The Revolutionary Period (1765-1790)

1765 – The Stamp Act ignited the first serious opposition to English rule in the American colonies.

1790 – after the implementation of the United States Constitution

During this period, the majority of American writing was politically motivated, whether supportive of English rule or revolutionary in character.

Poetry

- Most of the poetry was neoclassical, in imitation of English poet Alexander Pope.
  - neoclassical = characterized by simplicity, directness, order, decorum, balance, unity, and an emphasis on reason
  - Poets used neoclassical forms and styles such as burlesque, satire, and epic for political ends, especially the patriotic political end of independence.
  - Joel Barlow, Timothy Dwight, Philip Freneau, and John Trumbull wanted to establish a classical standard for American literature.
  - Others were associated with the Graveyard School of Poetry and emphasized an appreciation of nature, thereby foreshadowing romanticism.
  - Phillis Wheatley, an American slave and poet, inaugurated the African American literary tradition with her volume Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral (1773).
    - She became the first published African American poet.

Prose

- Revolutionary prose mostly promoted the movement for independence from England and the unification of the nation.
  - Thomas Paine - Common Sense (1776)
  - Alexander Hamilton and James Madison - The Federalist Papers (1787-88) – political theory underlying the U.S. Constitution
  - Benjamin Franklin - Autobiography (1771)
  - Thomas Jefferson - The Declaration of Independence (1776)
- The first American novel, The Power of Sympathy (1789), was written at the end of the Revolutionary Period.

Drama

- The first play written by an American and acted in America was Thomas Godfrey’s The Prince of Parthia (1767).
- Drama was the most influential and widespread outside of New England, where the Puritan suspicion of the medium remained strong.
- Dramas of the time were historical, didactic, and patriotic in nature.
The Early National Period (1790-1828)

1790 – after the implementation of the United States Constitution  
1828 – election of Andrew Jackson as President

- Unlike the writers of the Revolutionary Period, writers of the Early National Period began to form distinctively American voices that developed with the formation of a new nation.

- William Cullen Bryant is perhaps the best known poet of the time.

- Washington Irving, and essayist and storyteller, became the first American prose writer to achieve international fame.

- *North American Review* – the first long-running American magazine

- During this period, the novel flourished.
  - sentimental novels = “true” stories for moral instruction, warning young ladies of the perils of seduction
  - gothic novels = focus on horror, suspense, doom, mystery, passion, and the grotesque and supernatural.
    - Charles Brockden Brown - *Wieland* (1798)

Revolutionary and Early National Quiz

We will study the following:

- “On Being Brought from Africa to America” Phillis Wheatley 180 & notes; handout
- “An Hymn to the Evening” Phillis Wheatley 182
- “To His Excellency, General Washington” Phillis Wheatley 185
- from *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* Olaudah Equiano 158; 161
- “Speech in the Virginia Convention” Patrick Henry 200; 203
- from *The Age of Reason* Thomas Paine 168 & notes; notes
- from *Common Sense* Thomas Paine 134
- from *The Crisis, Number 1* Thomas Paine 174
- The Declaration of Independence Thomas Jefferson 168; 170