Chapter 1.
The Period of Colonization and Revolution (the early 17th century to the end of the 18th century)

1. Social background: The first permanent English settlement in North America was established at Jamestown, Virginia in 1617; The War for Independence lasted for eight years (1776-1783)

2. Literature: American Puritanism is one of the most enduring shaping influences in American thought and literature; The representatives of the Enlightenment set themselves the task of disseminating knowledge among the people and advocating revolutionary ideas. They also actively participated in the War for Independence.

*the Puritans emphasize hard work, piety and sobriety; The earliest writings include diaries, traveling books, journals, letters, sermons even government contracts.

*the earliest writer---Benjamin Franklin and “Poor Richard’s Almanac” and “Autobiography” which is the recording of his rising from a state of poverty and obscurity to wealth and fame. Mottos in “Poor Richard’s Almanac”

Lost time is never found again.

A penny saved is a penny earned.

Fish and visitors stink in three days.

Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.

*other important figures---Thomas Paine and “Common Sense,” “American Crisis;”

Thomas Jefferson and “The Declaration of Independence;” Philip Freneau and his poems

Chapter II.
The Period of Romanticism (the first half of the 19th century)

1. Social background: Industrial Revolution; western expansion; immigrant’s contribution; political ideal of equality and democracy; the influence of European Romanticists
2. Literature: American Romanticism; New England Transcendentalism

*American Romanticism---the real beginning of American literature; the first American Renaissance; emphasis upon the imaginative and emotional qualities of literature, a liking for the picturesque, the exotic, the sensuous, the sensational and the supernatural; the strong tendency to exalt the individual and the common man

*New England Transcendentalism---the Romanticism on the Puritan soil; emphasis on spirit, or the Oversoul; “a transparent eyeball;” the stress of the importance of the individual as the most important element of society; a fresh perception of nature as symbolic of the spirit or God; inspiration of a whole new generation of famous authors such as Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman and Dickinson.

*Washington Irving---father of American short stories; the first who won international fame; representative works The Sketch Book and two important humorous short stories “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”

*James Fenimore Cooper---father of American fiction; Leatherstocking Tales, a series of five novels about the frontier life of American settlers

*Edgar Allan Poe---father of American detective stories; “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”; a great writer of fiction, a poet of the first rank, and a critic of acumen and insight; important short stories “The Fall of the House of Usher,” “Ligeia”

*Hawthorne---his black vision of life and human being; evil as the trade mark of human being; his novels: The Scarlet Letter, The House of the Seven Gables; short story like “Young Goodman Brown”

*Melville---best known as the author of one book, Moby-Dick, an encyclopedia of everything, history, philosophy, religion, etc.; a Shakespearean tragedy of man fighting against overwhelming odds in an indifferent and even hostile universe

*Walt Whitman---a pioneer poet; free verse; Leaves of Grass, “Song of Myself” “When Lilacs last in the Dooryard Bloom’d”

*free verse---poetry basing on the irregular rhythmic cadence, no conventional use of meter, rhyme may or may not be present.

*Emily Dickinson---very unique poet; the largest portion of her poetry concerns death and immortality “I heard a fly buzz---when I died,” “My life closed twice before its Close”; no titles, always quoted by their first lines; dashes are used as a musical device
to create cadence and capital letters as a means of emphasis; a single image; noted for laconic brevity, directness and plainness.

*Ralph Waldo Emerson---the chief spokesman of Transcendentalism; Nature regarded as the Bible of New England Transcendentalism; “The American Scholar” regarded as America’s Declaration of Intellectual Independence.

Henry David Thoreau---representative of Transcendentalism; Walden, a faithful record of his reflections when he was in solitary communication with nature.

**Chapter III.**
**The Period of Realism (the latter half of the 19th century)**

1. **Social background:** the impact of American Civil War; increasing industrialization; the widening contrast of wealth and poverty; popular feeling of frustration and disillusionment

2. **Literature: American Realism; Local Colorism**

*Realism---a reaction against Romanticism or a move away from the bias towards romance and self-creating fictions; a great interest in the realities of life, everyday existence, what was brutal or sordid and class struggle; three dominant figures, William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, and Henry James.

Local Colorism---the beginning of Realism; the presentation and interpretation of the local character, the truthful color of local life.

*Mark Twain---the true father of American literature by H. L. Mencken; pen name of Samuel Langhorne Clemens; rough humor and social satire; magic power with language, the use of vernacular and colloquial speech; representative works: Adventure of Huckleberry Finn, Life on the Mississippi, The Adventure of Tom Sawyer

*Henry James---psychological approach to his subject matter; concerned more with the inner life of human beings than with overt human actions; the forerunner of the 20th century “stream-of-consciousness” novels and the founder of psychological realism; international theme or American innocence in face of European sophistication; representative works: The Portrait of a Lady, The Ambassador, The Wings of the Dove, The Golden Bowl; point of view

*Howells---focus on the rising middle class and the way they lived.

**Chapter IV.**
**American Naturalism (last decade of the 19th century)**
1. **Social background:** the impact of Darwin’s evolutionary theory on the American thought; the influence of the 19th century French literature

2. **Literature: American Naturalism**

*Naturalism*—The naturalists chose their subjects from the lower ranks of the society, portrayed misery and poverty of the underdogs who were demonstrably victims of society and nature. And one of the most familiar themes in American Naturalism is the theme of human bestiality, especially as an explanation of sexual desire.

