensions between American and European ideals. Based on your observations about the characters, what are James' views of those different values? (Don't forget: Costello and Walker are Americans.)

2. One critic has argued that in stories like "Daisy Miller: A Study," James was exploring one of his own problems—"a masculine aloofness...[a] cold reserve." How does James reveal and emphasize Winterbourne's aloof nature? Start by considering the title of the story and the names of the two protagonists. Then examine situations, phrases, and lines from the story that seem to you to show Winterbourne's reserve.

3. Examine the notions of gender present in the story. What views of women do we get? Of men?

Notes: William Dean Howells, Writer, Critic, Editor (1837-1920)

The vagaries of the canon are exemplified for me in W.D. Howells. The critics are clear on his role in the later 19th century: "No other American writer dominated the literary scene the way W.D. Howells did in his prime" says one anthology; another calls him "in his lifetime probably the most powerful figure in American letters." He wrote "fiction, plays, poetry, essays, travel, reminiscence, biography, autobiography, and literary criticism." He also edited the most prestigious journal in America, Atlantic Monthly, from which he wielded great power in his views on fiction and his support for other writers. Yet he was for years after his death unread, ignored—largely due to young writers who came after him—particularly H.L. Mencken and Sinclair Lewis—who rebelled against him as too genteel and Victorian. He was not a part of my training or reading. Yet now he is re-emerging in importance, valued for his "steady, masterful style, his powerful literary realism, and his intelligent civility" while in a position of great power. Those anxious about the current disruption and tension within the canon would do well to examine the ups and downs in the reputation of this most important man of American letters.

Notes: Regional Writers at the Turn of the Century

The term "regional writer" has in the past been a not-altogether complimentary term, implying that the writer was interested in presenting the landscapes, culture, and dialects of a region, often presented in nostalgic or sentimental ways, with too little sophistication of plot and character. Thus, writers (particularly women) like Sarah Orne Jewett or Mary Wilkins Freeman could be dismissed as quaint "local colorists" of only marginal merit and interest. Eric Sandquist, according to the Heath anthology, puts it this way: the term "realist" has been reserved for those in or nearest the seats of power in the cities, while those at the remove—midwesterners, southerners, blacks, women, immigrants—have been categorized and given minor status as local colorists.

Like others in the canon, these writers have been re-visited, honored for the universal which can be found in even their most particularly local works. Hamlin Garland (1860-1940), for instance, wrote movingly about the debilitating effects of poverty on farming families in the Midwest, while Mary Wilkins Freeman and Kate Chopin wrote as "an invitation to consider the world from the perspective of women awakening to, protesting against, and offering alternatives for a world dominated by men and male interests and values." Charles Chesnutt wrote movingly and subtly about ways of survival for black Americans in his tales of Uncle Julius and later examined the search for self made excruciatingly complex for those of mixed race in a racist America. While the "local colorist" term is appropriate for each of these writers, each did much more than re-create a region: in their writing we see a natural outgrowth of the interest in realism in fiction, an extension of naturalism as their characters grapple with the seemingly insurmountable forces that control their lives, and perhaps above all, characters who can move us still, a century after their introduction into the American canon.

Notes: Sarah Orne Jewett, Maine (1849-1909)

Inspired in part by Harriet Beecher Stowe's The Pearl of Orr's Island and encouraged in her writing by W.D. Howells, Sarah Orne Jewett began at a very early age to publish and write of her native Maine seacoast. Her most well-known works are the collection A White Heron (1886) and The Country of Pointed Firs, published in 1896. The title story of A White Heron is a quintessential Romantic story that moves me every time I read it, with its poignant description of the young girl Sylvia as she makes a choice not to betray the white heron to the young ornithologist/hunter who has captured the reticent young Sylvie's heart. The story is a classic initiation tale which forces a young woman to make a choice; that choice pits nature vs. science, life vs. death, male vs. female, intuition vs. education, city vs. country, and two ways of valuing nature—as observer and participant vs. one who conquers and classifies.

Journal Questions on Sarah Orne Jewett

1. One of the most common themes in literature is initiation. An initiation is an experience that leads a person to a new understanding; in many instances, it is a painful experience that leads the person toward adulthood. After reading the definitions below, write an essay in which you evaluate the level of initiation of Sylvie. What sort of initiation has she undergone?

*a) **a tentative initiation**—The person is led to the threshold of maturity and understanding but does not quite cross it. In this kind of initiation, the person is often quite young, and the experience is a shocking one for him/her;*

*b) **an incomplete initiation**—These go a little further; the person moves across the threshold of maturity and understanding but is left enmeshed in a struggle for certainty;*

*c) **a decisive initiation**—The person moves firmly toward maturity and understanding.*

2. In what ways do you see the influence of Romanticism on Jewett? Examine the ways that "The White Heron" exemplifies central values of the Romantic view. Among those values are the following: 1) nature is good, a powerful source of wisdom and solace; 2) emotion is valued more than intellect; 3) individualism; 4) an interest in the exotic and foreign; 5) an admiration for youth, not age; 6) an interest in revolution and change; 6) an aversion to technology as a destroyer of nature.

Notes: Kate Chopin, Louisiana (1850-1904)

Kate Chopin's life as a writer exemplifies both the opportunities and dangers available to 19th century women writers. In a period of ten years, widowed at age 35 with children to support, she wrote three novels, more than 150 stories, and a substantial body of poems, reviews, and criticism. Her depiction of Creole life won her national recognition and praise. But the response to her major and most well-known novel, The Awakening (1899) reveals, too, the limitations placed on women of her day. Chopin was condemned by critics and the public for the book's frank (but certainly not lurid) exploration of a woman's need for independence and her sexual dalliance outside of marriage; she was ostracized from social organizations in St. Louis, where she had moved after her husband's death, and her books were removed from a number of public libraries. She and her works fell into obscurity, but she today has won an honored place in the American canon.

Reading and Discussion Questions on The Awakening

Chapters 1-8

1. What is Mrs. Pontellier like? How does she differ from the women at the resort?
2. What are your initial impressions of Leonce Pontellier? Of the relationship between him and Edna? Why did they marry?
3. What is Robert LeBrun like? Compare him to Leonce Pontellier.
4. Explore Edna's relationship with Mrs. Ratignolle. Why is she attracted to her? How are they different?

Chapters 9-15

1. Think about the setting. How is Grand Isle appropriate for Edna's awakening?
2. In what ways do the events of the evening party at Grand Isle seem significant?
3. Examine the exchange between Mr. and Mrs. Pontellier and her choice to stay on the porch. What is interesting or significant about that conflict?
4. What do you make of the presence of the lovers and the woman in black in the story?
5. In what ways is Edna Pontellier awakening? What scenes/passages show this awakening to you?

Chapters 16-22

1. Contrast life on the resort with life on Esplanade Street in New Orleans.
2. Look at the interview between Mr. Pontellier and Dr. Mandelet. What do you think of it?

Chapters 23-30

1. Explore Edna's relationship with her father.
2. What is her response to being alone? Why?
3. What do you think of her relationship with Alcee?

Chapters 31-39

1. Examine the role of Mlle Reisz in the novel.
2. Why is Mrs. P dissatisfied after her dinner party?
3. What do you think of Mr. Pontellier's handling of her decision to move into the "pigeon house"?
4. Discuss the closing chapters of the book. Among the things to consider are Edna's visit to Adele's house at the time of birth, Robert's behavior, and most important, the final scene of the book. Some critics find that resolution false and not in keeping with Edna Pontellier's characters; others say it is inevitable. What do you think?

Journal Questions on Kate Chopin's The Awakening

1. Examine the ways in which Chopin's stories "At the 'Cadian Ball" and "The Storm" explore themes similar to those of The Awakening.

2. Explore the central characters of The Awakening: Edna Pontellier, Leonce Pontellier, Robert Lebrun. What are your impressions of them? What incidents or excerpts seem to you particularly revealing of their characters? (You may find that you want to focus on one or two of them in this journal rather than all three.)

3. What about the "minor" characters of the novel, Adele Ratignolle and Mlle Reisz? What are they like? What is their function in the novel? Consider especially how they help to illuminate Edna's character when we compare them to her.

4. Chopin was strongly influenced by the French use of symbol in fiction. Explore the symbols that help to underscore the novel's themes. Among the symbols you might examine are the use of the parrot in the opening scene, the descriptive passages of the sea, the old woman in black on the island, the pigeon house. You'll find many other possibilities in this symbol-rich novel.

5. Edna's past is revealed to us slowly, through flashback. What do we know of her past—her youth? her religious faith? her relationship with her father, her sister, and the absence of a mother? How do these facts affect her present character?

6 Examine one incident in the novel that seems to you to be particularly interesting, revealing, or puzzling. After a careful re-reading of that excerpt, discuss what happens and why you find it significant.

7. In examining Chopin's place in the American literary tradition, one can make arguments in a number of directions: that it is a local color novel, a novel that lends itself to feminist readings, a novel of realism, a Romantic novel. (Remember our particular definitions for these last two categories.) Make a case for one of these categories: which one best describes the novel for you?

8 . Fiction offers direct (and indirect) commentaries on social issues such as marriage, parenting, social mores. Focus on one of these issues, and discuss The Awakening's perspective on it.

9. Read this excerpt from critic Margaret Culley's essay, "The Context of the Awakening." How does it illuminate or affect your reading of the novel and your reactions to Edna Pontellier?

Most women in New Orleans "were the property of their husbands. The Napoleonic Code was still the basis of the laws governing the marriage contract. All of a wife's 'accumulations' after marriage were the property of her husband, including money she might earn and the clothes she wore. The husband was the legal guardian of the children, and until 1888 was granted custody of the children in the event of a divorce. The wife was 'bound to live with her husband, and follow him wherever he [chose] to reside.' A wife could not sign any legal contract (with the exception of her will) without the consent of her husband, nor could she institute a lawsuit, appear in court, hold public office, or make a donation to a living person. The woman's position in the eyes of the law was conveyed by the language of Article 1591 of the laws of Louisiana: 'The following persons are absolutely incapable of being witness to testaments: 1. Women of any age whatsoever. 2. Male children who have not attained the age of sixteen years complete. 3. Persons who are insane, deaf, dumb, or blind. 4. Persons whom the criminal laws declare incapable of exercising civil functions.' Though divorce laws in the state were somewhat more liberal than those in other parts of the country—divorce could be granted on the grounds of abandonment after one year of separation—divorce rates were much lower than in other states. Louisiana was a largely Catholic state and divorce was a scandalous and rather rare occurrence (29 divorces granted per 100,000 members of the population in 1890)."

10. Even the best of literature evokes a varied response; a work that nears perfection for one readers appears seriously flawed to another. Do you see such a flaw in this novel? This should not be simply an emotional reaction to the book—saying that it is boring or depressing is not really a critical response. If, however, you see a problem with the structure of the novel or with its underlying premise/world view, discuss it. Back up your views with specifics from the novel.

10. Read the sample critical reviews written at the time of <u>The Awakening's</u> publication. Summarize/discuss the views put for in those articles. Pinpoint, if you can, the general critical reaction to the book. Then refute or agree with that reaction, offering support from the book for your assertions.

11. One critic argues that the Greek myths of Icarus and of Psyche offer alternative readings of The Awakening, particularly its troubling conclusion. Familiarize yourself with these stories, and explore how they illuminate your reading of Chopin's novel.

Notes: Mary Wilkins Freeman, New England (1852-1930)

Mary Wilkins Freeman made her mark as a regional writer in her tightly written depictions of New England village life. Having spent her life in Massachusetts and Vermont, she understood well the "confining, inherited codes of village life." Among her themes were the potential for "unpredictable revolt in ostensibly meek and downtrodden natures," particularly women who were confined by the values of the diminishing Puritan patriarchy. Of particular biographical interest is the fact that she started her upper level schooling at the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, but, like Emily Dickinson before her, left because of the strain of the school's demands that its students offer public testimony of their Christian commitment. Threads of the oppressiveness of religious institutions also form part of the fabric of her stories.

Journal Questions on Mary Wilkins Freeman

1. Examine ways in which "A New England Nun" and "The Revolt of 'Mother'" explore similar themes and problems.

2. Describe the personality of Mrs. Penn as it is presented to us in "The Revolt of Mother." In what ways does Freeman reveal to us the astounding nature of her revolt? That is, what sort of person is Mrs. Penn? How does she see herself and her place in the world? How do these traits underscore her desperation in making the stand that she does?

Notes: Charles W. Chesnutt, African-American South (1858-1932)

Charles W. Chesnutt earned his place of respect in American literature in two primary ways: in his Uncle Julius tales, collected and published in 1899 after having appeared since 1887 in periodicals like the Atlantic Monthly, and his less-successful but compelling novels and short stories that explored the complications of identity for those of mixed race in American culture. The Uncle Julius tales, represented in anthologies most often by "The Goophered Grapevine," are an interesting re-appropriation of the folk tales which had been told by slaves and other black Americans and which had been made popular to the larger public through the work of Joel Chandler Harris. Harris' Uncle Remus fit rather too closely the easygoing, shuffling stereotypes of the loyal family retainer, and at first glance, the same might be said of Chesnutt's Uncle Julius, particularly since the tales are told through the eyes of a cool and amused white Northern narrator. A closer look at Chesnutt's Uncle Julius, however, reveals the ways in which the stories show us his wisdom and survival, often secured through a mask of ignorance. In that way, they are clearly an extension of the trickster tales that empowered the slaves who had told them from earlier days.

Journal Questions on Charles W. Chesnutt

1. While "The Goophered Grapevine" seems at first to be simply a story told for amusement and entertainment, a closer look reveals the ways in which it might be considered a coded look at racism and power and survival in the South. Examine ways in which Uncle Julius, for all his apparent good nature, articulates the cruelties of the slave system and the callousness and greed of the plantation owners. Look, too, at the introduction of the "Yankees" to the story—both in the past and in the present. How might we read their relationship to the Southerners they encounter? Finally, what about Uncle Julius himself? What does his character say about survival within the culture that has raised him? (You might find Paul Laurence Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask" illuminating here.)

