Looking Ahead

The United States changed rapidly after the Civil War. American writers reacted to these changes by turning away from Romanticism toward Realism, a literary movement whose writers depicted life as they saw it, not as they imagined it to be. A literary movement that was akin to Realism was Regionalism, sometimes known as the local color movement, whose writers portrayed the distinctive traits of particular areas of the United States. A later, more extreme movement was Naturalism, whose writers sought to describe with scientific objectivity the effects of environment and heredity on character.

Keep the following questions in mind as you read:

- How was the United States changing between 1880 and 1910?
- What are the basic characteristics of Realism, Regionalism, and Naturalism?
- How do you think the historical and cultural trends of this period continue to affect the United States today?

OBJECTIVES

In learning about Regionalism and Realism, and Naturalism, you will focus on the following:

- analyzing the characteristics of a literary period and how the issues of this period influenced its writers
- clarifying and understanding informational texts
- evaluating the influences of the historical period that shaped literary characters, plots, settings, and themes
- connecting literature to historical contexts, current events, and your own experiences
### Timeline 1880–1910

#### American Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings is published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Henry James's The Portrait of a Lady is published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Helen Hunt Jackson's Ramona is published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Mark Twain's <em>The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</em> is published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>W. D. Howells's <em>The Rise of Silas Lapham</em> is published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Sarah Orne Jewett's &quot;A White Heron&quot; is published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Charles Waddell Chesnutt's <em>The Conjure Woman</em> is published</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### United States Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Clara Barton founds American Association of the Red Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Booker T. Washington founds Tuskegee Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Renegade Jesse James is killed by one of his own gang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>George Eastman designs roll film for cameras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>William Le Baron Jenney builds the first skyscraper in Chicago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>President Grover Cleveland dedicates the Statue of Liberty in New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Wounded Knee Massacre takes place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>James A. Naismith invents basketball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>Immigration center opens on Ellis Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Klondike gold rush begins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Spanish-American War is fought</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### World Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Krakatoa volcano erupts; ensuing tsunami kills over 36,000 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Standard time divides Earth into 24 time zones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>Indian National Congress is founded</td>
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<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Eiffel Tower is completed in Paris</td>
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<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Brazil becomes a republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>Gerhart Hauptmann's <em>The Weavers</em> is published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>War begins between China and Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>German chancellor Otto von Bismarck resigns, due to conflicts with Kaiser Wilhelm II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Marie and Pierre Curie discover radium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1900
L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is published

1900
Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* is published

1900
Zitkala-Sa’s (Gertrude Bonnin) *Impressions of an Indian Childhood* is published

1901
Frank Norris’s *The Octopus* is published

1901
Booker T. Washington’s *Up from Slavery* is published

1903
W. E. B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* is published

1903
Jack London’s *The Call of the Wild* is published

1904
Henry James’s *The Golden Bowl* is published

1906
Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* is published

1907
Henry Adams’s *The Education of Henry Adams* is completed

1908
Israel Zangwill’s play *The Melting Pot* opens

1909
Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives* is published

1900
Hawaii becomes a territory of the United States

1901
President McKinley is assassinated; Theodore Roosevelt becomes president

1903
Wright Brothers make first airplane flight

1903
*The Great Train Robbery*, first narrative film, is shown

1904
The United States begins construction of the Panama Canal

1906
San Francisco earthquake takes place

1908
Ford Motor Company produces the Model T Ford

1908
Electric washing machine is invented

1909
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is founded

1910
Angel Island facility for Asian immigrants is opened

1900
Boxer Rebellion against European influence begins in China

1904
Russo-Japanese War begins

1905
 Strikes and mass protests begin reform in Russia

1906
Finland is first European country to grant woman suffrage

1908
Oil is discovered in the Middle East

1910
Mexican Revolution begins

Reading Check
**Analyzing Graphic Information** Which events on the timeline continue to shape the daily life of people in the United States today?

Timeline Visit [www.glencoe.com](http://www.glencoe.com) for an interactive timeline.
Railroad Time
Before the 1880s, each community set its clocks by the sun’s position at high noon. At noon in Chicago, for example, it was 12:50 P.M. in Washington, D.C., 12:09 P.M. in Louisville, Kentucky, and 11:41 A.M. in St. Paul, Minnesota. Local time interfered with train scheduling and at times even threatened passenger safety: when two trains traveled on the same track, collisions could result from scheduling errors caused by regional variations in time. In 1883, to make rail service safer and more reliable, the American Railway Association divided the country into four time zones, each with its own standard time. The federal government ratified the change in 1918.
Being There

Between the Civil War and World War I, the growth of mining, ranching, and farming brought settlement to the West. At the same time, populations of cities in the East swelled as immigrants poured into the United States and job seekers from rural areas sought employment in industry.

