

Beginnings to 1800s

Literature is influenced by the culture (time and place) in which it is created; it is a unique cultural expression of a specific group of people at a specific time

Early America included many groups:

Native Americans –

- oral tradition (stories were not written down, but passed from one person to another through the telling of the story)
- believed people belonged to the land
- nature honored as source of life
- literature made up of myths and legends

European Explorers –

- adventurers
- journals, reports, letters

Puritans (Pilgrims)-

- influenced American culture
- part of the Reformation in Europe
- came seeking religious freedom for themselves, “city upon a hill”
- “Puritan Ethic” hard work and self-discipline (still part of American values)
- lives and literature very much influenced by the Bible
- journals, sermons, some poems

Founding Fathers –

- The Age of Reason (Enlightenment)
 - valued science, logic, and reason over faith
- people are basically good and can use reason to create a better society
- land belonged to the people, civilization
- speeches, essays, documents, autobiographies

African Americans –

- struggle
- irony of a free land with enslaved people
- autobiographies

Overview:

Most literature of early America was not meant for the purpose of entertainment. It was informative and practical. Self-reliance and individualism are two key themes of American literature.