

WHAT'S INSIDE?

CONTEXT

READINGS

TAILORED TO

11TH GRADE
READING
LEVELS

What is Romanticism?

➤ Goal: Find out what Romanticism is.

➤ Directions:

- Take out a piece of lined paper and title it "Romanticism."
- Read the article and highlight key ideas.
- When you are finished, write 10 bullet notes with the main elements of Romanticism on your lined paper.
- Share your list with a partner or a small group; add to and modify your list to improve the list.

Romanticism: A Revolutionary Movement

From 1789 to the 1860s, a powerful literary and artistic movement called Romanticism swept across Western culture. Born in the wake of the French Revolution, Romanticism's influence spread throughout Europe and across the Atlantic to America. It touched every form of artistic expression, including literature, art, music, and architecture, and its impact lasted well into the early 20th century. For Americans, Romanticism marked a significant shift. Before this movement, American writing primarily consisted of religious texts and non-fiction accounts of exploration and life in the New World. Romanticism changed that, ushering in a new era of creative expression.

Rejecting Reason: The Romantic Reaction

To understand Romanticism, we need to look at what came before it. The previous

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Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: The Poet of American Identity



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) holds a revered position in American literature, often celebrated as one of the best-loved poets of his time. As one of the first American writers to embrace American themes, Longfellow crafted works that captured the essence of the American experience through captivating descriptive landscapes. He was known for crafting family-friendly, relatable topics.

From an early age, Longfellow was destined for the literary world from an illustrious family. His father hoped he would become a lawyer. Longfellow's greatest ambition for literary fame during his college years at Bowdoin College. At the age of 18, he traveled extensively throughout Europe, pursuing scholarly and linguistic pursuits. His time abroad not only enriched his knowledge but also laid the groundwork for his later themes of love,

and the United States. Longfellow began a dual life as both a professor and a poet. His appointment at Harvard College in 1835 marked a turning point in his career, but his personal life was fraught with tragedy. The untimely death of his wife, Fanny, in 1835 had a profound influence of German Romanticism on his work, infusing it with deep emotionality and nationalist themes.

In his poem "The Cross of Snow," Longfellow reflects on loss and enduring sorrow, as he writes, "I will cross it over upon my breast; / These eighteen years." This metaphorical cross symbolizes the burden of grief, emphasizing the enduring impact of loss. Longfellow's use of nature to convey complex emotions makes his explorations of the human condition memorable and impactful. The "cross of snow" in this poem evokes a chilling, haunting atmosphere, blending personal suffering with natural imagery to evoke the timelessness of grief.

This shift marked the birth of the modern view of art, nature, and the human experience.

The Romantic View of Human Nature

Romantics held an optimistic view of human nature, seeing it as essentially good, or "good by nature." They believed that civilization's rules could corrupt the innate goodness of the individual.

1. **Civilization as a corrupting force:** Romantics believed that the rules and constraints of society could corrupt the innate goodness of the individual.
2. **Celebration of childhood:** Childhood was seen as a time of innocence and purity, where the individual's true nature is most evident.
3. **Emphasis on emotions:** Romantics emphasized the power of human experience and emotions over logic and reason. They believed that emotions were a more reliable source of truth than logic.
4. **Distrust of logic:** Logical thinking was often viewed as less reliable than emotions. Romantics believed that emotions were a more direct path to truth.



The Romantic Approach to Art

The Romantic emphasis on emotions and individual expression had a profound impact on how artists approached their work. They emphasized spontaneity, following their feelings and intuition rather than strict rules.

1. **Spontaneity:** Artists were encouraged to create spontaneously, following their feelings and intuition rather than strict rules or formulas.
2. **Imagination:** Romantics valued the power of the imagination to uncover hidden truths and create new worlds. They believed that imagination was a more reliable source of truth than logic.



Notes for the Teacher

"June" by James Russell Lowell is a celebration of the beauty and vibrancy of nature in summer, particularly in the month of June. The poem captures the essence of this time of year through vivid imagery and reflects on the interconnectedness of all living things during this season.

Themes and Messages:

1. The Perfection of June:

- The poem begins with the rhetorical question, "What is so rare as a day in June?" suggesting that the month of June represents a rare and perfect time when nature reaches its peak. This sets the stage for an exploration of how June embodies the ideal qualities of summer.

2. Harmony and Interconnectedness:

- Lowell describes how "Heaven tries the earth if it be in tune" and how every aspect of nature, from the clouds of earth to the smallest flowers, is in perfect harmony, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all living things and the natural world.

3. Life and Vitality:

- The poem illustrates how all elements of nature are infused with life and vitality. The description of clouds of earth feeling a "stir of might" and flowers "climbing to a soul" highlights the idea that even the simplest elements of nature are alive with energy and purpose during this season.

4. Joy and Celebration in Nature:

- There is a strong sense of joy and celebration throughout the poem. The "rush of life" that is "thrilling back over hills and valleys" and the imagery of flowers and birds being integral to this scene underscore the joyous aspect of summer. The poem portrays

5. The Beauty of Simplicity:

- Lowell finds significance in the happy creature that has its own

6. Nature's Song:

- The poem expresses the male to her next, express the

Reading Questions

- What's this poem about?
Eighteen years after her death, the still misses his dead wife + still mourns
- What does the "hale of light" around the painting of the loved one suggest?
She's an angel + in heaven!
- What do we learn about the loved one from the second stanza?
she died in their home + he idolizes her. she was perfect and pure and gentle.
- Explain the "crane of snow" the speaker wears upon his breast as a metaphor. What is the crane of snow?
- his eternal grief - or perhaps his unchanging love for her + frozen
- How would you describe the rhymes in this poem?
simple, pleasing 1-syllable rhymes
ABBA ABBA ABC ABC

The Tide Rises, the Tide Falls

The tide rises, the tide falls,
Tinted darkness, the curlew calls;
The sands damp and brown
Conform toward the town,
The tide falls, the tide falls,
(5)

*a little bird who hangs out on the seashore

READ FAMOUS POEMS FROM THE AMERICAN ROMANTIC MOVEMENT, ANSWER LITERARY ANALYSIS QUESTIONS, STUDY LITERARY TERMS, & EXPLORE RELEVANT THEMES & ISSUES!

the imagination, and our relationship to the past. The period remain relevant and influential.

What Do You Think?

> **Directions:** On lined paper, write a paragraph or two for each question. Express your thoughts and explain why you agree or disagree.

- Some people believe man is essentially good when he is born, but then corrupted by society. Do you agree?

"People in their natural state are basically good. But this natural innocence, however, is corrupted by the evils of society"

-Jean-Jacques Rousseau

- In different times, places, and cultures, the balance between individualism and conformity is skewed toward one or the other. Would it be good to value individualism above conformity?



← Caspar David Friedrich's iconic painting "Wanderer above the Sea of Fog"

- Some thinkers have argued that we are more likely to find truth and understand ourselves and the world through science, logic, and reasoning (like during the Age of Reason). Other thinkers argue that we should instead place the most emphasis on our emotions, imaginations, and intuition (like during the Romantic era). If you had to choose a side, which would you pick and why?

- Do you think Henry David Thoreau was on the right track when he said, "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music that he hears, however measured or far away?" Why or why not? Is it better to "be yourself," or should we try to conform and "belong" to a group?

Reading Questions

1. What's this poem about?

Eighteen years after her death, the speaker still misses his dead wife + still mourns her.

2. What does the "halo of light" around the painting of the loved one suggest?

She's an angel + in heaven!

3. What do we learn about the loved one from the second stanza?

she died in this house + he idolizes

Reading Questions

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2. What is the traveler do

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