

1. Introduction



If you had been there on that rainy night in Maryland during the War of 1812, you might have mistaken the bombardment for thunder. But Maryland lawyer Francis Scott Key knew better. He huddled in a boat in Baltimore harbor and watched as British warships fired on Fort McHenry.

Fort McHenry had a flag so big “that the British would have no trouble seeing it from a distance,” boasted the fort’s commander. It was 30 feet high and 42 feet long. You can see a photograph of that very flag on the opposite page. Key knew that if the flag came down, it meant that both the fort and Baltimore had been defeated. But when the sun rose, the flag was still there and the British were

retreating.

Key celebrated by writing a poem, “The Defence of Fort McHenry.” Six days later, it was published in a newspaper. Before long, it had been reprinted across the country. It was set to music in 1814 and sung as “The Star-Spangled Banner.” In 1931, it was **proclaimed [proclaimed: to announce publically]** the national anthem.



Moments like these during the War of 1812 helped give Americans a feeling of national identity. But what did being American mean? How was it different from being European? Alexis de Tocqueville, a French nobleman who toured the United States in 1831 and 1832, had one answer. “I do not know a country where the love of money holds a larger place in the heart of man,” he wrote in his book *Democracy in America*. The pursuit of wealth was an important element of the **emerging [emerging: to come into existence or become more noticeable]** American identity. But there were also other elements that united Americans of different backgrounds and experiences. In this chapter, you will learn how a growing sense of nationhood developed during the early 1800s in spite of significant differences between various regions of the country.

2. Developing a Nation in a Land of Differences

In the early 1800s, the United States was a very young country. Older adults at that time could still remember when they were British subjects. Even after the American Revolution, the United States seemed less like a single nation than a collection of states.

A surge of patriotism following the War of 1812 helped forge a new national identity. Because many Federalists had been opposed to the war—a stance their opponents described as disloyal—the Federalist Party struggled to survive in the face of this growing patriotism. Leaders like James Monroe hoped that partisan strife, or fighting between political parties, was a thing of the past. Most Americans looked with pride on a rapidly growing country whose brightest days, they believed, lay ahead.

The United States in the Early 1800s The nation in 1800 was very different from what it is today. Two out of every three Americans still lived within 50 miles of the Atlantic Coast.

Fewer than one in ten lived west of the Appalachians. These round-topped, forested mountains extended like a bumpy spine from Maine through Georgia. They made travel between east and west very difficult.

Beyond the mountains, the land flattened out and was covered by dense woods. More and more settlers crossed the Appalachians in the early 1800s, clearing trees and starting farms and mills. For Americans of the day, this land between the eastern mountains and the Mississippi River was known as “the West.” Across the Mississippi lay the **frontier [frontier: unexplored wilderness at the edge of the country]**, a vast, unexplored wilderness.



Everywhere, travel was difficult and slow. Nothing moved faster than a horse could run—not people, not goods, not messages. News could take weeks to travel from one city to another, as the post office labored to deliver letters and newspapers over rutted, muddy roads.

In part because of geographical differences, **distinct [distinct: noticeably different]** regional lifestyles developed. This led to **stereotypes [stereotypes: to characterize someone based on a group they belong to]**, or exaggerated images, of different groups. The “Yankees” of the Northeast, with its growing cities and bustling trade, were seen as enterprising, thrifty, and—in the eyes of southerners—quick to chase a dollar. The rich plantation owners of the South were seen as gracious, cultured, and—in the eyes of northerners—lazy. The frontier settlers who sought their fortunes in the West were seen as rugged, hardy, and—in the eyes of people on the East Coast—crude.

Many of the country’s leaders knew they would have to overcome geographical obstacles and stereotypes to truly unite the country. One idea they favored was an ambitious program of building roads and canals to make transportation easier and faster.



Symbols and Values Uniting the nation required more than building roads and waterways. Citizens needed to *feel* American. One way to accomplish this was to build on Americans’ pride in their government. After the British burned Washington, D.C., during the War of 1812, Congress hired architects to rebuild the White House and the Capitol in a style that would equal the grand, stately buildings of Europe. Congress complained about the cost, but not about the result. These magnificent buildings are admired to this day as national symbols.