*Stephen Crane*—Red Badge of Courage; Maggie, A Girl of the Street

Frank Norris—McTeague

Theodore Dreiser—Sister Carrie; An American Tragedy

Jack London—The Call of the Wild; Martin Eden

**Chapter V.**

**Modernism in America (the 20th century)**

1. **Social background:** booming industry and material prosperity in contrast with a sense of unease and restlessness underneath; a decline in moral standard described as a spiritual poverty; the impact of war—feelings of fear, loss, disorientation and disillusionment

2. **Literature:** Imagist Movement; modernism in poetry; the Lost Generation; depression period; the Beat Movement; American fiction after WWII; new fiction: Twentieth-century American Drama

*Imagist Movement*—Pound and Flint laid down three main principles: direct treatment of poetic subjects, elimination of merely ornamental or superfluous words, and rhythmical composition in the sequence of the musical phrase rather than in the sequence of a metronome. Pound and “In a Station of the Metro;” Sandburg and “the Fog;” William Carlos Williams and “The Red Wheelbarrow.”

*modernism in poetry*—the feeling of frustration and failure; the commercialization and debasement of art in Pound’s “Mauberley”; Pound’s attempt to impose, through art, order and meaning upon a chaotic and meaningless world in “Cantos;”

T. S. Eliot revealed the spiritual crisis of postwar Europe in his epochal epic The Waste Land, a trivial world of total emptiness and the split nature of modern man in “Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock;”
E. E. cummings disregarded grammar and punctuation, always used “i’ instead of “I” as a protest against self-importance;

Wallace Stevens focused his attention on man and things in his world;

Robert Frost can hardly be classified with the old or the new

*the Lost Generation—a period of spiritual crisis; the second American Renaissance; the expatriate movement; young people volunteered to “take part in the war to end wars”, only to find that modern warfare was not glorious or heroic; the feeling of gloom and despair and cut-off; the sense of doom, dislocation and fragmentation; the term named by Gertrude Stein; Hemingway as the most representative

*Ernest Hemingway--- awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1954 for his “powerful style-forming mastery of the art;”

Hemingway Code heroes---Man can be physically destroyed but never defeated spiritually; “grace under pressure;”

Hemingway iceberg analogy---The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only 1/8 of it being above water.

“Less is more”---his language or diction seemingly simple and natural, actually polished and tightly controlled, highly suggestive and connotative

The Sun Also Rises---the impact of war on a whole generation

A Farewell to Arms---man is doomed to be entrapped

For Whom the Bell Tolls---a volunteer American fighting in the Spanish Civil War

The Old Man and the Sea---a representation of life as a struggle against unconquerable natural forces

*Fitzgerald---mirror of the exciting age in almost every way; literary spokesman of the Jazz Age; The Great Gatsby; the Jazz Age of the 1920s characterized by frivolity and carelessness

*Faulkner---his creation of a mythical kingdom that mirrors not only the decline of the southern society but also the spiritual wasteland of the whole American society; the use of stream-of-consciousness to emphasize the reactions and inner musings of the narrator; the use of multiple points of view giving the story a circular form; the use of montage, to fragment the chronological time by juxtaposing the past with the present;
representative works: The Sound and the Fury; Light in August; Absalom, Absalom!; Go Down, Moses; “A Rose for Emily”

*Sherwood Anderson---exploring the motivations and frustrations in terms of Freud’s theory of psychology, especially in Winesburg, Ohio

*Sinclair Lewis---a sociological writer, Babbit as the presentation of a documentary picture of the narrow and limited middle-class mind

*the Depression period--- the Great Depression (1929-1933); novels of social protest; John Steinbeck, a representative of the 1930s, his The Grapes of Wrath, a symbolic journey of man on the way to find some truth about life and himself, and a record of the dispossessed and the wretched farmers during the Great Depression

*the Beat Movement---the impact of WWII, the cold war, the Korean war, the Vietnam war, the assassination of Kennedy and of Martin Luther King; the idea of life as a big joke or an absurdity; the more disintegrating and fragmentary world; more estranged and despondent people; Allen Ginsberg, the “Howl”, the manifesto of the Beat Movement.

*American fiction after WWII---writings about traumatic war experience, The Naked and the Dead by Norman Mailer, Wind and War by Herman Wouk; writings about Southern life following Faulkner’s footsteps, “A Good Man is Hard to Find” by Flannery O’Conner; writings about Jewish experience (Saul Bellow, Issac Singer); writings about black people (Ralph Ellison); writings about the alienated youth, The Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger; writings about middle-class life (Updike)

*New Fiction---American fiction in the 1960s and 1970s proves to be different; writers like Kurt Vonnegut (Slaughterhouse Five), Joseph Heller (Catch-22), John Bath, etc. shared almost the same belief that human beings are trapped in a meaningless world and that neither God nor man can make sense of the human condition.

Twentieth-century American Drama has gained itself an indispensable position in the world literature and also established its international reputation for its achievements in the realistic theatre, expressionist theatre, metatheatre and feminist theater that are rooted in American social reality. It produces a band of important playwrights, two Nobel-Prize laureates among them.

American realistic theatre features a genre of modern tragedy in the strand that starts with Eugene O’Neill, continues with Tennessee Williams and consummates with Arthur Miller, whose The Death of a Salesman depicts the social reality of ordinary American people. The legacy is preserved in the later generations of American playwright like Marsha Norman.

Expressionist theatre gained a firm foothold in U.S. since Eugene O’Neill thematically uses expressionistic devices in his Hairy Ape and other plays. Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller
also use their expressionist dramaturgy effectively in Glass Menagerie and The Death of a Salesman, respectively.

Metatheatrical arts are intensively and effectively invented by American playwright Thornton Wilder in his Our Town, an American classic that still holds the stage for nearly eighty years. American feminist theater remains active in United States since 1970s. Marsh Norman’s ‘Night Mother is regarded as one of the most important plays written by women playwrights who not only rival men playwrights with equally brilliant dramatic art but also improve American theater with a special insights of women playwrights.