2. Scholar William L. Andrews points out that Chesnutt pits the white narrator of the stories, "a literal-minded rationalist to whom Julius is merely a reciter of quaint fairy tales, against the narrator's wife, who realizes the deeper truths that lie beneath Julius' marvelous stories." How do you see that in "The Goophered Grapevine"? What "deeper truths" are suggested by the story?

Notes: Naturalism as an Outgrowth of Realism

Regional writing was not the only literary movement to have its roots in realism; naturalism was an extension of realism, a perspective that interested itself not only in "real" life but in the seemingly inexorable forces which shaped that life. It was in many ways a perspective that was the result of Darwinian thought, popularized with his 1859 publication of Descent of Man. If, as Darwin argued, humans were defined more by their biological make-up than by any divine spark, then it made sense to present characters who were "conceived as more or less complex combinations of inherited attributes and habits conditioned by social and economic forces." Thus a writer like Stephen Crane can be seen both as a realist with the journalistic precision we see in stories like "Open Boat" or "The Blue Hotel" and as a naturalist in the ways that his characters in those stories and in his Red Badge of Courage seem to be caught in the grip of natural and social forces completely out of their control. Theodore Dreiser is perhaps the most well-known writer of naturalist fiction; for me, African-American author Ann Petry's story "The Winding Sheet" (though not included in the Heath or the Norton) is a stunning example of this genre.

Notes: Stephen Crane, Journalist & Writer (1871-1900)

After having identified, as do many critics, Crane as a writer or naturalist fiction, I find myself concurring with the editors of the Norton anthology: while such labels are useful, they are also too limiting. While Crane did indeed write in his poems and his stories about a universe coldly indifferent, even malevolent, to human life and endeavor, there is also a kind of optimism in his work, a belief that by collective action humans can rise about the forces that seek to dehumanize them. Thus the missed opportunity for compassion in "The Blue Hotel" and the admirable behavior of the shipwrecked men in "The Open Boat" argue for a hopeful view of human possibilities even in an indifferent world.

Journal Questions on Stephen Crane

1. As you read "The Open Boat," note carefully the characteristics of each of the shipwrecked men; you might find this easiest to do by making four columns on your paper and jotting down observations as you read. If Crane is arguing that heroic and humane behavior is possible even in a cruelly indifferent universe, what is that behavior like?

2. What do you make of the final sentence of the story?

3. Browse through some of Crane's poetry as it is presented in your text. How does that poetry relate to and illuminate your reading of "The Open Boat"?

Notes: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Writer & Feminist (1860-1935)

"The Yellow Wallpaper" is an extraordinary story for me, even after many readings. Its connection with Gilman's own life, as she explains in "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper'" (included in the Norton anthology—also available on the Net), makes the story even more compelling. The narrator's growing madness, outrageous and frightening, comes in a chilling counterpoint to her cool, lucid tone as the story unfolds. Clearly, it can be seen as a naturalist work: the narrator is caught in a web of circumstances—partly biological (she is probably suffering from what we would recognize today as post-partum depression) and societal—she is without power or voice in her marriage or in her role as patient. Students find the story fascinating, though I have had to caution them in our discussions against seeing it merely as a quaint historical artifact: we still do not understand depression, and the power relationships between doctors and patients (and yes, men and women) can still be problematic. The video is a fine rendering of the story, with a necessary shift in point of view that lends itself very well to discussion; the impact and theme of the story are markedly altered by that shift in narrative voice.

Journal Questions on Charlotte Perkins Gilman

1. Examine the relationship between the narrator and her husband. Note specific instances or lines that seem particularly revealing to you. How would you describe each of them—as individuals and as partners?

2. Read the story a second time, and trace the masterfully laid-out growing madness of the narrator; you'll see hints and clues of that madness that you missed on the first reading. Characterize the nature of her madness, and explain if you can its manifestations.

3. Look closely again at the descriptions of the house and its environs. What symbolic aspects do you see? (Start, for instance, by considering the room which her husband insists they use: why the nursery? why the top floor?)

4. Clearly, this story can be read as a feminist critique of the tensions between men and women. But the story presents other tensions to explore as well. How else might you interpret the conflicts in the story—that is, what values and ways of perception do they each represent?

Notes: Nonfiction Prose of the late 19th Century

While the 19th century was a time of remarkable and varied fiction, it was also a time of powerful non-fiction. During a time of social upheaval, many writers and journalists turned their attention to a variety of subjects—among them women's rights, political corruption, the exploitation of labor, and racism. While some writers addressed these issues in their fiction, others chose non-fiction as their genre, publishing essays, delivering speeches, and writing auto-biography. These genres have, in the belles lettres school of criticism, often been given short shrift. But an historical and literary look at the closing of the 19th century is not complete without an examination of some of the non-fiction which moved its readers and listeners and, in some cases, changed the course of history.

Non-Fiction Prose: Speech

Except for the speeches of Martin Luther King, speeches have often been left out of literary studies in American literature. Traditionally, this omission has been part of the Western de-valuing of oral literature in favor of written language, a tradition which has shifted somewhat with recent scholarly interest in folk tales, ethnographic studies, and speeches. It should be remembered, too, that speech is available to the author in ways that publication is not; thus this marginalized genre is often the only readily available outlet for those on the margins.

Booker T. Washington's landmark speech at the Atlanta Exposition of 1895 is one speech which is today a subject of great historical and literary importance, particularly with its famous (or, for some, infamous) analogy of "Cast down your buckets where you are," which urged Southern whites to use the labors of African-Americans, and which urged African-Americans to make use of the manual skills they already had. Even more pivotal is the line that became the cornerstone of the "separate but equal" policy which governed black and white life for half a century after the speech: "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." This speech helped consolidate Washington's power, so that the period from 1895-1915 is sometimes called "The Age of Booker T. Washington." These things stand out for me as I re-read the speech, which really is a masterful and powerful piece of rhetoric: 1) Washington repeatedly seeks to establish a rapport with and ease the fears of his white audience. Some see these concessions, some of which are indeed rather startling in their apologetic tone, as evidence of his Uncle Tom stance; others see them as a wise rhetorical ploy that ensured him an audience, an audience that had

much power. (Washington was able to raise very large sums of money for the Tuskegee Institute as a result of his favored statues in the powerful white community.) 2) His pragmatism is clear when he makes marketplace rather than moral arguments in favor of employing African-Americans. 3) He juxtaposes discussion of those who oppose him with a detailing of those who support him. 4) In the tradition of the slave narrative, he includes written testimony from powerful whites (in this case letters from President Grover Cleveland and Johns Hopkins University President D.C. Gilman) as evidence of his veracity and position in the community. 5) The speech, published in his book Up from Slavery, combines two great traditions in African-American literature—the speech/sermon, complete with homely homilies/anecdotes, and the autobiography, which offers an affirmation of self even in the face of a culture that seeks in every way to deny it.

Cochise (1812-1874) was an Apache, a leader who participated in the twenty years of warfare between the Apaches and settlers in Arizona both Euro-Americans and Mexicans. He was not able to stop the steady encroachment of settlers on Indian lands through battles, but an 1872 speech he made during negotiations did result in a more acceptable reservation for his people—the southeastern Arizona Apache Pass rather than a bleak, dismal reservation at Fort Tularose, New Mexico. While his speech (called in anthologies "I am alone") did not affect the large numbers affected by Washington's address, it is still evidence of the power of the spoken word, especially when wielded by the powerless who have no other weapons available. The transcripts we have of the speech are not direct but remembered, but the overwhelming impression given is of an implacable pride and sense of self, even when faced by the annihilation of his people.

Charlot (1831-1900) was a Flathead Indian of the Montana region. A speech he made in 1876 was reprinted in a Western newspaper. Called "He has filled graves with our bones," it is a thorough condemnation of the treatment of his people by whites, a strong assertion of the need for justice even when no justice has been available.

Non-Fiction Prose: Autobiography

I have seen no Introduction to Literature text that includes autobiography; it doesn't fit into our neat "Big Three" genres of fiction, poetry, and drama. Yet autobiography has played a pivotal role in the literature of our country, particularly for minorities who had little leisure for fiction and poetry and who had a profound need to assert themselves, to claim some power over their lives in a county that seemed to refuse to recognize them.

Of particular interest is the autobiography of **Charles Alexander Eastman (Ohiyesa)** (1858-1939), a Sioux whose autobiography's title, From the Deep Woods to Civilization, gives some evidence of his complex position as a man of both worlds: raised in traditional ways until he was eleven, then given an Anglo education which culminated in a degree in medicine. As the title of his autobiography indicates, he was largely assimilated into mainstream culture and its values, and there is plenty of evidence of this in his book. But there are also bits of evidence that his heart is with the Sioux culture, particularly with his sympathetic portrayal of their difficulties with getting proper medical treatment, and even more movingly in his description of the aftermath of the massacre of 230 Sioux, mostly women and children, at Wounded Knee. While he tries for a factual reporter's tone, his horror is clear, and he admits that he has a crisis in his Christian faith at the brutality he witnessed there. It is a stunning account, made all the more compelling for me by his obvious loyalty to white Christian culture, with occasional (and apparently unconscious) eruptions in the text when his sense of injustice is clear. (Students might compare his account with that of **Black Elk**, a Sioux who also witness the events of Wounded Knee and who narrated "The Massacre at Wounded Knee" to poet John Neihardt in 1931.)

Non-Fiction Prose: Essays

The essays of **W.E.B. DuBois** (1868-1963) in his important Souls of Black Folk were his entry to national attention and leadership; he ultimately led the Niagara Movement and served as the editor of the Crisis magazine of the newly formed NAACP for over twenty years. In that collection of penetrating essays by the Harvard-educated and pioneering sociologist, perhaps the most controversial was his "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others," in which he respectfully but unflinchingly criticizes Washington's insistence on manual and trade education for black Americans. To read Washington's speech and DeBois' essay is an intriguing look at two very different approaches to what was then called "the Negro Problem"—and a look at two very powerful, eloquent writers.

Journal Questions on Non-Fiction Prose

Charles Eastman (Ohiyesa)

1. Throughout his autobiography, beginning even with its title, Charles Eastman/Ohiyesa struggles with what W.E.B. DuBois called "double consciousness." Examine the passages where his struggle between the two cultures is evident.

Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois

1. The debate between these two men stands as one of the most important and controversial debates of the early 20th century; it was a debate that affected American culture for years afterward. On one side was Washington, an educator, leader, and spokesman who was seen by many as the "Moses of his race." On the other side was W.E.B. DuBois, a sociologist with degrees from Harvard and Fisk, a leader who vehemently opposed many of Washington's basic tenets. Write a response which examines the contrasts between their major ideas.

2. Both DuBois and Washington were extraordinary rhetoricians. How does each seek to address (ease, mollify) the concerns of those who opposed them?

3. Washington's "cast down your buckets" analogy meant different things to his white and black audiences. Explore its meanings for each of these audiences.

Notes: The Twentieth Century Between the Wars

These facts of American life set the stage for the writing that would emerge in the first forty years of the 20th century:

1) There were increasing tensions between management/middle class America and people of the working classes. These tensions were exacerbated by the fact that many of the working class were recent immigrants, so that the difficulties were touched not just by class but also by race. The very restrictive immigration act of 1924 and the sometimes-violent labor disputes exemplify these tensions.

2) African-Americans continued to bear the particular brunt of American racism, with the 1920's being an especially horrifying time of widespread lynching.

3) The 1920 's brought interest and struggle in matters of freedom (women finally got the vote) and social permissiveness, while the Depression of the 30's shifted the focus to economic survival.

4) Technology was changing the face of everyday American life, with the arrival and expansion of the telephone, electricity, the phonograph, the motion picture, and the automobile.

5) While World War I was not fought on American soil, it brought to America a strong sense of "social breakdown and of individual powerlessness" and the beginning of the strong feelings of alienation which would become even stronger with the horrors of World War II.

6) The thinking of Freud (1856-1939) and Marx (1818-1883) began to make its way into popular consciousness—and thus public art.

The Norton anthology describes the literature of this period in this way: "...Literature created before World War I reflected a sense of society as something stable, whose repetitions and predictability enabled one to chronicle a universal human situation through accurate representations of particulars," while "serious literature written between 1914 and 1945 attempted to convey a vision of social decay through the appropriate techniques or offered radical critiques of American society on behalf of working people or tried to develop a conservative literature that could counter social breakdown." In simplest terms, "writers before World War I had faith in society and in art, [while] writers between 1915 and 1945 had faith in art."

Notes: Willa Cather, Novelist and Short Story Writer (1873-1947)

Willa Cather is seen today as one of the major writers of the 20th century; some critics place her with Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and Hemingway. For me, her work is not as remarkable in its innovations in craft as were the works of Faulkner and Hemingway, though she does do interesting things in some of her novels with point of view, often locating the voice in the story to someone just outside it, often someone who cannot fully understand the events or characters s/he describes. And her stories' plots lack the dramatic tension of "Barn Burning" or The Great Gatsby, for instance. But her subject matter was certainly her own, with her most well-loved works focusing on the lives of immigrants living in Nebraska.