Another national symbol was born during this period: Uncle Sam. Legend has it that the name came from Sam Wilson, a New York butcher. “Uncle Sam,” it was said, had provided the army with meat during the War of 1812. More likely the name was made up to match the initials *U.S.* for United States. After the war, “Uncle Sam” became a popular nickname for the federal government.

A national identity requires more than symbols. Citizens need to share values as well. White American men saw themselves as devoted to individualism and equality. Their commitment to these values may not have extended to enslaved African Americans, American Indians, or women. Still, they were united in the belief that they were different—and better—than Europeans.

Alexis de Tocqueville sensed this feeling just four days into his visit. “The Americans carry national pride to an altogether excessive length,” he noted. By the end of his trip, however, he had come to admire this distinctly American spirit. That spirit was reflected in every aspect of life, from politics to art, music, and literature.

3. Politics: The Era of Good Feelings



After being elected president in 1816, James Monroe went on a goodwill tour. Huge crowds greeted him so warmly that a newspaper proclaimed an “Era of Good Feelings.” Monroe’s eight years as president are still known by this name today. To many Americans at the time, it seemed that a new period of national unity had dawned.

Economic Nationalism The swelling of nationalist spirit was reflected in proposals that the federal government take a more active role in building the national economy. One of the leading supporters of such measures in Congress was Henry Clay of Kentucky.

Clay was a persuasive speaker, full of charm and intelligence. Driven by ambition, Clay wanted to be president. He campaigned for the office five times, but was never elected.

Clay believed that America’s future lay in **capitalism [capitalism: an economic system based on the private ownership of farms and businesses]**, an economic system in which individuals and companies produce

and distribute goods for profit. Most supporters of capitalism agreed that government should have a limited role in the economy. But Clay believed that the national government had a role to play in encouraging economic growth. Clay supported an economic plan called the **American System [American System: a proposal to the government that called for taxes on imports, federally funded transportation projects, and a new national bank]**. This plan called for taxes on imported goods to protect industry as well as federal spending on transportation projects like roads and canals.

A third part of Clay's plan was a new national bank to standardize currency and provide credit. Congress adopted this idea in 1816 when it created the second Bank of the United States. (The first national bank had lapsed in 1811.) The bank was a private business, but the government owned one-fifth of it and deposited government funds there.

Another early champion of economic nationalism was South Carolina's John C. Calhoun. In Congress, Calhoun supported the national bank, a permanent road system, and a tax on imports. Yet in other ways he resisted federal power. By the 1830s, he would become the leading spokesman for states' rights, largely to protect slavery in the South. His career illustrates the tensions between nationalism and the pull of regional differences.

A third proponent of nationalism was Daniel Webster of Massachusetts. Webster served several terms in both the House and Senate. Unlike Clay, who was a War Hawk, Webster bitterly opposed the War of 1812. After the war, however, he voiced strong support for Clay's American System. "Let us act under a settled conviction, and an habitual feeling, that these twenty-four states are one country," Webster urged in 1825. Later, he would strongly challenge Calhoun's claim that states had the right to defy the federal government.

Judicial Nationalism Both nationalism and commerce had a friend in the Supreme Court's chief justice, John Marshall. Appointed by John Adams in 1801, Marshall wrote some of the most important court decisions in U.S. history.

Marshall's decisions had two major effects. First, they strengthened the role of the Supreme Court itself and the federal government's power over the states. Second, they encouraged the growth of capitalism, as a few specific cases show. In *McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819), the Court confirmed Congress's authority to create a national bank that was free from state interference. This strengthened the federal government's position. In another case, the Marshall Court held that business contracts could not be broken, even by state legislatures. This decision gave contracts a fundamental place in constitutional law. In *Gibbons v. Ogden* (1824), the Court further reduced state powers. This case ended a monopoly that New York State had granted to a steamboat company operating between New York and New Jersey. Only Congress, the Court said, had the authority to regulate interstate commerce. Besides strengthening the power of the federal government, this decision promoted business growth by limiting the ability of states to regulate transportation.

The End of the Era of Good Feelings In 1824, four candidates, including Clay, competed to succeed Monroe as president. None of the candidates won a majority in the Electoral College. As a result, the election had to be decided by the House of Representatives. The House elected John Quincy Adams, the son of John Adams.

