Literary Eras and Important Works

1607 - 1775: Colonial Period
William Bradford
John Winthrop
Cotton Mather
Benjamin Franklin
Anne Bradstreet

1765 - 1790: Revolutionary Age
Thomas Jefferson
Alexander Hamilton
James Madison
Thomas Paine

1775 - 1865: Early National Period
James Fenimore Cooper
Edgar Allan Poe
William Cullen Bryant
Frederick Douglass
Harriet Jacobs
(slave narratives)

1828 - 1865: Romantic Period in America (American Renaissance or Age of Transcendentalism)
Ralph Waldo Emerson
Henry David Thoreau
Edgar Allan Poe
Herman Melville
Washington Irving
Nathaniel Hawthorne
Harriet Beecher Stowe
John Greenleaf Whittier
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
Walt Whitman

1865 - 1914: Realistic Period - Naturalistic Period
Mark Twain
William Dean Howells
Henry James

Ezra Pound
Emily Dickinson
Jack London

1914 - 1939: Modern Period - Jazz Age - Harlem Renaissance
Edgar Lee Masters
Ezra Pound
Robert Frost
Carl Sandburg
T.S. Eliot
Edna St. Vincent Millay
E.E. Cummings
Edith Wharton
Sinclair Lewis
Gertrude Stein
F. Scott Fitzgerald (jazz age)
William Faulkner
Ernest Hemingway
John Steinbeck
Eugene O'Neill

Harlem Renaissance:
Langston Hughes
Countee Cullen
Jean Toomer
W.E.B. DuBois
James Baldwin

1939 - : Contemporary Period

Eudora Welty

Saul Bellow
Norman Mailer
John Updike
Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.
Allen Ginsberg (Beat Generation)
Sylvia Plath
Arthur Miller
Tennessee Williams
Edward Albee

African American writers:
Ralph Ellison
Zora Neal Hurston
Alice Walker
James Baldwin
Richard Wright
Toni Morrison

Influential Writing

(1) Common Sense (1776) by Thomas Paine.

In straightforward but powerful language, this pamphlet called for American independence from Great Britain. With half a million copies in circulation, it helped sway many undecided Colonists to join the Patriot cause.

(2) The Federalist (1787) by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay.

These 85 essays played a crucial role in influencing state officials, especially in Virginia, to abandon the ineffective Articles of Confederation and adopt the U.S. Constitution, a system of government that has survived for more than two centuries.

(3) Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Considered by many scholars as the most influential book in American history, this compelling story about a slave family stirred the Northern public to sympathize with the enslaved. An overnight best-seller, the novel was translated into 20 languages, but was banned from distribution in the South. Stowe's work is often cited as a factor in dividing the nation and eventually leading to the Civil War.

(4) The Influence of Sea Power on History (1890) by Alfred Thayer Mahan.
This little-known book by the president of the Naval War College influenced the worldwide buildup of naval forces prior to World War I. Mahan argued that mighty nations have mighty navies and far-flung strategic outposts.

(5) Frederick Jackson Turner's essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 1893
A reflection of the 1890s, as a statement of American expansionism, as an idea in American thought, as an historical philosophy, and as the site of debate over the meaning of the "frontier" in American culture.

(5) The Jungle (1906) by Upton Sinclair.

The novel describes in lurid detail the lives of immigrants working in filthy conditions in the Chicago stockyards and meat packing factories. It helped lead to congressional investigations and the passage of the Meat Inspection Act, the first significant consumer protection legislation.

(6) Invisible Man (1953) by Ralph Ellison.

Ellison's story of an educated black man describes the contrast between Northern and Southern racism. This groundbreaking novel won the National Book Award and is often regarded as the first widely circulated book to tackle head-on the issue of race relations in post World War II America.

(7) Silent Spring (1962) by Rachel Carson.

Carson’s bestseller described in elegant prose the devastating effects of chemicals on the natural world. The book led to unprecedented public awareness of the environment and man's impact on it. Carson has been called the Mother of the Environmental Movement.

(8) The Feminine Mystique (1963) by Betty Friedan.

Reading this book was an epiphany for many women who felt trapped as housewives. Friedan argued that women are as capable as men to do any kind of work or pursue any career. The book was a bestseller among women and helped inspire a generation of women to change the status quo.