While her work fell out of favor for some in the late 1930's because it was not overtly political, I am struck by her sensitive rendering of those whose lives were on the margins—in "Old Mrs. Harris," we have Old Mrs. Harris, who is literally marginalized in her daughter's house, living in a side room and disempowered by her age, gender, and lack of financial resources, and we are given an utterly sympathetic view of immigrants in Mr. and Mrs. Rosen, while "Neighbor Rosicky" presents a Czech immigrant farmer. The story gives a clear sense—certainly relevant to the immigrant world in which I live in L.A.—of the difficulties faced by immigrants who cannot speak the language and who often come first to huge urban areas in which they live in poverty. In "My Mortal Enemy," we see poverty of a different sort: the fallen-from-favor Hawthornes' poverty is sympathetically but not sentimentally rendered; the starkness of their loss of fortune is clearly, coolly detailed. So I am not surprised that Cather's reputation has enjoyed a kind of renaissance as critics and readers today enjoy her quietly told stories which often explore the interior tensions of characters who face the loneliness natural to immigrants separated by language, culture, and economic status from those around them or the loss felt by those on the prairie far away from the culture and stimulation of city life. While Cather understood the longing that her characters (particularly women) felt separated from the music, drama, and beauty of places like New York City, she came down firmly in her stories against the materialism and disconnection from the natural world that places like New York inflicted on those who lived there. "Paul's Case" is a particularly memorable exploration of that theme.

Questions on Willa Cather's "Neighbor Rosicky"

1. Willa Cather once said this about writing: "If [the writer] achieves anything enduring, it must be by giving himself absolutely to his material. And this gift of sympathy is his greatest gift." Although she was writing at a time when there was much anti-immigrant sentiment in the U.S., Cather again and again in her writing returns to the experiences of immigrants. Look carefully at her descriptions of Rosicky's life when he was first an immigrant. Where do you see Cather's "gift of sympathy" in those descriptions? That is, what does she tell us about the life of an immigrant that seems true to you?

2. Cather in some ways fits in the Romantic tradition of writers like Emerson and Thoreau in her valuing the natural world over the urban, technological world. Note and discuss all the times in which we see a city vs. country contrast set up in the story. What does each place represent for Rosicky?

Notes: Katherine Anne Porter, Writer of Fiction & Essays (1890-1980)

Katherine Anne Porter is one of those writers who I suspect falls between the cracks in survey courses, in part because she wrote right at the cusp of the changing century, in part because her output was small (two dozen short stories, collected essays, and one novel), and in part because her stories are delicately nuanced, finely tuned pieces, even at a time when much American fiction was highly polemic and political. Yet she earns very strong praise from even the anthologists, who sometimes aim for a muted reporter's stance in their descriptions. The Heath anthology says, "There is no more thoroughly American writer than Katherine Anne Porter" (whatever *that* means), and the usually-subdued Norton anthology says that "each story was a masterpiece of technical skill and emotional power, combining traditional narrative ability with new symbolic techniques and modern subject matter like dreams and sex." (Perhaps this latest point explains why she received the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize in 1965—more than thirty years after her stories were first published—for her Collected Stories publication in that year.)

I find myself not moved that much by her stories—interested, but not staggered by them. I'm not sure why—though in the next breath I must say that I find myself re-thinking my response to Miranda and "Old Mortality," which does present an insightful sense of both a child's and a young woman's confusion and rebellion at the vagaries of the adult world and its sometimes-mysterious codes of behavior. I like, too, the fact that we see Miranda struggling to make sense of her family and her place in it amidst a constellation of women relatives—so that we see her weighing the various options that seem to be available to her gender, struggling between her own romantic idealism and her acute and innate common sense. (Interesting—I find that my thoughts about the story are shifting as I write, so that in writing about the story I am re-reading it, thinking about it in ways different from my first response. This is why I think that reading journals are such a crucial part of a literature class—because the same things happen to students when they are forced to articulate their ideas about a story, even one that confused or bored them at first.)

"The Fig Tree" also features Miranda. In this story, she feels a kind of despair at being surrounded by adults who "spoke to children always as if they knew best about everything and children knew nothing....and they were always right and children never were." But there is a moment, too, when adult knowledge (from her aunt) offers enormous comfort to her.

"The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" is more experimental in its form—particularly its stream-of-conscious narrative—and offers students a good introduction to that point of view. It's a fine story, and there is a good film adaptation of it available that can be useful for students who are baffled by their first reading.

Journal Questions on Katherine Anne Porter

1. Eudora Welty says this of Katherine Anne Porter: "Miss Porter's stories are not so much a stand against the romantic as such, as a repudiation of the false. What alone can instruct the heart is the experience of living, experience which can be vile; but what can never do it any good, what harms it more than vileness, are those tales, those legends... those universal false dreams, the hopes sentimental and ubiquitous, which are not on any account to be gone by." How does that statement relate to your reading of "The Old Mortality"?

2. Miranda is surrounded by a constellation of women and by stories about those women. What ideas about women does she get from these various women and from the stories that are told about them? What options are presented to her? What choices does she make about these options?

3. One of the most common themes in literature is initiation. An initiation is an experience that leads a person to a new understanding; in many instances, it is a painful experience that leads the person toward adulthood. After reading the definitions below, write an essay in which you evaluate the level of initiation of Miranda. What sort of initiation has she undergone?

*a) **a tentative initiation**—The person is led to the threshold of maturity and understanding but does not quite cross it. In this kind of initiation, the person is often quite young, and the experience is a shocking one for him/her;*

*b) **an incomplete initiation**—These go a little further; the person moves across the threshold of maturity and understanding but is left enmeshed in a struggle for certainty;*

*c) **a decisive initiation**—The person moves firmly toward maturity and understanding.*

Notes: The Harlem Renaissance (1917?-1929)

The Harlem Renaissance was an unprecedented time in American literary history, when African-American art—fiction, poetry, drama, and music—flourished, with its artists receiving widespread attention, praise, and financial support. With its locus in Harlem, it brought to national attention a number of artists, many of whom would make their artistic presence felt long after the Renaissance "ended" when the Stock Market crashed. Among the artists of the Renaissance were **Jean Toomer**, author of the complexly-wrought Cane; **Nella Larsen**, author of the novels Quicksand and Passing; **Claude McKay**, who appropriated the highly formal sonnet in order to write stunning poems of rage; **Countee Cullen**, poet and editor of the Opportunity magazine; **Alain Locke**, whose 1925 anthology The New Negro was a landmark in American literature; **Langston Hughes**, perhaps the most versatile, well-known, and much-loved writer—he was an extraordinary poet, journalist, essayist, playwright—of the period; and **Zora Neale Hurston**, who participated in some of the social and political world of the Harlem Renaissance but whose greatest works were published ten years later, in the 1940's.

I have long loved the works of the Renaissance; they are for me a remarkable body of work of great importance and power in the American canon. In these works, we see a variety of themes:

1) a powerful celebration of black Americans and their culture; the pride expressed in them is joyful and courageous in the face of continued oppression and racism; this celebration is perhaps best exemplified in poems like Langston Hughes' lilting and exuberant celebration of the beauty of black women of many shades, "Sugar Hill."

2) protest and defiance of the racism of the day, racism both overt and implicit (see especially Claude McKay and Countee Cullen);

3) an honoring and exploration of Africa as ancestral home;

4) an attention to forms and language that were distinctly African-American, ranging from the use of dialect pioneered by James Weldon Johnson and used later by Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes' masterful use of jazz, the blues, and, later, be-bop, in the rhythms of his poetry. (Sometimes the Harlem Renaissance writers were/are faulted for not being sharply innovative in their forms in this nascent period of the Modernist Age, with Faulkner and Hemingway as exemplars; I think that criticism ignores the above-named innovations.)

5) an exploration of black life apart from the difficulties caused by racism, especially in works like Hurston's Their Eyes were Watching God.

This list is an easy one for me to make, and it confirms my affection for the period. But my understanding of the Renaissance has shifted—or at least broadened—in my reading and studies this time. What I had not fully understood before were the artistic complexities faced by the writers of the period, the tensions within their community. Langston Hughes' essay "When the Negro was in Vogue" and an article on Hughes in African American Writers helped me to understand how choices for these writers were complicated by two important things: the issue of patronage—white patrons who provided financial support until the Stock Market Crash—and the newly-won white audience who flocked to Harlem to hear (and buy) the fiction, poetry, and music being produced there . First, the patrons often had very clear (read: restrictive) ideas about the kinds of art they wanted to support: Zora Neale Hurston's patron, for instance, particularly favored "primitivism," and Langston Hughes' career took a painful shift when his white patron suddenly dropped him. Second, the black artists struggled with the kinds of images they wanted to present to their white audiences. Was their mission, for instance, to "uplift the race"? Would works that used dialect or that showed violence and poverty in presenting black life be used to support stereotypical views held by whites? In making choices about form, should black writers show their mastery of accepted, traditional forms? Or should they branch out and forge new forms of their own? What if those forms were unacceptable to the prosperous whites who formed a financial base? (It's interesting to note that these questions still arise in debates about African-American literature; witness the controversy about Alice Walker's The Color Purple or Spike Lee's films.) These issues are an important part of the Renaissance—and were explored powerfully, I realize now, in Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man in 1952, twenty years after the Harlem Renaissance "ended."

Notes: Langston Hughes, Renaissance Writer— Poet, Journalist, Writer of Poems, Short Stories, Essays, Plays, Children's Books, and Autobiographies (1902-1967)

A look at Langston Hughes' writing clearly reveals that he was a Renaissance man in two ways—first, as the undisputed leader and poet laureate of the Harlem Renaissance movement; second, in the more general sense of the phrase, as he wrote not just the fine poetry for which he is most remembered and honored but also wrote powerfully as a fiction writer, essayist, and journalist; his character Jesse B. Simple has been called "the most memorable figure to emerge from black journalism." He was, quite simply, a remarkable writer, a remarkable man.

Obviously, I am a Langston Hughes fan. For me, he is one of America's great writers. His range of poems is astonishing, from sharp pieces that point out the violent and the subtle racism of this country to singing, joyful celebrations of black beauty, strength, and dignity to remarkable innovations that make use of and honor the blues and jazz traditions. I am perhaps most struck by his love for his people, revealed in his poems like "Sugar Hill" and "I, Too" and in the stories told about him. One writer describes the way that Hughes, who bought and lived in a house in Harlem as soon as he could afford it, would put up little signs of praise of various accomplishments of the school children of the neighborhood so that they could see them and revel in the attention as they walked by.

My studies of Langston Hughes this time, particularly in an essay in <u>African American Writers,</u> taught me some new things about him that make him all the more interesting an American writer:

* He struggled financially for much of his early writing life, writing and publishing while he held a variety of jobs, ranging from floral deliveries to kitchen work.

*He was supported by a white patron, Mrs. Mason, beginning in 1927, a woman who was a "firm believer in parapsychology and in the spiritual power of the darker races" and who edited him "relentlessly." Her expulsion of him in 1930 was a traumatic, unsettling time for him. (See my subsequent notes on Zora Neale Hurston.)

*The thirties were a time of social unrest and a rising interest in leftist and communist values, and Hughes was very much involved in these movements, publishing work such as "Good Morning, Revolution" and "Goodbye Christ" that would later lead to difficulties and protests from conservative readers (in Pasadena!) and ultimately in his being called

before Joseph McCarthy. Hughes later repudiated his stance in these poems as an error of his youth.

*He was a playwright, too; his play Mulatto stayed on Broadway for longer than any other play by a black playwright until Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun—the title of which had come from a Hughes poem.

*He translated or helped to translate four books, including books by Lorca of Spain, Guillen of Cuba, Mistral of Chile, and Roumain of Haiti.

*He also wrote a number of children's books—books that were consistent with his life-long commitment to and celebration of black life, covering topics such as jazz, the West Indies, and African-American heroes.

Journal Questions on the Harlem Renaissance Writers

1. As you read the poems by the Harlem Renaissance writers included in our text, consider the ways that they explore one (or more) of the themes listed below. In your reader's journal, discuss one of the poems, examining in detail both the theme(s) that the work explores and the techniques (word choice, images, rhythm, voice, etc.) that the writer uses to present that theme. Or broaden your focus to two or three poems, comparing and contrasting their themes and techniques.

The themes which were pioneered by the Renaissance included the following:

**) a celebration of black Americans and their culture;*

**) protest and defiance of the racism of the day, racism both overt and implicit ;*

**) an honoring and exploration of Africa as ancestral home;*

**) an attention to forms and language that were distinctly African-American, ranging from the use of dialect to the use of jazz and the blues in the rhythms of poetry.*

**) an exploration of black life apart from the difficulties caused by racism.*

2. The Harlem Renaissance occurred primarily in the 1920's, a time that we often associate with the age of flappers, conspicuous wealth, and open rebellion against Prohibition—the world described by F. Scott Fitzgerald in The Great Gatsby. We often hold that image of the Renaissance, too, with its jazz clubs and the vibrant life of Harlem. But Langston Hughes says, in his essay, "When the Negro was in Vogue," that "the gay and sparkling life of the so-called Negro Renaissance of the '20's was not so gay and sparkling beneath the surface as it looked." After reading that essay, describe the complications of that period—for artists and Harlemites— as Hughes presents them to us.

3. Langston Hughes' Jesse B. Simple, called by scholar Arnold Rampersad "probably the most memorable figure to emerge from black journalism," offers an often hilarious but pointed view of the world, a view not shared by the middle-class and optimistic "I" with whom he has conversations. While "Radioactive Red Caps" is a highly comic piece, Simple also reveals fundamental wrongs faced by African-Americans in the 1960's. What problems does Hughes expose in this piece?

CASEBOOK: Zora Neale Hurston, Anthropologist & Writer of Fiction, Essays, and Autobiography (1891-1960)

Notes

Like Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston published in and was associated with the Harlem Renaissance, but her period of productivity did not stop with the end of that time. In fact, Hurston's best works were published a decade later—Jonah's Gourd Vine in 1934, Mules and Men in 1935, Their Eyes were Watching God in 1937, and Dust Tracks on the Road in 1942. In spite of the important place that these works have in today's canon—Hurston is considered "the most important and influential African-American woman who wrote before World War II"—she lived her final years in obscurity and poverty, and Alice Walker, who is credited with bringing Hurston back into the pubic eye, has described the dearth of Hurston material that was available at the time of Walker's college studies: the only way they could read Hurston was on tattered xeroxed copies, passed hand to hand. That has certainly changed in the last two decades, with Hurston firmly established as an important voice in 20th century fiction and essays.