The House's action enraged the candidate who had received the most votes on Election Day. That candidate was Andrew Jackson of Tennessee, one of the heroes of the War of 1812. Jackson vowed to run again in the next election. The voters who rallied around him in 1828 would become the heart of a new political party, the Democrats. The Era of Good Feelings was over. Partisan strife was here to stay.

4. Early American Art

Americans had brought European art traditions with them to the colonies, but by the 1800s they were expressing their national identity by developing styles all their own. Not all artists were professionals. Ordinary people produced many kinds of **folk art [folk art: art made by ordinary people (as opposed to trained artists) using traditional methods]**. Men carved weather vanes and hunting decoys. Women sewed spare bits of cloth into quilts. Untrained artists created signs, murals, and images of national symbols like the American flag. Such folk art was simple, direct, and often very colorful.

Most professional artists made a living doing portraits. Portrait artists of the period tried to capture the personalities and emotions of their subjects. The best-known portrait artist was Gilbert Stuart. The image of George Washington on a dollar bill is adapted from a Stuart painting. The painting was so treasured that when the British attacked Washington, D.C., during the War of 1812, President Madison's wife, Dolly, saved Stuart's painting of Washington from the burning White House.

Strangely enough, it was an Englishman whose work led to a uniquely American brand of fine art. When Thomas Cole arrived from England in 1818, he fell in love with the immense and varied American landscape. His most famous works feature both storm clouds and sunny skies over broad stretches of land. The glowing light made a striking contrast to the stormy darkness. Fellow artists followed Cole's example and started what became known as the Hudson River School of painting. These painters focused on nature rather than people, often choosing to paint broad, scenic vistas.



Other artists portrayed more particular aspects of nature. John James Audubon painted finely detailed portraits of birds. In some respects, Audubon was more a naturalist than an artist. He made accurate, realistic studies of the species he observed in the fields and woods. No one in the United States would print his four-volume book, so he found a publisher in England. *The Birds of America* made him the country's first internationally famous artist.

Philadelphia's George Catlin turned his eye on the natives of the American West. He saw that American Indians' traditional ways were disappearing. For years, Catlin crisscrossed the West, drawing the native people and capturing in rich colors their villages, hunts, and rituals.

By choosing as their subject the wondrous features of their new country, Americans gave their art a distinct identity. At times,

they presented dangerous landscapes in deceptively positive tones. Still, the vividness and optimism of their work accurately reflected the national outlook.

5. Early American Music



Americans' national identity was also expressed through music. Until the 1800s, music in the United States was performed and heard mostly in church. Songs were performed outside church, too, but they were usually old tunes with new lyrics. The music for "The Star-Spangled Banner," for instance, came from an English tune.

With growing prosperity came an outburst of musical activity. In the North, orchestras played classical music from Europe. They also provided the music for the cotillion, in which groups of four couples danced together with elegantly coordinated movements. Dancers swirled through ballrooms, performing lively minuets, gavottes, mazurkas, and waltzes. Sometimes, female dancers lifted their floor-length petticoats to show off their footwork. Displaying their ankles was considered quite daring.

In the South, slaves combined the hymns of white churchgoers with African musical styles to create **spirituals** [**spirituals: a religious folk song of African American origin**]. They also entertained themselves—and sometimes slave owners—with folk songs accompanied by violin, drum, and banjo (an African American invention).

In the South and West, square dances became common. These were less formal versions of the popular cotillion. As fiddles played, a "caller" told dancers which steps to perform.

As demand for popular songs grew, composers answered with a stream of patriotic anthems. The best known is "America," written in 1832 by Samuel Francis Smith. It begins "My country, 'tis of Thee" and is sung to the tune of England's "God Save the King."

White composers from the South, inspired by the music of African Americans, created a type of music known as minstrel songs. These songs honored black music by mimicking it. But at the same time, the performers mocked African Americans by blackening their own white faces, wearing shabby clothes, and singing in exaggerated African American dialects. One white composer, Thomas Dartmouth Rice, caused a national sensation in 1828 with his song "Jump Jim Crow":

*Weel about and turn about and do jis so
Ebery time I weel about I jump Jim Crow.*

The racist phrase “Jim Crow,” which came from Rice’s black minstrel show character, had a long life. Many years later, laws that discriminated against African Americans would be known as “Jim Crow laws.”