Reading Check

Analyzing Graphic Information

1. Between what years did immigration from central and eastern Europe reach its peak?

2. In 1900, roughly how many times greater was school attendance than it had been in 1870?

3. What change did the western and eastern parts of the U.S. have in common during this time?
Westward Expansion

For a time during the early nineteenth century, American settlement paused at the edge of the Great Plains. Settlers felt challenged by these vast, treeless grasslands, which had little rainfall, a fierce climate, and soil that was very fertile but difficult to plow. But beginning in the 1860s, improvements in farming equipment, the expansion of the railroads, and the Homestead Act, which enabled settlers to claim public land, made more Americans willing to move to the Great Plains. However, these prairie farmers—or “sodbusters”—still faced constant toil, drought, extreme temperatures, blizzards, tornadoes, grass fires, locusts, and a social and cultural isolation that broke many homesteaders’ spirits.

Westward expansion was a disaster for the Native Americans of the region. Each new group of settlers further encroached on Native Americans’ traditional ways of life. The Native Americans of the Great Plains had long depended on the herds of buffalo for food, clothing, and shelter. By the 1880s, the destruction of these herds by white hunters had doomed this way of life. After the Civil War, the policy of the U.S. government was to move Native Americans onto reservations, which were large tracts of land set aside for them. Resistance by some Native Americans led to armed clashes with U.S. troops.

The Gilded Age

As the Great Plains and the West were being settled, cities in the East and Midwest were also growing. New inventions, such as the electric light and the telephone, improved economic efficiency and created new jobs. Thousands of Americans moved to cities in search of work, and millions of immigrants arrived, many of them from southern and eastern Europe. By the early 1900s, Americans had transformed the United States into the world’s leading industrial nation. However, this rapid growth had a social cost. Beneath the glittering surface of prosperity, corruption in business and politics became so widespread that historians often refer to this period as the Gilded Age, a reference to Mark Twain’s scathing social satire of the same name, which described the greed and corruption of the time. The gap between rich and poor Americans widened greatly, and a few so-called robber barons became enormously wealthy as a result of the labors of their employees. Cities were overpopulated, and the poor were forced to live in tenement houses that were crowded, dirty, and unsafe.
Reformers and writers tried to improve working and housing conditions. Jane Addams founded Hull House, a settlement house to serve immigrants and poor working people in Chicago. Hull House offered hot lunches for factory workers and classes in English for foreign-language speakers. Some journalists—later called muckrakers—later exposed the social problems brought on by industrialization and urbanization. Ida Tarbell analyzed the way in which the Standard Oil Company had come to control 95 percent of the country's oil-refining capacity. In his novel The Jungle, Upton Sinclair shocked and sickened readers with a graphic account of the filthy and unsafe conditions in Chicago's stockyards and meatpacking plants.

“\textit{I aimed at the public’s heart, and by accident I hit it in the stomach.}”

—Upton Sinclair

Women’s Rights
The fight to achieve women’s right to vote began before the Civil War but slowed while many women focused on ending slavery. After the Civil War, reformers such as Susan B. Anthony realized that women would remain powerless until they could own property and vote. Anthony was devoted to securing equal rights for women and, with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, formed the National Woman Suffrage Association in 1869. Although the federal government balked at giving women the right to vote and own property, individual states in the West were more progressive. When Wyoming joined the union in 1890, it became the first state to give women the right to vote. By 1914, women had voting rights in fifteen states. It was not until 1920 that the Nineteenth Amendment guaranteed voting rights for all American women.

Regionalism, Realism, and Naturalism
Some American writers, known as Regionalists or local color writers, created vivid portrayals of their own regions and satisfied a curiosity many Americans of the time felt about the distinctive landscapes, speech, and customs of other parts of the country. In the mid-1800s, some artists and writers began to turn away from Romanticism. Realism, a new direction in art and literature, consisted of writers who attempted to portray people as they actually were, rather than idealizing them as Romanticists had often done. As the American novelist and critic William Dean Howells observed, “Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material.” Other writers, known as Naturalists, were influenced by the theories of scientists such as Charles Darwin.

**PREVIEW Big Ideas Regionalism, Realism, and Naturalism**

1. **Regionalism**
   Following the Civil War, some American writers concentrated on the unique characteristics, or local color, of a particular region of the country. They attempted to portray the landscape, speech, customs, and other cultural details of their chosen region.
   
   See pages 472–473

2. **Realism**
   Writers of this period turned away from Romanticism and attempted to create the appearance of ordinary life. Known as Realists, these writers aimed not to transcend reality but to render the truth of everyday experience as they saw, heard, and felt it.
   