One reason for Hurston's having fallen into obscurity is simply timing: her works came out after the Renaissance, when the audience had turned its attention elsewhere. Also problematic was the fact that Their Eyes Were Watching God, her greatest work, did not fit neatly into any one category, being a "loosely organized, highly metaphorical novel, with passages of broad folk humor and of extreme artistic compression." Finally, Hurston's personal relationships with the male leaders of the Renaissance were troubled: they disapproved of her lack of concern about the political impact of her works, and she and Langston Hughes had a falling out when she claimed authorship over a play that they had written together. She defended her writing choices in this way: "It would be a tremendous loss to the Negro race and to America, if we should lose the folklore and folk music, for the unlettered Negro has given the Negro's bet contribution to America's culture." It's easy to imagine this headstrong woman, raised in the all-black community of Eatonville, Florida, would have clashed with the men who were the primary movers and shakers of the Renaissance.

The challenges she faced as a writer were considerable, with one of the most glaring being the patronage early in her career of Mrs. Rufus Osgood Mason, who also supported Langston Hughes for a time. The stunning details of Mason's contract with Hurston—"signed, witnessed, and notarized"—were that Hurston would "collect all information possible, both written and oral, concerning the music, poetry, folk-lore, literature, hoodoo,

conjure manifestations of art and kindred subjects related to and existing among North American Negroes"—**and** that all that material would belong to Mason herself; Hurston was forbidden to share it or publish it without Mason's permission. It's painful to think of writers as creative and talented as Hurston and Hughes being forced by finances to work under such strictures. Both writers went on to publish their best work free of Mason's tutelage.

Summaries of Three Major Works

Dust Tracks on the Road: Hurston's remarkable autobiography has been the subject of much interest and critical debate. As interest in Hurston has risen, so has the commentary on the book's looseness with the "facts" of Hurston's life. Even Hurston's champion Alice Walker has said, "after the first three chapters, it rings false." More recently, however, critics and appreciative readers have been less likely to be disconcerted or disapproving, given the fact that "Autobiography, no longer seen as a subcategory of biography, based on factual truth, is approached from a broader interpretive stance. Critics examine the process of the autobiographer/subject struggling to 'shape identity out of amorphous subjectivity'; self-disclosure and self-deception are acknowledged.'" (See "New Tracks" on Dust Tracks" in appendix for more information.) The recent re-issuing of the text includes the original versions of three chapters that were rejected by Hurston's editors. Each of these "restored" chapters sheds an interesting light on the pressures faced by Hurston, particularly the pressure to tone down her criticism of those in power.

Their Eyes Were Watching God: This novel traces the growth of Janie from child to woman, from voicelessness to self-declaration, from a loveless marriage insisted upon by her grandmother to a marriage of her own choosing to Tea Cake. Told in a voice that is lush and poetic, using African-American dialect in a powerful way that was nonetheless controversial at the time, the novel uses powerful images to reveal Janie's gradual emergence—as she moves from the kitchen of her first marriage to the inarticulate Logan Killicks to the storefront of her egotistical and powerful second husband, Jody Starks, to the out-of-doors porches and muck of the Everglades as she works side-by-side with Tea Cake.

"What White Publishers Won't Print": This powerful essay from the Negro Digest in 1950 argues for literature that portrays not only the "exceptional" or the "quaint" or the morbid and defeated Negro. What we need instead, she believes, is literature about "a Negro insurance official, dentist, general

practictioner, undertaker, and the like"—in short, "incisive and full-dress stories around Negroes above the servant class."

Selected Bibliography on Zora Neale Hurston

(These articles are in the appendix.)

Ashe, Bertram. " 'Why don't he like my hair?': Constructing African-American Standards of Beauty in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon and Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God." African American Review. Vol. 29, No. 4. 1995. 579-592.

Bordelon, Pamela. "New Tracks on Dust Tracks: Toward a Reassessment of the Life of Zora Neale Hurston." African American Review. Vol. 31, No. 1. 1997. 5-21.

Racine, Maria J. Voice and Interiority in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God. African American Review. Vol. 28, No. 2. 1994. 283-292.

Journal Questions on Zora Neale Hurston

1. For some critics, Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God is a novel emblematic of the Harlem Renaissance because it is about the central importance of having a voice in the assertion of self. Choose two scenes where the use of voice—or the failure to use voice—seems crucial. Examine those two scenes carefully, exploring the ways in which they use the notion of voice.

2. Read the excerpts from The Eatonville Anthology that are printed in your anthology. What connections can you make between those sketches and Their Eyes Were Watching God?

3. Read the handout on Joseph Campbell's description of the heroic life cycle. In what ways does that cycle illuminate your understanding of Janie's story?

4. One critic says this of Tea Cake: "Although Tea Cake seems to be the 'bee' for Janie's blossom, his is the ultimate betrayal of Janie. Up to the point at which Tea Cake hits Janie, his egalitarian treatment and encouragement of Janie earn him to right to be called bee, and his name—Verigible 'Tea Cake' Woods—basically confirms the sweet, pastoral designation." But, that critic argues, Tea Cake ultimately betrays Janie—and the fact that he is transformed into a "mad dog" at the end of the book is no accident. What do you make of that reading? That is, how do you read Tea Cake's beating of Janie? How does it fit into (or disrupt) the themes of the novel?

5. Discuss Janie's husbands. How are they similar? How do they differ? Do Janie's interactions with them reflect her development, and if so, how? What do you make of the fact that Janie is still single at the end of the story?

6. How does the novel present community? You might want to compare/contrast the Eatonville community and the community in the Everglades. How do people in these communities interact? What role does class hierarchy play in these communities? What is Janie's relation to these communities? Does her relation to the community in which she lives change significantly?

7. Analyze a pattern of imagery in the novel. For instance, you could choose images of trees and blossoms, or images of horizons. What do the images suggest? How do they comment on the story? Do similar images work differently at different points in the novel? You might also want to trace connections or contradictions between two patterns of imagery.

8. Consider the role of race in the novel. What does the novel suggest it means to be black? You will want to consider what different characters (Nanny, Jody, Mrs. Turner, Tea Cake) say about the situations of black people or what black people should be like, and whether the narrative endorses or undercuts these statements.

9. How do you think the storm and its aftermath function in the novel?

Notes: William Faulkner, Writer of Fiction (1897-1962)

There is a kind of funny understatement in the heading for these notes, for I think that the editors of the Norton anthology do not exaggerate when they say that "in each of the novels William Faulkner wrote between 1929 and 1936 it seemed as though fiction were being reinvented." I just read (and re-read) As I Lay Dying for the first time in fifteen years, and I found myself startled, really, by the stunning creativity of it, both in its remarkable plot—a poor white trash family journeys through flood and fire to bury the mother elsewhere, as she had requested—and in its virtuoso form—59 interior monologues by 15 people, ranging from the bewildered young boy Vardaman to his worthless, "hang-dog" father Anse to the mad Darl to the unlettered, seventeen, and pregnant Dewey Dell to the ever-careful Cash, who wants to bring the world into some kind of balance. They and the neighbors and people they encounter are an incredible—but entirely credible—array of characters. I know of no other book in American literature like it. But for me, it is not one of those books, like those by a number of men writing in the late twentieth century, in which the prose is so dazzling that my attention is drawn to the writer and not the story. The Norton describes the New Journalism of the 1960's like this: that it might be about "a racing-car star or a New York disco celebrity, but in fact, didn't matter all that much, because it was there mainly for the style to perform on." That kind of egoistic writing makes me cranky, and I love Faulkner all the more because he managed, somehow, to transform the way fiction is written—but the story always remains central, with a kind of fierce dedication to the characters and the struggles they face and endure.

Journal Questions on William Faulkner

1. One of Faulkner's great innovations was the way that he used a new form of narration to make visible the uncertainty of the 20th century. Rather than telling the story from one point of view—which implies that the truth is knowable, that there is a single truth—he fractured the narrative, giving us the story from multiple points of view. The story emerges, then, in bits and pieces, with one character contradicting the other, so that we are forced to weigh the credibility of one against the other, coming to our own conclusions, but understanding finally that our conclusions may be as flawed as those of the character/narrators'.

Write in your journal on the central characters of As I Lay Dying—perhaps focusing on two or three. What picture do we get of each? What are the contradictions about them that are implicit in what they say of themselves versus what others say of them?

2. A character in Robert Frost's poem "Home Burial" says, "The nearest friends can go / with anyone to death, comes so far short /They might as well not try to go at all./ No, from the time when one is sick to death,/ One is alone, and he dies more alone./ Friends make pretense of following to the grave/ But before one is in it, their minds are turned/ And Making the best of their way back to life/ And living people, and things they understand."
How might As I Lay Dying be read as an illustration of that idea? What else does the novel show us about how we humans confront the mystery of death? (It may be helpful to think about how each character thinks about and reacts to Addie Bundren's death and burial.)

3. There are certainly mythic overtones to this story of the Bundren family. Read Joseph Campbell's description of the heroic life cycle. What connections can you make between that mythic pattern and the novel?

4. On the face of it, this shouldn't be a funny book, given the plot. But it is almost always referred to as a "tragicomic" masterpiece. Explore the ways in which As I Lay Dying is a comic novel.

5 Sarty's decision at the end of "Barn Burning" can be seen in two very different ways: 1) that he has made a necessary, crucial decision in freeing himself from his father and Abner's destructive anger or 2) that Sarty has been duped, aligning himself with what he believes is justice, while in fact it was his father who understood justice (or the lack of it) for the poor

and disenfranchised. Examine the text for evidence of both these readings; then discuss your analysis of Sarty's final choice.

6. "Barn Burning," despite its remarkable story-telling style, in which we often see things through the stream-of-consciousness of the young boy Sarty, is a type of story familiar to us by now: an initiation story. Apply the theory we have discussed in the past to this story; what kind of initiation does Sarty undergo?

*a) **a tentative initiation**—The person is led to the threshold of maturity and understanding but does not quite cross it. In this kind of initiation, the person is often quite young, and the experience is a shocking one for him/her;*

*b) **an incomplete initiation**—These go a little further; the person moves across the threshold of maturity and understanding but is left enmeshed in a struggle for certainty;*

*c) **a decisive initiation**—The person moves firmly toward maturity and understanding.*

7. Write a brief essay in which you examine the stylistic innovations and the themes of Faulkner. Use examples and quotes from the stories we read to help illustrate your assertions.

Notes: Ernest Hemingway, Novelist and Short Story Writer (1899-1961)

It's not surprising that someone who nearly swoons at the poetic language of William Faulkner and Toni Morrison would not especially like the much-parodied terseness of Hemingway's prose. Yet, I find that when I read Hemingway, most times, I like the story more than I expect to. His ear for spoken language is acute, and he renders an argument between characters better than anyone I know. And since his writing, in some ways, made Raymond Carver's possible, I can perhaps forgive him the obsession with noble stoicism that pervades his work. Even as I write that, I understand the appeal in an existential world of a kind of dignity even in the face of a universe that is cruel or indifferent or merely banal. But while that silent dignity may offer some code or pattern to the man who is at a loss in facing the world, it ultimately doesn't seem a particularly healthy model for male behavior, particularly if that male has a wife or lover or children or friends. When Margaret O'Connor says, "Hemingway's protagonists struggle to keep seven-eighths of their character hidden below the surface of their conscious lives, showing only a cool exterior to the outside world," my response is Why? That kind of distancing from engagement with others seems in some ways more cowardly than heroic.

But I'll try not to bash him too much when I teach him; my last group of students in American Lit liked " A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" very much, and Hemingway's style did make its mark on American literature.

Questions on Ernest Hemingway

1. Compare and contrast the old waiter vs. the young waiter in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place." As is true for most Hemingway stories, you will have to rely not on extensive descriptions of the characters; instead you will have to listen carefully when they speak, for it is in what they say (and in what they don't say) that they come closest to revealing themselves.

2. One of Hemingway's pervasive themes has been described as the heroic code—which, in a world in which the old codes are not useful, involves honor, courage, and stoic endurance in the face of terrible pain and loss. Many of his stories present to us a "code hero"—often an older man who, as my Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature puts it, rightly exhibits "what counts most in human experience...the dignity and courage with which the individual conducts himself in the process of being destroyed by life and the world." This code hero is distinct from the "Hemingway hero"—a man (often young) who is struggling and who would profit from following the lessons offered by the code hero.

Discuss the ways that this idea illuminates your understanding of "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" or "The Killers."

3 Write a brief essay in which you examine the stylistic innovations and the themes of Hemingway. Use examples and quotes from the stories we read to help illustrate your assertions.

Notes: John Steinbeck, Writer (1902-1968)

The list of Steinbeck's writing surprises me—plays, movie scripts, short story collections, books of non-fiction, novels, and political documents—for it is his fiction for which he is most known and loved. He did not perform radical experiments with style, as did his contemporaries Faulkner and Hemingway, which explains partially why he has been eclipsed by them both, though he did win the Nobel Prize for his writing. Two other factors come into play: 1) he was a Symbolist, creating archetypal characters in symbolic landscapes at a time when that had fallen out of fashion; 2) like Edith Wharton before him, the writing from late in his life was not consistent with the fine quality of his earliest work.

In spite of this, he remains a well-loved author, whose sympathetic portrayals of those without power—particularly in Of Mice and Men (1937), The Grapes of Wrath (1939), and The Pearl (1945)—can move us still.

Questions on John Steinbeck

1. Steinbeck wrote most powerfully about what one critic calls "those socially marginal characters" in his novels Of Mice and Men (1937) and The Grapes of Wrath (1939), but we can see that interest in "The Leader of the People," his 1945 short story, too. How does he reveal the powerlessness of both Jody and his grandfather? Use specific examples from the text in your discussion.

2. After completing the story, look again at the first two paragraphs. Read them carefully; how does Steinbeck present details in those paragraphs that prepare us for the crisis over which Jody's grandfather is grieving? That is, in what ways are those details symbolic of Grandfather's sense of loss?