Minstrel shows became the most popular form of entertainment in the country. They inspired composer Stephen Foster to write such famous songs as “Old Folks at Home,” “Camptown Races,” and “Oh! Susanna.” Foster earned nationwide fame, proof that a truly American musical tradition had arrived.

6. Early American Literature

In 1820, a British writer sneered, “Who reads an American book? or goes to an American play? or looks at an American picture or statue?” In the eyes of Europeans, the United States was a culturally backward nation. Yet America was finding its cultural voice, especially in literature.



Like the painters of the Hudson River School, writers began to use uniquely American subjects and settings. One of the first to achieve literary fame was Washington Irving. He drew on German folklore for his colorful tales of “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” but he set them in the wilds of upstate New York. Irving’s enchanted stories were an immediate hit.

One of the nation’s first novelists was James Fenimore Cooper. In books such as *The Pioneers* and *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper wrote about the adventures of settlers in the wilderness. His descriptions of frontier life and American Indians attracted worldwide interest. In France, 18 publishers competed to publish *The Pioneers*.

Davy Crockett was a real-life frontiersman who spun tall tales about his life as a hunter, scout, soldier, and explorer. His election to Congress from Tennessee horrified Alexis de Tocqueville. The Frenchman described Crockett as a man “who has no education, can read with difficulty, has no property, no fixed residence, but passes his life hunting, selling his game to live, and dwelling continuously in the woods.” But that very image captivated Americans, who saw Crockett as the fictional frontier hero come to life. Crockett’s autobiography, which was full of his plain backwoods speech and rough humor, helped give popular literature a new, distinctly American accent.

New England’s Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was one of the first serious American poets. He wrote America’s first epic poem, *The Song of Hiawatha*, based on stories of American Indians. Other poems, like his famous “Paul Revere’s Ride,” touched on patriotic themes. In “The Building

of the Ship,” Longfellow celebrated the growing importance of the United States to the world:

*Sail on, O Ship of State!
Sail on, O Union, strong and great!
Humanity with all its fears,
With all the hopes of future years,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate!*

In both subject matter and style, writers like these encouraged the growth of a national identity. In particular, they promoted the myth of rugged individualism that for many people—at home and abroad—best characterized the United States.

Summary

In this chapter, you read about the growing sense of nationhood in the United States after the War of 1812.

Developing a Nation in a Land of Differences A spirit of patriotism after the War of 1812 helped the United States form a national identity, even though distinct lifestyles developed in different regions of the country. This national identity was shown in Americans' pride in symbols, such as the White House, the Capitol, and Uncle Sam, and in shared values, such as equality.

Politics: The Era of Good Feelings James Monroe became president in 1816. His presidency is known as the Era of Good Feelings because of the national unity the country experienced between 1816 and 1824. During these years, leaders like Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, and Daniel Webster supported proposals that called for the federal government to take a more active role in developing the nation's economy. Also during this period, the chief justice of the Supreme Court, John Marshall, helped strengthen federal power over the states and encourage the growth of capitalism.

Early American Art, Music, and Literature American art forms also helped the nation develop a unique identity. Painters of the Hudson River School created artworks that highlighted the landscape's natural beauty, and George Catlin painted scenes of American Indian life. New forms of music included spirituals and patriotic anthems. Writers used uniquely American settings and subjects to create such stories as "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" and popular novels like *The Pioneers* and *The Last of the Mohicans*.

Read part of the short story "Bear Hunting in Tennessee" by Davy Crockett.

Writing from the perspective of Davy Crockett, complete this short story about hunting bears. Remember that Crockett tended to exaggerate to make his stories more entertaining.

- 1) Your story should bring out details of what it meant to be an American living on the frontier.
- 2) Your piece should be at least two paragraphs long and free of spelling and grammatical errors. It should also include
- 3) at least three details describing frontier life.
- 4) a statement on what it means to be an American in the early 1800s.

