American Romanticism and the Gothic (1hr 15min class)

Why does American literature take a gothic turn?

**Historical Context (**10 min)

Early 19th century (1820-1848) a time of growth, conflict, and sadness

Place students into groups and ask each to research:

* Indian Removal Act (1830) -> Trail of Tears
* Missouri Compromises
* Bleeding Kansas
* Panic of 1837

Have each team characterize on the board the events and social climate of this time. What was society preoccupied with at this point in our nation’s history?

* People questions the easy narratives of national destiny and providence while, at the same time, fiercely clinging to and defending them, even to the point of turning away from evil.
* Authors of this time are grappling with these same questions.

In this climate of hardship, an American literary renaissance occurs, with a dark, brooding, and complicated literature that we cherish today. Answers, finally, Emerson’s call for a truly American literature.

**Overarching questions (Hawthorne and Poe)**

* How does the American Gothic movement build upon the conventions and content of the literature that preceded it?
* Why is this period termed the American Renaissance?
* How does American Gothic movement act as a strand of American Romanticism?

**Hawthorne** (25 min)

“Young Goodman Brown” as an exemplar of 2 characteristics of the American Gothic

* Allegory
* Historical and socio-cultural preoccupation

Close Reading

* What really happens here? Think inception.
  + Did the devil’s communion really occur?
  + Was it a dream? (628)

In groups, have students

1) divide the story into 6 scenes

2) draw a comic depicting how their group decides to read the piece. (see template below)

This asks each team to decide what occurs in reality and what occurs in dream?

Questions raised if a dream

* Why would Brown dream such a thing? What elements of reality are contained therein? If illness, what is this illness and its significance?
* What is the power of suspicion? Of the mind in general? (628)
* Where was Brown going before he fell asleep? Was it for good or ill? (620)
* When did the dream begin? What are the implications for each possible starting point?

What questions are raised if real?

* Are we able to truly discern good from evil? (Brown returning to the town in the morning to see the venerable citizens in the daylight) (621 – the staff; 626 – the community)
  + If not, how then are we to interpret our society and our history?

Can evil build a solid and prosperous community? (621 – reputation)

* What brought Brown and Faith to that place? What led up to their involvement?
* Does evil = human? Is there no escape from our depraved natures?
* What is the proper response to spiritual hypocrisy? (628)
* From what site can we even judge?

**Poe** (30 min)

“Philosophy of Composition”

Have students pair up and tell them that they have to discover a word which conveys the feelings, environment, weather, etc. of January and they have to justify their choice of word similar to what Poe does in *Philosophy*.

Identify what Poe believes to be ideal form in his writing.

Have students answer: What is it and why is it ideal?

* Length: 739
* Tone: 740
* Refrain: 741
* Topic: 741

Listen to “The Raven” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BefliMlEzZ8> and have students create an emoji chart of the poem’s character as he slowly slips into madness?

Adaptations: Simpsons <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLiXjaPqSyY>

Ending question: How do Hawthorne and Poe fit into the Romantic tradition we have encountered thus far?

Background Info for Teacher

Westward movement

* Conflict with well-established and peaceful Native American tribes
  + Indian Removal Act (1830) culminates in many injustices, with the most well-known conflict being the Trail of Tears.
  + After years of court battles and appeals (in which the courts alternated between refusing to see the tribes as people and refusing them because they were a separate nation, depending on what was most convenient), thousands were forcibly removed from homes by federal troops in 1838 to pave the way for white development in mining, forestry, and other commodities.
* Forays into Mexico created conflict with our neighbors, culminating in the Mexican War, a conflict that unabashedly trumpeted territorial gains as its goal
* New states and sectionally-based legislation led to North/South conflict, which gave an opening to the newly powerful abolitionist movement
* Nullification, talk of secession, violence in Congress
* Culminates in Missouri compromises (Missouri admitted as a slave state and Mass. divided to create Maine, a free state), Bleeding Kansas, and eventually Civil War
  + Series of depressions, including the Panic of 1837, destabilize brief prosperity. 1837 recession, 2nd only to the Great Depression, lasted 6 years