Notes: F. Scott Fitzgerald, Fiction Writer (1896-1940)

In sorting out when to teach F. Scott Fitzgerald, I imagine two possible approaches: I might place him next to the Harlem Renaissance in the syllabus, as his concerns offer a stark contrast to those of the Harlem Renaissance; or I might pair him with Steinbeck. Though he published most of his best work a decade before Steinbeck, he, like Steinbeck, falls in the shadow of Hemingway and Faulkner. Both men offered criticism of America in their fiction, though from different angles: Steinbeck saw an America diminished by its inexorable movement toward mass (and crass) commercialism; Fitzgerald wrote—and lived—in testimony to the corrupted and corrupting force of the American Dream and its promise of material wealth and social mobility.

Questions on F. Scott Fitzgerald

1. "Winter Dreams," published three years before Fitzgerald's masterpiece The Great Gatsby, shares some of its themes. If you have read The Great Gatsby, write a comparison of the two works.

2. Although he was writing when the Harlem Renaissance was at its height, Fitzgerald clearly lived in and wrote of a different world. Write a comparison of "Winter Dreams" and one of the pieces from the Harlem Renaissance.

3. Compare Fitzgerald's treatment of women in his fiction to that of Steinbeck.

4. Like Hemingway, Fitzgerald lived a life that seemed inextricable from his fiction and its themes. What biographical connections can you make between his marriage to Zelda and his depiction of Judy Jones (and Daisy in The Great Gatsby, if you've read it)?

5. Fitzgerald pioneered and mastered the voice of the outsider as narrator. In what ways does he establish Dexter as an outsider and an observer of the world to which he aspires?

Notes: Ralph Ellison, Novelist, Short Story Writer, Essayist (1914-1994)

Ralph Ellison made his mark in American literature by writing one of its finest novels. Invisible Man, published in 1952, fully deserves the accolades with which we greet extraordinary works of fiction: a tour de force, a masterpiece, a stunning, innovative, highly original and inventive work. It is a classic American coming-of-age novel in which a young man makes his way in the world, but Ellison re-invents even that form, using his love and knowledge of music to shape the story's telling in the African-American traditions of the blues and jazz. And his protagonist at the story's end is in a remarkable position: "the whole book is conceived and understood to be narrated from the 'hole' into which the Invisible Man has retired," a trickster figure who surrounds himself with light at the expense of a culture which has declared him invisible.

I find myself struggling with my conception of the American Lit course. I've planned to teach it next time as a survey course, thinking that offering students breadth is a good thing, offering them some familiarity with many writers so that they'll have some sense of the variety and richness of American Literature and so that they'll be able to make their own choices about writers they'd like to read further in life after the course. My biggest reservation about this plan is that I won't get to teach all of Invisible Man, which is for me the quintessential American novel.

Journal Questions on Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man

Questions to consider in the first part of the novel:

1. Describe how the tone of the prologue differs from the chapters that follow.

2. How does the first paragraph of Chapter 1 ("Battle Royal") sum up the conflict that the narrator confronts? Explore as many symbolic possibilities as you can.

3. Why do the grandfather's words cause so much anxiety in the family? What does his grandfather mean when he says, "I want you to overcome them with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death"?

4. What is the symbolic significance of the naked blonde? What details reveal that she represents more than a sexual tease in the story?

Questions to consider throughout <u>The Invisible Man</u>:

5. <u>Invisible Man</u> tells the story of a journey to self. Along the way, our narrator encounters a number of people and incidents that give him lessons—both false and true—about who he is. Some of these encounters are surrealistic, confusing. Examine one that is of particular interest (or frustration) to you and read it closely. What "lessons" seem to be offered in that encounter? How does the young man react to those lessons?

6. Examine one of these scenes exploring ways in which it seems symbolic to you: the battle royal, the conversation with True blood, the Golden Day incident, the Bledsoe interviews, the Liberty Point episode, the Brotherhood experience. What does the experience signify—for the narrator, for the other participants, for you?

7. Ellison went to Tuskegee originally to study jazz. His interest in jazz and his belief in its importance is obvious in the novel. Examine his use of jazz, his references to particular songs or musicians. What is the significance of his particular choices?

8. Notice the nursery and folk rhymes that appear throughout the book. What are they, and how do they illuminate the themes of the book?

9. Look at the names that are given characters in the book. Play with them a bit. What symbolic possibilities do you see? Why is our hero given no name?

10. Examine the depictions of women in the novel. How does the hero react to them? What is their significance?

11. Keep track of the hero's dreams and of the "dreams' others would impose on him. What do those dreams signify?

12. As you read, keep a record of the questions that the hero asks himself. What do you make of those questions? What do they reveal about him? about his efforts to define himself?

13. The hero of IM continually seeks to define and redefine himself. Discuss those various definitions as the book progresses.

Questions about the closing section of The Invisible Man

14. In what ways are certain historic black leaders—such as Marcus Garvey, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, and Frederick Douglass—represented directly or indirectly by the various leaders depicted in the novel?

15. Discuss Homer Barbee's speech in detail. What myth of the Founder does he reconstruct? What is the significance of his blindness?

16. Continue to look closely at the episodes in which the hero is involved. Examine them for their symbolic value and for what they tell us about the hero's changing sense of self. For instance, comment on the theme of liberty and discuss the episode at Liberty Paint as an allegory of the hero's condition. Of examine the hospital episode, the first Brotherhood meeting...

17. Compare the narrator to Hamlet.

18. What do you think of the hero's progress (or lack of it) in the middle part of the book? As you look at Liberty Paints, the hospital, and his first interactions with the Brotherhood, what signs of progress do you see? What signs of failure do you see?

19. The hero makes several speeches in the book—at the battle royal, at the eviction, at a Brotherhood gathering, and at a friend's funeral.. Examine those speeches carefully and compare them. What impressions do they give you of the narrator's changes (or lack of them)?

20. Some say that IM is essential a hopeless book. Do you agree or disagree? Do you see any evidence of hope? Why?

21. Read the prologue and the epilogue again. What, if anything, as the narrator learned by the time of the epilogue that he didn't know in the prologue?

22. In an essay in "Shadow and Act" about jazz musician Charlie Christian, Ellison says this about jazz:

> *There is...a cruel contradiction implicit in the art form itself. For true jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each jazz true moment (as distinct from the uninspired commercial performance) springs from a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest; each solo flight, or improvisation, represents...a definition of his identity: as individual, as member of the collectivity, and as a link in the chain of tradition. Thus, jazz finds its very line in an endless improvisation upon traditional materials; the jazzman must lose his identity even as he finds it. (234)*

What connections can you make between this theory of jazz and the book?

23. What do you make of the last line of the book?

24. In an essay called "The World and the Jug," Ralph Ellison is critical of Richard Wright, asserting that Wright believed that "much abused idea that novels are weapons"(114). Ellison goes on to say, "I can only ask that my fiction be judged as art; if it fails, it fails aesthetically, not because I did or did not fight some ideological battle" (136-7). How is it that the novel makes such a defense necessary? In what ways does Ellison seem to you to shift from the focus of earlier writers like Wright or Langston Hughes? Why might that shift be controversial? How do you respond?

Notes: Eudora Welty, Fiction Writer (1909-)

Every time I read a Eudora Welty story, I hear her voice reading it, see her dressed in deep pink with her white hair a cloud around her unbeautiful but lovely face. Hearing her read over a decade ago was a great joy for me—with her sharp and funny sense of humor, her self-deprecating ways, her apparent surprise that an auditorium at Stanford had filled to overflowing to hear her read. There was a long delay—the fire marshals moved people out of aisles and doorways—but she maintained her grace and patience, signing autographs in the long wait. I was near the aisle at the close of her reading, and as she walked by, I thanked her for the pleasure of her stories and her patience, to which she replied, "Oh, but no, it was you who were so patient." I nearly swooned.

It's not very academic, of course, to think so personally and lovingly of a writer, but Eudora Welty's ear for Southern talk and personality, her tightly crafted, sweetly funny stories, bring me great pleasure every time I read them—or hear her read them on one of the tapes she made of her earliest short stories. The editors of the Norton anthology aptly describe her appeal: "[E]verything Welty touches is transformed by the incorrigibly humorous twist of her narrative idiom. No matter how desperate a situation may be, she makes us listen to the way a character talks about it; it is style rather than information we find ourselves paying attention to. And although her attitude toward human folly is satiric, it is satire devoid of the wish to undermine and make mockery of her characters." So there are lines and characters who reverberate: Mama shouting "Stella-Rondo! Stella-Rondo!," Billy Boy blurting to a roomful of women in a beauty parlor, "If you're so smart, why ain't you rich?," another character roaring to the Fats-Waller based character, "Oh, Powerhouse." I'll look forward to teaching her again.

Questions on Eudora Welty

1. Welty's title, "The Petrified Man," has broader implications than the criminal Mr. Pike. Examine closely all the men in the story; in what ways might they seem to be petrified—particularly in their relationships with women?

2. "The Petrified Man" is on the one hand a very funny story; on the other hand, it presents relationships—friendships as well as marriages—as being fleeting, marked by betrayals, deceit, resentment, subtle aggressions. Examine this aspect of the story.

3. Pregnancy and children play a central role in this story which has women on its center stage. Yet it does not present a sentimental picture of maternal instincts. Explore the perspectives that we get of children and child-bearing in the story.

Notes: Flannery O'Connor, Fiction Writer (1925-1964)

Flannery O'Connor lived in the same South as Eudora Welty, spending all of her life in Milledgeville, Georgia. We see some similarities in these writers—in their sense of humor, their extraordinary ear for Southern conversation, their unswerving understanding of their characters. But ultimately, their visions of that world come to us in fundamentally different ways.

While O'Connor's collected letters in The Habit of Being contain some of the funniest writing I've encountered, the sense of humor that serves as the prism through which she sees the world is not a mirthful or even a very affectionate sense of humor. She sees her characters—perhaps like the God at the center of her very strong Catholic faith—in a kind of stern but loving relief. She is not disdainful or disrespectful of them; she does not laugh at their shortcomings. Instead she seems to write out of an austere love for her characters which results in markedly different stories from those of Eudora Welty, whose affectionate exasperation for her characters shines through her stories. The Norton editors put it this way: "This capacity for mockery, along with a facility in portraying perverse behavior, may work against other demands we make of the fiction writer, and it is true that O'Connor seldom suggests that her characters have inner lives that are imaginable, let alone worth respect...."

But because of the centrality of her Catholic faith, these characters are again and again faced with a kind of redemption, a redemption that they have not been worthy of, a redemption that they have not sought. Her most familiar characters are irritating and smug (mostly women) who face a kind of revelation when the platitudes with which they try to face life are suddenly revealed to them as wholly inadequate for the task at hand. We see this pattern in the Grandmother in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," the crippled Mr. Shiftlet in "The Life You May Save is Your Own," and the bookish and sullen young women of several stories, especially in "Good Country People."

Journal Questions on Flannery O'Connor

1. *Read the following comment on Flannery O'Connor. How does it help you make sense of the story you read?*

Because of the centrality of Flannery O'Connor's Catholic faith, her characters are again and again faced with a kind of redemption, a redemption that they have not been worthy of, a redemption that they have not sought. Her most familiar characters are irritating and smug (mostly women) who face a kind of revelation when the platitudes with which they try to face life are suddenly revealed to them as wholly inadequate for the task at hand.

(Questions 2-4 come from a hand out by Lois Cole.)

2. O'Connor's story "A Good Man is Hard to Find" sorts through a variety of definitions of a "good man" but finally leaves the reader with only an implicit definition of what a "good man" is or does (or isn't or does not do). What is that definition, according to the story? You might begin by considering the conventional definitions of "good" which the story first presents and then rejects as unsatisfactory. This process of elimination will not necessarily provide you with a final definition, but it will certainly narrow the field.

3. Consider whether any of the characters in the story qualify as a "good man" in O'Connor's terms: does any character experience a change of heart, a kind of epiphany or redemption?

4. Read the series of letters which are reprinted on the handouts. Focusing particularly on the ideas O'Connor presents in her letter, write a letter to her in which you do two things: react to her explanations, explaining to her the degree to which you understand the ideas she says she was trying to express in the story. In the second half of your letter, write about an aspect of the story that puzzles you or intrigues you; feel free to close with a question that you still have about the story.

Notes: John Cheever, Fiction Writer (1912-1982)

It's interesting that earlier writers like Sarah Orne Jewett and Kate Chopin were relegated to the ranks of minor writers with the label "regional writer" used in a rather pejorative way, while our praise of later writers like John Cheever and John Updike focuses on the way that they create (or re-create) the particularities of life in a region with which they have become inextricably connected. For Cheever, called by critic John Leonard "Our Chekhov of the exurbs," that region is Shady Hill, modeled on affluent and insulated neighborhoods like Fairfield or Westchester in the manicured suburbs of upstate New York.

A writer for the New Yorker, winner of the 1957 National Book award for his novel The Wapshot Chronicle, Cheever wrote for forty years; the Norton describes his contributions to American letters like this: "Trapped in their beautifully appointed houses and neighborhoods but carried along by the cool, effortless prose of their creator, Cheever's characters are viewed with a sympathetic irony, well-seasoned by sadness."