In the fall of 1825, I concluded I would build two large boats, and load them with pipe staves [narrow strips of wood] for market. So I went down to the lake, which was about twenty-five miles from where I lived, and hired some hands [workers] to assist me, and went to work; some at boat building, and others to getting staves. I worked on with my hands till the bears got fat, and then I turned out to hunting, to lay in a supply of meat. I soon killed and salted down as many as were necessary for my family; but about this time one of my old neighbours, who had settled down on the lake about twenty-five miles from me, came to my house and told me he wanted me to go down and kill some bears about in his parts. He said they were extremely fat, and very plenty. I know'd that when they were fat, they were easily taken, for a fat bear can't run fast or long. But I asked a bear no favours, no way, further than civility [politeness], for I now had eight large dogs . . . so that a bear stood no chance at all to get away from them. So I went home with him, and then went on down towards the Mississippi, and commenced hunting.

Reading Further - A New Literature Celebrates a New Nation

As the country grew, American writers began to develop a uniquely American literature. Stories and novels took place in beautiful American settings. They also focused on distinctly American topics, both celebrating the new nation and pondering its future.



Rip Van Winkle, the title character of an 1819 short story by Washington Irving, was a happy man. He lived in New York's lush Hudson Valley and spent his days hanging out with his friends, shooting squirrels, and avoiding his domineering wife.

One afternoon, as he rested in the hills after hunting with his dog, Rip heard someone call his name. He saw a strange-looking, elflike man who wanted his help. Rip helped the little man carry a heavy keg to a green valley. There he saw more small, oddly dressed men, who were bowling on a lawn.

Rip wondered if there was something magical about the scene. How had the little man known his name? And why, every time a ball hit some pins, did thunder roar? Soon Rip's curiosity about what was in the keg—and his desire to avoid

his wife—overcame him, and he had a drink. He had a few more drinks, and then he fell asleep.

When Rip woke the next morning, everything had changed. The little men were gone, and when he made his way home, he saw that his "village seemed altered; it was larger and more populous" than it had been when he had left. He felt that the "character of the people seemed changed." A "busy, bustling" tone had replaced the "drowsy tranquility" that Rip had known. In fact, Rip Van Winkle had slept for 20 years, although it felt like just one night to him.

Rip soon discovered that he had become an old man. "He found himself stiff in the joints," and he looked different. When he passed the local villagers,

They all stared at him with equal marks of surprise, and whenever they cast eyes upon him, invariably stroked their chins. The constant recurrence of this gesture, induced Rip, involuntarily, to do the same, when, to his astonishment, he found his beard had grown a foot long!

—Washington Irving, "Rip Van Winkle," from *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent*, 1819

More than Rip's appearance had changed during his long night. While he slept, the American colonies had fought and won a war for independence. Imagine Rip's confusion on visiting the local tavern, where the political changes were visible.

He recognized on the sign . . . the ruby face of King George, under which he had smoked so many a peaceful pipe, but even this was singularly metamorphosed [transformed]. The red coat was changed for one of blue and buff, a sword was stuck in the hand instead of a sceptre, the head was decorated with a cocked hat, and underneath was painted in large characters, GENERAL WASHINGTON.

Talking with the townsfolk, Rip discovered what had happened. "Instead of being a subject of his Majesty George the Third," he found out, "he was now a free citizen of the United States."

In the story "Rip Van Winkle," 20 years seemed to pass overnight. A man fell asleep, and the colony where he lived had become part of a new country. Many people consider "Rip Van Winkle" to be the United States' first short story. Written not long after independence, it expressed wonder and shock at how quickly a revolution had happened and how much it had changed the lives of the people of the new nation.

Washington Irving was not the only writer to choose American topics for his work. At the same time Irving was writing, James Fenimore Cooper penned the first American novels. Set in the fictional town of Templeton, New York, *The Leatherstocking Tales* told about the settlement and rapid disappearance of the frontier.

The Pioneers was the first of the series, written in 1823. It introduced readers to Natty Bumppo. This fictional character, a former wilderness scout, was probably modeled after Daniel Boone. He was called Leatherstocking because he wore leather chaps to cover his legs. In Cooper's novels, Natty Bumppo tried to protect both nature and his own way of life from the onslaught of civilization.

