



# Year 12 English Literature A level

## Topic: Literary Periods and Movements

### Literary Periods and Movements

<b>The Medieval Period</b>	500-1500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• plays that instruct the illiterate masses in morals and religion</li><li>• chivalric code of honour/romances</li><li>• religious devotion</li></ul>
<b>The Renaissance</b>	1500-1670	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Renaissance artists used classical myths and history as the foundations for their own, novel explorations of the major happenings of their era</li><li>• world view shifts from religion and after life to one stressing human life on earth (humanism)</li><li>• an era of discovery and change – old beliefs challenged by new discoveries</li><li>• popular theme: development of human potential</li><li>• popular theme: many aspects of love explored (unrequited love, constant love, timeless love, courtly love, love subject to change)</li></ul>
<b>The Age of Enlightenment</b>	1700-1800	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• emphasis on reason, order, logic and rationalism</li><li>• stresses harmony, stability, wisdom</li><li>• Locke: a social contract exists between the government and the people. The government governs guaranteeing “natural rights” of life, liberty, and property</li></ul>
<b>The Romantic Period</b>	1798-1870	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• human knowledge consists of impressions and ideas formed in the individual’s mind</li><li>• introduction of Gothic elements and terror/horror stories and novels</li><li>• in nature one can find comfort and peace that the man-made urbanized towns and factory environments cannot offer</li><li>• rebellion against literary and social conventions</li><li>• experimentation with poetic style</li><li>• the importance of emotions and the sublime</li></ul>
<b>Realism</b>	1820-1920	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tries to create a world that seems real or true (verisimilitude)</li><li>• Attention to detail</li><li>• A focus on the quotidian (the daily life of ordinary people) using simple transparent language</li><li>• A focus on character (about understanding life, society and the world starting with the psychological reality of individuals)</li><li>• Social Realism comments on social and political conditions in a uniquely straightforward and hard-hitting way</li><li>• A focus on social networks (class) and the individual's place within these social networks</li><li>• Many realist novels were serialised in journals for mass readership</li></ul>
<b>The Transcendental Period (principally an American movement)</b>	1830-1860	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Essays and poetry at the heart of transcendentalism</li><li>• Transcendentalism developed as a reaction against Unitarian Church orthodoxy (a liberal branch of Christianity that emphasizes reason and the importance of rational thought and intellect in distinguishing between right and wrong, good and evil)</li><li>• belief that there's a whole realm of experience that is <i>beyond</i> logical or rational deduction (accessible only by trusting our intuition)</li><li>• Everything is connected; what’s in us mirrors what’s outside us and vice versa</li><li>• Individualism is necessary to true understanding of one’s self; conformity leads to unhappiness</li><li>• In nature one can be free and gain access to God</li><li>• Transcendentalists committed to social reform (e.g. abolition of slavery, improved women’s rights)</li></ul>



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<b>The Victorian Period</b>	1837-1901	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Victorian novels are often long and wordy; however, they were originally serialised in journals and magazines</li><li>• Push for reform: highlighted conflict between those in power and the common masses of labourers and the poor/ highlighted shocking life of workhouses and urban poor</li><li>• A paradoxical period: desire for change/progress and nostalgia for the past</li><li>• Utilitarianism (the doctrine that actions are right if they are useful or for the benefit of a majority) is hotly debated in Victorian fiction – some writers wanted to show the other side: what happens to the "few" who get sacrificed for the happiness of the many?</li><li>• The Gothic genre was very popular in this period</li><li>• Key themes: industrialisation, poverty, class, science vs religion, attitudes to women, repression</li><li>• Key features: strained coincidences, romantic triangles, heroines in physical danger, aristocratic villains, misdirected letters, bigamous marriages, sexual discretion (or lack of it)</li></ul>
<b>Existentialism</b>	1850- Today	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "the existential attitude" = a sense of disorientation, confusion, or dread in the face of an apparently meaningless or absurd world</li><li>• Individual freedom and choice</li><li>• each individual—not society or religion—is solely responsible for giving meaning to life and living it passionately and sincerely, or "authentically"</li></ul>
<b>Naturalism</b>	1870-1920	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Naturalism is an offshoot of Realism and places an emphasis on portraying society and personality as they really are</li><li>• Naturalists greatly influenced by Darwinism</li><li>• Determinism: characters are often controlled by powers beyond their control (e.g. their social environment, characteristic inherited from their parents)</li><li>• Narrative detachment</li><li>• Important themes: poverty and its consequences, survival</li><li>• Unhappy, pessimistic endings</li></ul>
<b>The Bloomsbury Group</b>	1903-1964	<p>The <b>Bloomsbury Group</b>—or <b>Bloomsbury Set</b>—was a group of associated English writers, intellectuals, philosophers and artists in the first half of the 20th century, including Virginia Woolf, John Maynard Keynes, E. M. Forster and Lytton Strachey. This loose collective of friends and relatives was closely associated with the University of Cambridge for the men and King's College London for the women, and they lived, worked or studied together near Bloomsbury, London. According to Ian Ousby, "although its members denied being a group in any formal sense, they were united by an abiding belief in the importance of the arts." Their works and outlook deeply influenced literature, aesthetics, criticism, and economics as well as modern attitudes towards feminism, pacifism, and sexuality.</p>



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<b>Modernism</b>	1910-1965	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Breakdown of social norms</li><li>• Realistic embodiment of social meanings</li><li>• Separation of meanings and senses from the context</li><li>• Despairing individual behaviours in the face of an unmanageable future</li><li>• Spiritual loneliness</li><li>• Alienation</li><li>• Frustration when reading the text</li><li>• Disillusionment</li><li>• Rejection of history and outdated social systems</li><li>• Objection to traditional thoughts and traditional moralities</li><li>• Objection to religious thoughts</li><li>• Substitution of a mythical past</li><li>• Two World Wars' effects on humanity</li></ul>
<b>Post-modernism</b>	Began 1945/1965- Today	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- a reaction to modernism</li><li>- rejects Western values and beliefs as only a small part of the human experience</li><li>- suspicious of being "profound" because such ideas are based on one particular Western value systems</li><li>- prefers to dwell on the exterior image and avoids drawing conclusions or suggesting underlying meanings associated with the interior of objects and events</li><li>- sees human experience as unstable, internally contradictory, ambiguous, inconclusive, indeterminate, unfinished, fragmented, discontinuous, "jagged," with no one specific reality possible</li><li>- the Postmodern writer creates an "open" work in which the reader must supply his own connections, work out alternative meanings, and provide his own (unguided) interpretation</li></ul>

Please remember:

- Literary period= literature of a specific period of time (e.g. Jacobean, Elizabethan, Victorian)
- Literary movement= literature with a shared style, influences, themes, concerns, aims (can span different periods of time)
- These are only some of the main literary periods/movements/groups
- All dates are approximate and may be disputed by different critics/sources
- This knowledge organiser provides a only general introduction to some of the key features/characteristics of these literary periods/movements
- Different movements influence one another and therefore can share ideas/influences
- Sometimes different movements overlap or run alongside one another, perhaps because one is a reaction to the other