For me, this statement by Stephen Moore, quoted in the Norton anthology, is enormously helpful in reading Cheever: "His best stories move from a base in a mimetic presentation of surface reality—the *scenery* of apparently successful American middle class life—to fables of heroism." Thus a story like Cheever's "The Country Husband" moves beyond an extraordinary "slice of life" rendition of a middle-aged man's mid-life crisis; while my first reading left me less than sympathetic (or even very interested), my re-reading allowed me to see the protagonist, Francis Weed, in his isolation in a world that is oppressively banal, a world (admittedly the creation of Weed himself and men and women like him) in which any kind of meaningful human connection seems impossible. It is a world in which the rituals and surfaces of beauty obscure moments of passion and pain: thus Weed's brush with death on a plane is swept aside by squabbles between his bickering children; the fact of a young woman's public scourging and humiliation during the War cannot be acknowledged in his social circle; young Clayton Thomas's efforts to think critically about his life and the neighborhood which has marginalized him get lost in small talk about jobs and college plans; Weed's awakening—brought on with three folktale-like encounters with feminine images of sensuality and passion—must be cured by woodwork as therapy. It is a world in which he realizes that "no amount of cheerfulness or hopefulness or valor or perseverance could help him find, in the gathering dark, the path he'd lost"—and yet those are the only tools that life in Shady Hill has to offer. And so he plunges on, like his son Toby, who dons alternately the various

suits of heroes—cowboys, astronauts—decently accepting his fate, caught in the minutiae of suburban life even on nights where in other worlds "kings in golden suits ride elephants over the mountains."

Questions on John Cheever

1. Critic Stephen Moore, quoted in the Norton anthology, says this about Cheever: "His best stories move from a base in a mimetic presentation of surface reality—the scenery of apparently successful American middle class life—to fables of heroism." How might Francis Weed be seen as a hero? Consider especially the obstacles and difficulties he faces, particularly those raised by the place in which he lives; what are the things that threaten him? What is it that he desires? (Go beyond his immediate lusts for young Anne Murchison.) You may find it useful to look back at the Joseph Campbell explanation of the life cycle of a hero.

2. Your text claims that "there is a noticeable absence of politics in [Cheever's] work." This is debatable, particularly if we examine the clear criticisms that Cheever offers of the American upper middle class. What is wrong with life on Shady Hill? That is, what problems lie beneath its lovely surfaces and rituals?

3. Examine those who are at the margins of life at Shady Hill: Anne Murchison, Clayton Thomas, Gertrude, even Jupiter. What are the things that marginalize them? What does this tell us about Shady Hill?

4. Notice all the allusions to Greek myths as you read. Examine each of them in context: how do those particular allusions illuminate the story's intent?

5. What roles do the women of the story play? In what ways are those roles stereotypical? Are there ways in which any of them emerge for you as more human than stereotype?

Notes: John Updike, Fiction Writer (1932 -)

I have found myself struggling to get a strong sense of the ways in which to distinguish John Cheever from John Updike. They are roughly of the same period, and both have made their mark in American literature with their acute renderings of the life of the Eastern seaboard middle class, with both writers focusing primarily on the details of that life and the angst it engenders for their rather hapless male protagonists. I'm thinking now that a central distinction is this: Cheever focuses on the polished and affluent upper middle class, whose outer lives appear to be the stuff of magazines; it is only when we look closely, guided by Cheever's relentless eye, that we see the cracks in the polished surfaces of those lives. Updike's range is perhaps broader; he is more likely to write about the lower middle class, those who can only aspire to the smooth appearances of a Cheever neighborhood. Sammy in the "A & P" describes the parties his parents have—if it's a "real racy" affair, they serve Schlitz beer in glasses adorned with comic images of "They'll Do It Every Time." Another Updike story, from his well-known Olinger series, features young men marked by "athletic incompetence," "bad teeth," and "skin allergies." There is a kind of sympathy in Updike, perhaps because his characters are not so affluent, not the ready targets for criticism that we find in Cheever's too-rich-and-therefore-too-banal characters.

Even that distinction is not entirely fair: Cheever writes with deep sympathy even for those he is holding up for critical scrutiny. While he might agree with Clayton Thomas's criticism of Shady Hill— "the way people clutter up their lives....[so] that the only idea of the future anyone has is just more and more commuting trains and more parties"—he still ultimately seems to sympathize with those who struggle, however pathetically, to live heroically in that milieu. And Updike does write occasionally of the upper class: his story "Separating" is a splendid one about a family in disintegration even when all seems well. Perhaps it is fair to say that Updike is more likely to write about those who aspire toward affluence, while Cheever generally writes about those who are trapped by it.

Journal Questions on John Updike

1. Compare John Updike's "Separating" to John Cheever's "The Country Husband." What similarities do you see in the protagonists and in their situations? What differences? Which story affects you the most? Why?

2. One critic says this of Updike: "...he continues to be one of the finest short story writers at work today, with a...sharp eye for the seemingly insignificant moments in which a character is revealed and fate determined." How is this true of the story you read?

3. Examine the setting of "A&P" closely, both inside and outside the store. What is significant about the setting?

(With thanks to Joe Gallo at Foothill College for the following questions.)

4. In "A&P," Sammy seems to think he's different from the ordinary run of people (the "houseslaves in pin curlers with varicose veins mapping their legs," for instance). In what respects is Sammy different, even extraordinary?

5. Discuss Sammy's attitudes toward authority, commercial business, and women. For what can your criticize him? What can you praise in him?

6. Imagine some of the reasons Sammy might consider telling his parents at the dinner table when they ask him why he lost his job. Compare these "good" reasons with his "real" reasons—the ones the reader discovers in what Sammy reveals about his environment and attitudes.

Notes: Philip Roth, Fiction Writer (1933 -)

The editor of the Norton anthology coyly identifies Roth as one of the three major novelists of our age: "It may be folly—given the fact that our appreciation of a particular writer has so much to do with the gender, class, age or taste of the appreciator—to name the major American novelists of the post-World War II decades. Nevertheless, in the eyes of this anthologist they appear to be Bellow, Updike, and Roth." That sentence is really irritating to me—with its half-hearted curtsy in acknowledging the political nature of the canon, its coy "this anthologist" phrasing as a way of de-personalizing his choices, and its all-male, all east coast list. But, that aside, I do love reading Philip Roth. I know he is sometimes facile in his sending up of upper class Jewish American culture, and his treatment of women in his works is problematic. But there is an edginess and humor to his characters and their struggles that appeals to me both intellectually and emotionally. I have taught Good-bye, Columbus several times both in Introduction to Literature and American Lit courses. Its addressing of class and gender issues, as well as Roth's treatment of problems of Jewish identity, have appealed to a wide range of my students.

Journal Question on Philip Roth

1. "Defender of the Faith" raises questions about what it means, literally, to defend the faith: What is that faith?—Is it the religious practices and rituals or is it the practitioners of that faith? In this story, Marx must face the question he asks Grosbart: What are you? Trace ways in which the narrator tries to sidestep aligning himself with his faith and culture; then trace the ways in which he is drawn, inexorably, into facing it. What do we make of his final decision—and his own view of that choice?

Notes: N. Scott Momaday, Poet, Novelist, Autobiographer (1934-)

A Kiowa and Cherokee, Momaday has been a leading figure in Native American Literature. His House Made of Dawn, published in 1968, won the Pulitzer Prize and is seen by some as marking the beginning of the Native American Renaissance. He is perhaps most remarkable for the variety of forms in which he has explored his Kiowa past—oral and written poetry, prose fiction and nonfiction, autobiography, legend, history, photography, painting, scholarly writing. His The Way To Rainy Mountain, excerpted in the Norton anthology, is a lovely bringing together of oral tradition and memoir: it moves back and forth between a re-telling of traditional tales and his own present-day observations and memories, weaving clear connections between past and present, oral tradition and written autobiography.

Journal Questions on N. Scott Momaday

1. Examine the folk tales which appear periodically in The Way to Rainy Mountain. They can be understood as fitting into the patterns by which myths are sometimes described: 1) the charter myth, which explains cultural or political practices; 2) the nature myth, which seeks to explain natural phenomena; 3) the myth of psychological truth. How are these patterns evident in the folk tales that Momaday retells?

2. Explore the relationship between the italicized sections and the regular-print sections of The Way to Rainy Mountain.

Notes: Joyce Carol Oates, Writer of Fiction, Poems, Essays (1938-)

The description of Joyce Carol Oates' body of work is decidedly lukewarm in the Norton anthology. The editor's main objection seems simply to be peevishness at the prodigious output of writing that Oates has produced in her career—more than twenty novels in a twenty-year period, many volumes of short stories, poems, essays, a number of thrillers (written under the pseudonym Rosamund Smith), even a pictorial study of boxing. These lines from the introduction to Oates indicate a kind of disdain for her productivity: "Even for a prolific 'serious' writer, this output is cause for wonder—if not alarm. Can anyone who writes this much be trusted as to the quality of her product?" and later, "There is no doubt that the torrent of words delivered to us [emphases mine] over the past two decades has made it extremely difficult to keep up with her, and temptingly easy to neglect her." I find myself wondering what the "acceptable" output for a "serious" writer would be; the implication of the write-up on Ralph Ellison is that his one book was not enough, while the large number of works from Oates is held against her. Neither criticism seems particularly relevant to me.

Of more interest is the negative criticism that is cited concerning the violence of Oates' works: "The dosage of violence is so high and so regular...that the reader becomes immune to it, and none of it seems to matter much." That seems a more interesting point to raise and explore.

While the Norton includes "Golden Gloves," I would choose instead to teach "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" because a) I despise boxing and have no interest in reading about it; b) "Where Are You Going..." seems to me to be one of the great American short stories, with its interest in a female protagonist and her coming of age, and its exploration of the complexities of life for an American girl who is defined (and confined) by her prettiness, as well as its examination of the paucity of American family life and the culture in which those families live.

Journal Questions on Joyce Carol Oates

1. "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" is an extraordinary story, with complex layers of meaning and possibility. Consider the following readings of the story; write about the interpretations that are the most compelling for you. Remember to find specific evidence from the text.

** a realist story of rape and murder*

** a story of a supernatural encounter*

** a story of a dream*

** a contemporary rendition of the Greek myth of the abduction of Persephone*

** an initiation story which shows us a young girl moving out of the safety of home toward adulthood, faced with conflicting feelings of longing and terror*

** an indictment of the paucity of the world that Connie inhabits—a world in which "bright-lit, fly-infested" restaurants are like "sacred buildings"*

** a criticism of the American family*

** a criticism of the limited (and limiting) scripts that our culture gives to pretty girls like Connie.*

Notes: Alice Walker, Fiction Writer, Poet, Essayist (1944-)

Alice Walker has had a very visible presence and influence both in literature and popular culture over the last two decades. She is probably most well known for her 1982 novel The Color Purple, for which she won the American Book Award and which was made into a popular film by Stephen Spielberg. While it has been somewhat controversial because of what some see has its polemically negative portrayal of men, it is also a remarkable and much-loved book. For me, it is part of a powerful continuum in African-American literature: it uses African-American dialect in a powerful way, as did works by Walker's predecessor Zora Neale Hurston, and it appropriates a mainstream, traditionally Anglo-Saxon form—in this case the epistolary novel—and uses it in new ways—in this case, to depict an extraordinary story of abuse and the power of love between sisters to survive and heal the wounds from that abuse.

But Walker has been a major force in other ways, too. Perhaps as important as her novels has been her role in re-introducing American readers and scholars to Zora Neale Hurston, bringing out her works when they had virtually disappeared from print and attention. She edited a collection of Hurston's work, I Love Myself When I am Laughing..., and she wrote a remarkable work on Hurston called "Looking for Zora."

Walker has also made her mark with her collections of essays, particularly the 1983 In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens and her most recent work against female clitorectomy in some African cultures.

Journal Questions on Alice Walker

1. "Everyday Use" is a story about an inheritance; but more specifically, it is a story about heritage. In what ways is the story critical of Dee/Wangeroo and her connections to her heritage?

2. Describe the I of the story; what do we learn, directly and indirectly, about the narrator of "Everyday Use"?

3. Explore the dedication of the story. What are the various ways that you can connect it to the story?

Notes: Denise Chavez, Playwright and Fiction Writer (1948 -)

Denise Chavez is one of a number of Latina writers who have drawn admiration and attention in recent years. The works of Chavez, along with Sandra Cisneros, Ana Castillo, Helena Maria Viramontes, Lorna Dee Cervantes, and Pat Lora, are now featured in many anthologies of American Literature; for most publishers' anthologies, they are the first Latino voices to be recognized and heard in the canon.

The title story of Chavez' 1986 The Last of the Menu Girls, a series of interconnected short stories, is excerpted in the Norton anthology. The story is both hilarious and poignant, a coming of age story of Rocio Esquibel, who says at one point "I never wanted to be a nurse, never" but who also wants to be a kind of Florence Nightingale, 'helping all of mankind, forgetting and absolving my own sick." Rocio is mortified when she becomes the menu girl at the local hospital: "It seemed right to me to be working in a hospital, to be helping people, and yet: why was I only a menu girl? Once a menu was completed, another would take its place and the next day another. It was a never ending round...." The story explores Rocio's confrontations with death, with sexuality, with her place in the world: "I want to be someone else, somewhere else, someone important and responsible and sexy. I want to be sexy." In these struggles, we see the universal struggles of adolescence in conjunction with the particular struggles of a Chicana, all given to us by Chavez in a funny, authentic, compelling first person voice.

Journal Questions on Denise Chavez

1. Explore the ways in which Chavez ties her narrative together. While her narrator's stream-of-consciousness may seem random, it is in fact tightly constructed, with one memory or word triggering another, often in subtle ways. You might start with the "In my dreams" paragraph on page 2350 in the Norton; explore the way Rocio moves from idea to idea in that paragraph and the next one. Then, find other places in the story where you can see the subtle connections between apparently different ideas or topics.

2. Explore Rocio's accounts of her dreams. What readings can you offer of them?

3. In what ways does Rocio seem to you to be a typical adolescent? What issues is she grappling with?

4. While Rocio is facing the struggles faced by most adolescents, some of the issues she faces are raised by her cultural ties. How do you see her life and problems as a Chicana played out in the story?