In one scene, Cooper described the clash between the pioneers, who represented civilization, and a flock of birds, which represented nature. The excitement began early one morning. "The gulls are hovering over the lake already," one Templeton resident exclaimed, "and the heavens are alive with pigeons. You may look an hour before you can find a hole through which to get a peep at the sun."

The excited townspeople gathered. Cooper wrote, "If the heavens were alive with pigeons, the whole village seemed equally in motion with men, women, and children." They brought their guns—all kinds of guns—and started to shoot at the pigeons. There were so many birds that the hunters didn't even need to aim. They simply shot into the air and the pigeons fell. At one point, the hunters grew so enthusiastic that two of them brought out a cannon to shoot even more pigeons. That was too much for Natty Bumppo. He harshly criticized the settlers for recklessly spoiling nature.

"This comes of settling a country!" he said. "Here have I known the pigeon to fly for forty long years, and, till you made your clearings, there was nobody to skear [scare] or to hurt them. I loved to see them come into the woods, for they were company to a body, hurting nothing—being, as it was, as harmless as a garter-snake."

—James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pioneers*, 1823

In describing the hunters as not even bothering to see whether the birds were dead or to pick them up off the ground, Cooper seemed to agree with Natty that the settlers threatened the natural world.

On the other hand, the settlers did have some valid reasons for their actions. Cooper sympathized with them, too. One hunter, Billy Kirby, heard Natty's outrage and replied,



"What! old Leather-Stocking," he cried, "grumbling at the loss of a few pigeons! If you had to sow your wheat twice, and three times, as I have done, you wouldn't be so massyfully [mercifully] feeling toward the devils. Hurrah, boys! scatter the feathers!"

The settlers were farmers, and the birds threatened the crops they needed to survive. In Cooper's eyes, the settlers' motive was as valid as Leatherstocking's anger. But the needs of nature and the needs of the pioneers clashed—and would continue to clash—until the settlers finally won out.

A Disappearing World

Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper were two of the first truly American writers. Both had lived overseas and wanted Europeans to respect the budding American culture. Both saw themselves as voices for the new nation.

The content of their writing was distinctly American. Irving and Cooper set their stories in the beautiful American landscape. They also addressed American issues. They were proud of their new country. But they also knew that, along with the nation's growth, there would be unforeseen changes.

Preparing to Write: Analyzing Characters in Literature

Rip Van Winkle and Natty Bumppo are famous characters in American literature. Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper created them to show a time of change in the young United States.

Adjectives are an important component of an author's toolkit for creating a character. List four adjectives that describe Rip Van Winkle.

- 1) What was changing in Rip Van Winkle's world?
- 2) In a story or novel, the author puts characters in situations that make a point. What point did Cooper want to make in the scene of settlers shooting pigeons?
- 3) What was changing in Natty Bumppo's world?

Writing a Character Description

Suppose you wanted to write a story about change in the United States today. For example, how is technology changing our lives? How is the environment changing?

Describe the changes you would like to write about.

- 1) Create a character to include in your story. Write a description of your character.
- 2) Describe one situation you would create for your character. It should make a point about change.
- 3) Use this rubric to evaluate your descriptions. Make changes in them if you need to.

Score	Description
3	The description gives clear details. The situation makes a clear point about change. There are no spelling or grammar errors.
2	The descriptions give some details. The situation makes a point about change. There are some spelling or grammar errors.
1	The descriptions do not give details. The situation does not make a point about change. There are many spelling or grammar errors.

Enrichment Essay - The Growth of a National Literature

“To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme.” So wrote Herman Melville, the author of the famous novel *Moby Dick*. As American literature grew to maturity in the 19th century, American authors chose mightier and mightier themes. Their efforts quickly led to a distinctive national literature. It didn't go as far back as European literary traditions, but it was just as ambitious and varied. And with the coming of Mark Twain, Americans could boast that their literature had developed a writer equal to any in the world.

Herman Melville

Herman Melville's “mighty themes” came from his own experiences. Born in New York City in 1819, he showed little promise as a child. He failed at several jobs until he enlisted as a sailor on a whaling ship and spent four years at sea. Back home, he charmed his family with stories of his adventures. He realized he was on to something, and began writing.

Melville published his greatest novel, *Moby Dick*, in 1851. The hero, Captain Ahab, has lost a leg trying to catch a huge white whale called Moby Dick. Ahab sets off to confront the whale again.