Notes: Leslie Marmon Silko, Poet and Writer of Fiction (1948-)

Leslie Marmon Silko emerged as a major voice in the Native American Renaissance with the publication of her 1977 novel, Ceremony. Since then, she has published other respected books, including her Storyteller in 1981, a book that includes prose, poems, and photographs. (In that way, she has, like M. Scott Momaday, not always written neatly categorized texts. This mixing of genres is interesting to me. It is a bold artistic choice that both allows the artist freedom of movement but that also means the text will probably not be part of the canon, which uses traditional genres as a way of thinking about texts. Quite simply, that which cannot be categorized may not be recognized. It's also an interesting marketplace choice, as publishers and bookstores, I'm sure, struggle to market those works they cannot easily fit into niches. The best example I can think of is Jean Toomer's Cane of the Harlem Renaissance. Every critical description of that period I've read hails it as the masterpiece of the period, but almost no anthologies include it.)

A writer of mixed blood with Plains Indian, Anglo, and Mexican ancestry, Silko writes of the Laguna area just outside of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Of particular interest is the act of storytelling. She says of Ceremony, "This novel is essentially about the powers inherent in the process of storytelling...The chanting or telling of ancient stories to effect uncertain cures or protect from illness and harm have always been a part of the pueblo's curing ceremonies." I would add the power of memory to her valuing of tradition; her story "Lullaby," printed from Storyteller in the Norton anthology, shows the healing power of memory and the land, as an old woman Ayah—whose searing, painful memories of loss have filled the story—ultimately finds comfort and offers comfort through singing a lullaby sung by her mother and grandmother as she sits below a night moon in the snow, where "there was nothing between her and the stars [and] she breathed the clarity of the night sky; she smelled the purity of the half moon and stars."

Questions on Leslie Marmon Silko

1. Leslie Marmon Silko has said that her first novel, Ceremony, was about the "search for a ceremony to deal with despair." In that book, the ceremony which offered comfort was the chanting or telling of ancient stories. We see that Ayah and her husband have tried a number of "ceremonies" or ways of dealing with the despairs of their life together. What ways have they tried? How and why have those ways failed? Examine closely the closing lines of the story; what ceremonies there offer a way for Ayah to deal with her despair? Can you extrapolate from that Silko's argument or theme in this story?

2. Memory is a source of terrible pain, and ultimately, of comfort to Ayah in this story. Explore the different ways that memory functions in the story.

3. Examine the various ways in which powerlessness is revealed in the story. In what instances has Ayah been powerless—against whom, and why? What's going on in the closing scene in the bar?

Notes: Louise Erdich, Novelist (1954-)

Louise Erdich has been much on my mind this Spring. All I have ever read of her has been connected to her life with Michael Dorris, her once-teacher, husband, friend, and whom she has called "her most serious and supportive critic," her truest collaborator. Although I had read her novels and liked them, I was particularly moved by her introduction and writing in Dorris' The Broken Chord, a book I read at the beginning of this sabbatical. In it, he describes his struggles to raise and understand a child he had adopted who had, it turned out, fetal alcohol syndrome. The book is an extraordinary one, exploring the terrors and struggles of raising a child who has been terribly damaged before birth. The book looks head-on at the problem of alcohol in the Native American population, particularly on the reservations; it must be a hard choice for Native American writers to make, as they face, like other minorities, the question of audience, the dilemma of whether or not to reveal problems that will be used as weapons or confirmation of stereotypes by those in power. Neither Dorris, nor Leslie Marmon Silko, nor Louise Erdich shrink from that issue in their stories. And Erdich writes so bravely—not sentimentally, but with a kind of fundamental love—in her section of The Broken Chord, that I find myself depressed, sick at the news that Michael Dorris committed suicide this Spring. I don't know the details—I think they were separated, there is some talk of charges being brought against him for sexual misconduct with a minor—but I am heartsick for this family I've never met—for her as a writer and woman who has lost her friend and husband and closest writing companion, for him that his pain was so enormous that he could do no other thing—or that his anger was so great he could not get past it, and for the loss to their children, particularly Adam, the one with fetal alcohol syndrome. It seems weird or voyeuristic, maybe, as I write this, but I have admired their lives and their writing so much, because they write so well and with such understanding, that I can't bear to think of the kind of cataclysm they faced—and the fact that, in spite of all their heart and talent, they were unable to do what Leslie Marmon Silko describes: "to search for a ceremony to deal with despair...the suicide, the alcoholism, and the violence which occur in so many Indian communities today."

Erdich's Love Medicine won the National Book Award in 1984; The Beet Queen, a later novel, moves beyond the reservation to a small town near the reservation, populated by whites and a few Chippewas. The Norton describes her work this way: "Erdich writes without sentimentality, yet with a real feeling for place and people, for individual lives as they extend themselves over time and space."

Casebook: August Wilson, Playwright (1945-)

Notes

A review of a book of essays on August Wilson says it best: "August Wilson has become America's preeminent contemporary playwright." Part of his importance lies simply in the largeness of his vision, in his working toward a cycle of plays, each set in a different decade, that will provide a history of African-American experience in the 20th century. Beginning with his first successful play, Ma Rainey's Black Bottom (1984) to his more recent plays, The Piano Lesson (1987) and Two Trains Running (1990), Wilson has presented powerful stories marked by their incredible ear for dialogue and their sympathy for difficult and complex characters facing thorny problems. The use of music is another Wilson hallmark; like Langston Hughes, he is moved by the blues, seeing their significance both as a part of African-American history and as a way of owning of that history. The use of the work song in The Piano Lesson is a riveting moment, turning on its head the shuck-and-jive stereotype of minstrel shows from the past, showing the power and pain that the shared songs offered a closed-in and shut-out community. Another source of the power of his plays is simply the language, and while that is sometimes a source of criticism—his plays are "talky"—he rightly defends that choice, arguing that an oral culture is central to the African American community.

In short, Wilson writes plays about history, and the techniques he uses in those plays—the music, the talk, even the images—are firmly rooted in that history. And the plays not only tell stories that have not been told on stage—they re-tell the stories that have been told again and again. Thus stereotypes are confronted and reshaped: Boy Willie in The Piano Lesson, for instance, sells watermelons. When actor Charles Dutton heard this, he says he reacted strongly: "C'mon, August, you're not going to put a black man on stage selling watermelons, are you?" But indeed he does, and the act sheds its demeaning implications as Boy Willie emerges as a complicated man with a dream—a dream of buying the land on which his ancestors had been enslaved. Like other Wilson characters, Boy Willie faces substantial obstacles to his dream, and even the dream itself is not without its complications and flaws. But his struggles to achieve it, with family and community working both in support and in opposition to him, are compelling reading, compelling theater.

Summaries of Three Major Works by August Wilson

Fences: (1986) This play explores the conflicts in the life of Troy Maxson, father, friend, husband, lover, worker, ex-baseball player. These various roles often bring Troy into conflict, as he struggles with achieving some kind of balance—between his love for his wife and the solid life they have built together and the freeing laughter he finds in the arms of a lover; between his love and responsibility for his sons and his fear and anger about their chances for survival and success; between his aims for security and acclaim and the racial barriers that lie in his way. The play also examines, often in lyrical ways, the effects that Troy's struggles have on the lives of those he loves—his wife Rose, his friend Bono, and his sons, especially Cory. Like other Wilson plays, this one makes strong use of music and talk in the telling of its story. And like other Wilson plays, there is a kind of peace at the end, but it is bittersweet, and the questions raised are not all resolved.

The Piano Lesson: (1987) This play examines the question of "What do we do with the past?" In opposition are Boy Willie and his sister Berneice. Willie has come from the South to get the support of Berneice; he wants to sell the family piano so that he can have enough money to buy the land which their ancestors worked as slaves. Berneice, on the other hand, does not want to part with the piano: for her, it signifies the past, with its African carvings and its connection to their family; her father died trying to retrieve it for their mother. Yet the question is more complicated than a "sell-it-or-keep-it" dichotomy. While Willie seems to want to get rid of the past, it is he who has remained in the South, the land of their ancestors, and it is he who wants to claim the land once denied them. And while Berneice seems to represent a holding on to the past, it is she who has left the South, one of the many who migrated to the urban North; she is also haunted by the piano, and though she does not want to sell it, she refuses (and has refused for many years) to play it herself. Thus Wilson sets up a complicated situation as he explores the relationship of this brother and sister—and their community of family and friends—to the past.

Joe Turner's Come and Gone: This work, like other Wilson plays, features characters haunted by the past, desperate to understand it and reconcile themselves to it. The primary "seeker" here is Herald Loomis, a boarder at Seth Holly's Pittsburgh boardinghouse. Loomis had been abducted by Joe Turner (a real person in American history), who forced him to pick cotton for seven years; during that time, Loomis' wife Martha disappeared, and the play follows Loomis' search for her. Here the play brings in a familiarly Wilsonesque touch, as in one scene Loomis experiences a frenzied, powerful vision, which he recounts to another boarder, Bynum Walker, a conjure man. Even when Loomis' wife is located, he still does not find peace or resolution, and it is the conjure man, the "root doctor," who offers wisdom and healing: if Loomis can reclaim the song taken from him by Joe Turner, he will be healed. The play closes with Loomis rediscovering his song, "the song of self-sufficiency." Again, we see that the past for Wilson's characters offers both pain and comfort, turmoil and peace. We see, too, the primacy of art in the form of music as a healing agent. Like Hughes and Ellison before him, Wilson understands African-American music, wither spirituals or folk songs or blues, to be central forms of expression and redemption for those who sing them.

Journal Question on August Wilson

1. Explore one of these themes as it is played out in the work(s) you have read by August Wilson:

**the role of the past*

**the role of place in African-American identity, especially the urban North vs. the rural South*

**the place of music in the play*

**the presence of the supernatural or surreal in the play*

**the role of dreams in the play*

**the tensions between men and women in the play*

**the needs of the individual vs. those of the family*

**healthy (and unhealthy) mechanisms for survival in the face of oppression*

**the issue of money in the play*

friendships between characters

**the role of talk—what is said and unsaid, what is understood*

2. In Wilson's plays, he often creates complex protagonists in conflict with others. These characters are on the one hand compelling and sympathetic and on the other hand difficult and frustrating. Examine the protagonist in the play of your choice. What is your ultimate reaction to him? Why?

Selected Bibliography on August Wilson

(These articles are in the appendix.)

Bissiri, Amadou. "Aspects of Africanness in August Wilson's Drama: Reading The Piano Lesson through Wole Soyinka's Drama." African American Review. Vol. 30, No. 1. 99-113.

Loynd, Ray. "'Piano's' Passage: Playwright Wilson Adapts His 1990 Prize 'Lesson' for Its TV Premiere." TV Times. Feb. 5-11, 1993. 5-6.

Plum, Jay. "Blues, History, and the Dramaturgy of August Wilson." African American Review. Vol. 27, No. 4. 1993. 561-566.

Shannon, Sandra G. "Blues, History, and Dramaturgy: An Interview with August Wilson." African American Review. Vol. 27, No. 4. 1993. 539-543.

Casebook: Gary Soto, Poet, Essayist, Autobiographer

Notes

Gary Soto is one of the leading voices in Chicano literature. Mt. San Antonio College has a video of an interview with Soto held as part of the Lannan Foundation series. In it, he is funny, self-deprecating, acutely sympathetic to the exigencies brought on by poverty among the working class—and those traits show clearly in his work, which ranges from poetry to fiction to autobiography. One critic asserts this as Soto's ground-theme:

> The poor are unshuffled cards of leaves
> Reordered by wind, turned over on a wish
> To reveal their true suits.
> They never win.
> This means Theresa Fuentes,
> Palm reader and washerwoman,
> Stacking coins into vertebrae of silver
> Fingered dull by the cold....

This piece is reminiscent for me of Gwendolyn Brooks' "The Bean-Eaters," with its clear sense of the minutiae of the lives of the poor. In this poem and in one shared with me by colleague Cindy Prochaska, "The Box Fan," we see both the physical and emotional world of the poor, wrought for us in details like the coins in "vertebrae of silver" and "the whir of the fan" with its "blades the color of spoons and forks falling/ from a drawer."

Again and again, though, in this world of suggested dangers and overt disappointments, Soto interjects the elements of humor for relief. Thus there is the kind of perverse humor that describes chopping cotton as "Mexican golf" and which describes, in "Mexicans Begin Jogging," his flight, though a citizen, from *la migra.* The effect of this humor is not to diminish the pain of his protagonists but to underscore and glorify their resilience and courage.

Summary of Three Major Works by Gary Soto

Living Up the Street: This book, subtitled "Narrative Recollections," is perhaps one of Soto's best-known works. The pieces in this collection present the pleasures and fears of growing up in the barrio of Fresno, and they are replete with hauntingly familiar images of childhood and adolescence that are rendered new through Soto's humor and powerful metaphor. This passage from "Looking for Work" is typical: "One July, while killing ants on the kitchen sink with a rolled newspaper, I had a nine-year-old's vision of wealth that would save us from ourselves. For weeks I had drunk Kool-aid and watched morning re-runs of Father Knows Best, whose family was so uncomplicated in its routine that I very much wanted to imitate it. The first step was to get my brother and sister to wear shoes at dinner." Again and again, we watch the young protagonist as he tries to negotiate a world that is sometimes threatening, other times baffling. The chapters in this text are frequently anthologized, with "Looking for Work," "Black Hair," and "Baseball in April" being particularly compelling.

Local News: This collection of stories is similar in its affectionate yet occasionally chilling look at adolescence. The pains of the adolescent, who forever feels himself an outsider, are all the more acutely felt when there is the added challenge of being part of an "outsider" culture. The stories here are sometimes familiar—most readers, I suspect, will smile in sympathetic recognition at the terrors described in "The School Play"—and sometimes grounded in Chicano life, as in "El Radio," where we see the parents (like the boy in "Looking for Work") trying to negotiate between two worlds—in this case, their own working-class home and the world of the opera—which they try to attend but cannot when their car breaks down. This anthology is less clearly autobiographical than those in Living Up the Street (which is classified as fiction for reasons not altogether clear to me) but it rings true and sweet from the author who has been called "a perceptive and sensitive chronicler of everyday life."

Gary Soto

Pieces of the Heart: New Chicano Fiction: While Soto is known primarily as a writer of poetry and fiction, he also has done good work as an editor. His introduction presents to us concrete images, familiar yet compelling: "When I think of the stories that make up this collection, I think of young and beautifully single-minded writers sitting at a Formica-top table pressed to a kitchen wall." The collection is wonderful, bringing together familiar writers like Sandra Cisneros with names that are new to me, like Dagoberto Gilb and Victor Martinez. Even in this venue, then, Soto does what he does so well: to combine the familiar and the new, the comfortable and the challenging.

Bibliographic Information

Because Gary Soto may be the most unfamiliar author of the three I have focused on, I have included a more extensive collection of secondary sources for him in Appendix C. Taken from Volume 80 of Contemporary Literary Criticism, this 28-page collection of articles and excerpts provides a general overview of Soto's career through 1992, with reviews and commentaries on his poetry and his fiction collections. This collection also includes a brief annotated bibliography with suggestions for further study. To this collection I've added "Soto Voce," an article from the L.A. Times that describes an interview with Alejandro Morales at the Lannan Foundation; our Media Services has a video of this engaging reading and interview.

APPENDIX B:

NOTES ON WORLD MYTHOLOGY

Myths of the Middle East: The Enuma Elish

Culture: Babylonian

Time: As early as 1900 B.C.

Sources: Mentioned in the code of Hammurabi, 1700 B.C.; told in cuneiform on clay tablets from several cities, including Ninevah, which is in what is now Iraq.

Type of myth: Creation of the World and Establishment of Order

I notice that familiar themes appear throughout the **Enuma Elish**:
1) the notion of creation from chaos, form from formlessness;
2) When the world does begin to take shape, water is a primeval source of life. Just as Aphrodite emerged from water, Ashar and Kishar emerged from the waters of their parents, Tiamat (salt water) and Apsu (sweet water). (This is hardly surprising, given both the biological facts of birth and the importance of water in desert regions.)
3) There is tension between parents and children, especially fathers and sons: Apsu plans the destruction of his children, in this story aided by his son Mummu.
4) Female forces embody both disorder and evil. Tiamat, as the embodiment and goddess of the sea, represents primeval chaos; later, she is associated with monstrous destructive powers, creating eleven terrible monsters with which to destroy her children.
5) There is a multi-generational shift in power that ultimately consolidates power in one male god, in this case, Marduk.
6) Just as in the stories of the clash of the Titans, we see an interest in warfare. The stories provide a detailed account of the battle between Marduk and Tiamat, with graphic descriptions of her physical destruction.
7) As in Greek stories, the notion of Mother Earth is clearly a part of this story, but it comes at enormous pain to the female figure—I read it both as a hyperbolic representation of birth pangs and, perhaps more predictably, as a destruction of female power, as she is literally divided and conquered: "Once Marduk had subdued all his enemies, he returned to Tiamat, stamped on her legs, and crushed her skull with his mace. When he had severed her arteries, the north wind bore her blood to secret places. Marduk then divided Tiamat's body into two parts like a shellfish. Half of Tiamat he set up as the sky; the other half he formed into the earth. From Tiamat's saliva, he created the clouds and filled them with water....He put Tiamat's head into position to form the mountains of the earth, and he caused the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers to flow from her eyes."
8) The stories clearly function in part as charter myths, as they explain why temples (and thus religious power) were located in Babylon; they further establish the importance of that religion in the lives of the people in specifying that mankind was created in order to serve the gods through ritual.

Journal Questions on the Enuma Elish
1. What similarities in themes and patterns do you see between the Enuma Elish and the Greek stories we've read?
2. What societal values are implicit in the Enuma Elish?
3. Which of the theories of myth that we've discussed seem to apply to the Enuma Elish?

Myths of the Middle East: Osiris, Isis, and Horus

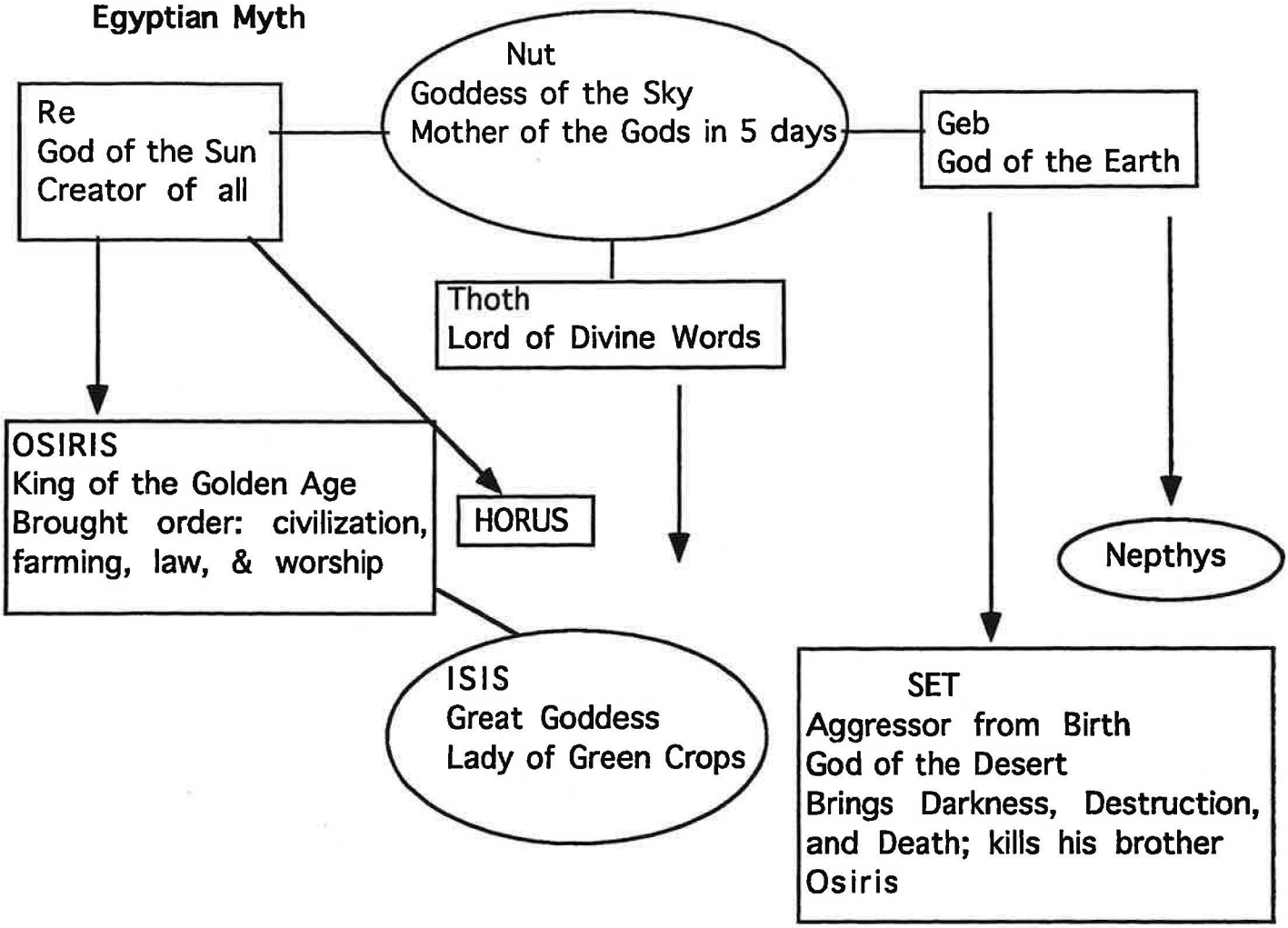
Culture: Egyptian

Time: Between 3500 and 2500 B.C.

Source: Many fragmentary references, including religious texts, pictorial representations, pyramid texts, and the Book of the Dead

Type of myth: Creation Myth and Establishment of Order.

Egyptian Myth



Again, there are familiar themes in this story of **Osiris, Isis, and Horus**:
1) The struggle for power, couched in terms of good vs. evil, appears again, this time in Set's plot to overthrow his brother.
2) Isis' wanderings as a bereft goddess very clearly parallel in nature and details those of another fertility goddess, Demeter. We see her very public mourning, her far-ranging wandering, her meeting with women at the fountain, her role as nurse to the queen's sons.
3) the resurrection of the lost/dead, mirroring the vegetative cycle: Although Osiris' resurrection is at first only temporary, it does engender Horus, a son and a legacy. Eventually, in the familiar descent-of-hero motif, this son Horus does lead Isis and Nepthys to the world of the dead, where they bring Osiris back to life.
4) the hero child in exile motif: The hiding of Horus on an island in papyrus swamps clearly parallels the story of Moses, and echoes all hero stories in which the child is sent into exile to avoid destruction by an angry adult figure.

Notes

As is so often the case, the geography of the region has clear impact on the myths of its people. Egypt, divided into Upper and Lower Egypt, with a name that meant "The Two Lands," had strongly dualist thought patterns, with Horus and Seth each coming to be associated with one part of the country: Horus presided over Lower Egypt, Seth over Upper Egypt.

The notion of judgment/justice looms large in the end of this story, when a) the gods discuss and weigh testimony of Set against Horus; b) Osiris becomes judge of the dead in the Hall of Judgment; c) Horus comes to be the intermediary between the living and dead.
Implicit here is a belief in justice, language, judgment, and life after death.

Journal Questions on Isis, Osiris, and Horus

1. Which aspects of this myth are similar to other stories about creation and the ordering of the universe?
2. In what ways do you see Horus as fitting into the heroic cycle as described by Joseph Campbell?
3. What values are implicit in this myth?
4. What is the function of Set—and his survival—in the myth?

Myths of the Middle East: Gilgamesh

Culture: Sumerian, Babylonian

Time: first written from oral tradition in 2100 B.C.

Source: Five extant Sumerian texts, woven into one story by the Babylonians. There are variations between 1600 and 1000 B.C. by Hittites, Hurrian translations, and Akkadians (Babylonians).

Type: Heroic epic and Flood Story

Gilgamesh

Lugalbanda
King
Heroic father of Gilgamesh

Ninsun
Priestess of Shamash
Goddess mother of
Gilgamesh

GILGAMESH
King and Hero
Slayer of Humbaba and the
Bull of Heaven;
Searches for immortality.

ENKIDU
Friend and helper
of Gilgamesh;
dies for killing the
Bull of Heaven

Humbaba
Giant monster,
Guardian of the
cedar forest of
Lebanon

ISHTAR
Goddess of love
and war who is
spurned by Gilgamesh;
sends Bull of Heaven in
retribution.

UTANAPISHTIM
King of Shurrippak, he
survived the great flood
and was made immortal.

This wonderful story of **Gilgamesh** has many of the themes and motifs as described by Otto Rank and Joseph Campbell, among others, as being part of the heroic life cycle. Among the familiar traits are these:

1) The hero is of partially divine heritage: Gilgamesh is son of noble Lugalbanda and the goddess Ninsun.

2) Gilgamesh has a series of difficult tasks, beginning with his initial fight with Enkidu, followed by his travel to the Cedar Forest and slaying of the evil giant Humbaba, his destruction of the Bull of Heaven which threatens his kingdom, and his journey and descent to visit Utanapishtim, where he obtains the boon of youthfulness, which he loses.

3) One of his obstacles is Ishtar, a female force who threatens his autonomy.

4) In his completion of difficult tasks, Gilgamesh is aided by his helper, Enkidu.

5) While Gilgamesh is not literally granted immortality, the ultimate reward for heroic life, he does achieve another kind of immortality in his accomplishments, which are reiterated at the close of the myth that bears his name.

The myth of **Gilgamesh** has other interesting and familiar mythic themes:

1) He begins as an image of chaos and disorder; at his life's end, his life is epitomized by the strength and order he has brought to his city.

2) The female forces in the story signify a threat, a de-masculating energy. This can be presented positively—the woman (one version calls her a prostitute) who civilizes Enkidu at the beginning of the story, or negatively—Ishtar, who threatens Gilgamesh's autonomy and who brings chaos and destruction in the form of the Bull of Heaven when she is refused by Gilgamesh. (Familiar "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned" image.)

3) The myth functions in a number of places as a charter myth, offering detailed descriptions of offerings, rituals, and prayers. It also is a nature myth, serving etiological functions, as it explains why the earth suffered a terrible flood and why the snake sheds its skin.

4) We see a number of the beliefs and values of the culture played out in the story. We see, for instance, that their gods are subject to whim, but they are not the implacable god of the Old Testament: they regret and mourn deeply the destruction in which they have participated in destroying mankind by flood. This scene is only one of the many in which the value of justice appears. The value of male friendship and bonding is clear, while females serve as a threat—though women without power are not so threatening and in fact are helpful, as with the prostitute who civilized Enkidu and the fishwife Siduri who advises Gilgamesh in his search for immortality.

5) The division between animals and humans is clear, as is pointed out by Enkidu's transformation from a hairy animal early in the story and in Gilgamesh's shedding of animal skins once he has achieved wisdom.

Journal Questions on Gilgamesh

(Questions 4-6 come from Rosenberg's text World Mythology.)

1. In what ways does Gilgamesh fit the heroic life cycle as described by Joseph Campbell? Do you see any important deviations from the pattern in his story?

2. What cultural values are implicit in the story?

3. Compare and contrast the flood story told by Utanapishtim to that of the Greeks or the Old Testament story of Noah. Important similarities? Differences?

4. How are Gilgamesh and Enkidu alike? How are they different?

5. Does Gilgamesh's journey in search of immortality make him appear cowardly because he fears death, or strong because he attempts to change his fate? Explain.

6. What character traits best describe Gilgamesh? Give examples to support your view.

7. What images of women do we get from the story? What inferences can you make about the Sumerian/Babylonian views toward women?