Melville wrote in a slow, wandering style. But to the readers of 1850, who had never seen a TV show or a movie, *Moby Dick* was a rip-roaring adventure story. It was also a thoughtful study about wanting something you shouldn't. In the end,

Ahab's ship tracks down Moby Dick—and Ahab dies trying to kill the whale. Only one crewmember survives to tell the story.

Nathaniel Hawthorne

While composing *Moby Dick*, Melville moved to Pittsfield, Massachusetts. There his neighbor was another writer, Nathaniel Hawthorne. Hawthorne had been born to a Puritan family in nearby Salem, the site of witch burnings in 1692. Shamed by this part of his heritage, Hawthorne made the dark side of Puritan society his mighty theme. He used a high-sounding, elegant style to portray early New England life in such novels as *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Scarlet Letter*.

Hawthorne's tales often had a spooky feel. In his short story *Young Goodman Brown*, the hero meets the devil. Is it a nightmare? Is it his imagination? Or is it real? Whichever, the devil tells him, "I helped your grandfather, the constable [policeman], when he lashed the Quaker woman so smartly through the streets of Salem; and it was I that brought your father a pitch-pine knot, kindled at my own hearth, to set fire to an Indian village." Through such haunting passages, Hawthorne exposed the violence underlying America's Puritan ancestry.

Louisa May Alcott

In the early 1840s, Hawthorne lived at Brook Farm, near Boston. The group that started Brook Farm tried to live by the Transcendentalist philosophies of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Everyone shared equally in the work and profits. Among the farm's leaders was Amos Bronson Alcott. Hawthorne helped inspire Alcott's young daughter, Louisa May, to become a writer herself.

Alcott's mighty theme was the everyday life of half of America's people: its girls and women. Unlike Hawthorne and the Transcendentalists, she wrote in an easy, natural style. Her biggest success was *Little Women*. The book sold so well that she wrote several sequels. It remains popular today.

Little Women is the story of four young sisters and their mother, whom they call Marmee. Each chapter presents a typical adventure for outgoing girls of Civil War times, and usually ends with a lesson.

In one chapter, the sisters decide they don't want to do their chores. They get so bored that when Marmee decides she won't do any housework either, they eagerly take her role, only to botch it completely. In the end, Marmee reminds her daughters to "have regular hours for work and play, make each day both useful and pleasant, and prove that you understand the worth of time by employing it well." Alcott's warm portrayal of sturdy, independent women contributed to America's growing sense that all people are equal.

Mark Twain

American literature truly reached maturity with Missouri-born Mark Twain in the last half of the 19th century. Twain's real name was Samuel Langhorne Clemens. His pen name comes from a term used by boat pilots on the Mississippi River to note the water's depth.

Many people consider Twain to be America's greatest writer. Like Melville, he often wrote about life on the water—in his case, the Mississippi. Like Hawthorne, he often wrote about America's shameful past—in his case, slavery. And like Alcott, he often wrote about ordinary people—in his case, the residents of small western towns. Twain then added a few mighty themes of his own and tied them all together with a biting sense of humor.

Perhaps Twain's most famous book is *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Published in 1884, it tells a story that takes place before the Civil War ended slavery. Though widely praised, its depictions of child abuse, juvenile delinquency, and race relations make it controversial even today.

The book's hero, Huck Finn, sails down the Mississippi River in a raft with Jim, a runaway slave. At one point Jim is returned to slavery, putting Huck in a no-win situation. He can let Jim go and lose a true friend, or he can rescue Jim and commit a crime, since helping a slave escape is illegal (and, to most people around Huck, morally wrong as well). Finn tells the reader, "I was a-trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself: 'All right, then, I'll go to hell.'" He and his friend Tom Sawyer then work together to free Jim.

Mark Twain tackled American themes in a distinctively American style. At the same time, like all great writers, he wrote about subjects and individuals that people everywhere can recognize and appreciate.

Create a table with these pieces of information completed:

- 1) the names of the four authors covered in this reading
- 2) the titles of books written by each author
- 3) the themes of the books written by each author

When you have completed the table, circle each theme that at least two of the authors have in common.