   See pages 474–475

3. **Naturalism**
   Naturalism, a more extreme movement, grew out of Realism. Naturalist writers, influenced by scientists such as Charles Darwin, believed that human beings are shaped by heredity and environment and dominated by economic, social, or natural forces.
   
   See pages 476–477
Influenced by such factors as public education and mass media, culture in the United States today is probably more uniform than at any other time in our history. In the past, cultural differences among people from various parts of the United States were more marked. After the Civil War, a new group of American writers, known as Regionalists or local colorists, emphasized local cultures. Not all of these Regionalist writers were born and educated in the East, as most previous American writers had been. Many came from the South, Midwest, or West. Under the influence of the new emphasis on Realism in art and literature, they did not present the unusual characters and exotic settings familiar in Romanticist writing. Instead, local colorists depicted the ordinary people and everyday places around them.

In their writing, the local colorists emphasized setting, and their characters tended to be typical of a particular region, which was clear from their speech and beliefs. Often the narrator was an outsider who observed a world filled with unfamiliar or outdated characteristics and customs. This outsider frequently revealed the tension between the new and old, the modern and the old-fashioned. The mood of local color writing was sometimes nostalgic, serving as a reminder of a time before mass production and noisy urban life. At other times, the mood was more somber, presenting a criticism of habits and ideas considered long outmoded.

Mark Twain’s Mississippi River
Born in a small Missouri town on the Mississippi River, Mark Twain vividly evoked the world of that river in a series of works, including his masterpiece The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. In this novel, an orphaned boy and a runaway slave flee down the Mississippi in a raft. Through their innocent eyes, Twain presented a piercing view of American society in the pre-Civil War era and revealed the injustices of slavery and the culture that enforced it. He also employed a lively sense of humor and a fine ear for American dialect. His editor and friend William Dean Howells was the first to realize that Twain was more than a humorist or local colorist. In The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Twain had transformed our literature by writing a true American novel, in which the setting, subject matter, characters, and style were unmistakably American. Howells claimed Twain to be an American genius, hailing him as “incomparable, the Lincoln of our literature.”

Bret Harte’s Far West
Bret Harte told stories of the rude, lawless life of the California gold-mining country while describing places few people had ever seen. One of his earliest stories, “The Luck of Roaring Camp,” made Harte famous. Readers in both the United States and Britain enthusiastically read about the gamblers, thieves, and social misfits that populate his work. Harte distinguished himself from other writers of the West by his ironic tone. His unsavory characters frequently undergo an unexpected reformation, which provides the narrator with an opportunity to make wry comments on their sudden changes of heart.

“Consciously, I was always, as I still am, trying to fashion a piece of literature out of the life next at hand.”
—William Dean Howells

Willa Cather’s Great Plains
When she was nine years old, Willa Cather’s family left Virginia and moved to the open prairie of Nebraska—a move that would change her life dramatically. Cather’s writing reflects her memories of prairie life, and many of her early works focus on the harshness and isolation of pioneers’ lives. In her novel O Pioneers! she depicted immigrant farmers in Nebraska, whose tough yet sensitive natures and determination made their survival possible. In other works, such as My Antonia, she celebrated the pioneer lifestyle for its freedom and simplicity.
from *O Pioneers!* by Willa Cather

For the first three years after John Bergson’s death, the affairs of his family prospered. Then came the hard times that brought every one on the Divide to the brink of despair; three years of drought and failure, the last struggle of a wild soil against the encroaching plowshare. The first of these fruitless summers the Bergson boys bore courageously. The failure of the corn crop made labor cheap. Lou and Oscar hired two men and put in bigger crops than ever before. They lost everything they spent. The whole country was discouraged. Farmers who were already in debt had to give up their land. A few foreclosures demoralized the county. The settlers sat about on the wooden sidewalks in the little town and told each other that the country was never meant for men to live in; the thing to do was to get back to Iowa, to Illinois, to any place that had been proved habitable. The Bergson boys, certainly, would have been happier with their uncle Otto, in the bakery shop in Chicago. Like most of their neighbors, they were meant to follow in paths already marked out for them, not to break trails in a new country. A steady job, a few holidays, nothing to think about, and they would have been very happy. It was no fault of theirs that they had been dragged into the wilderness when they were little boys. A pioneer should have imagination, should be able to enjoy the idea of things more than the things themselves.

**Reading Check**

*Generalizing* How would you describe the overall goals of the local color movement?
The emergence of American Realism in the second half of the 1800s was in part a reaction to the Romanticism of the previous era. Romanticism’s glorification of the imagination became unappealing to Realists, who wanted to explore the motivations, behaviors, and actions of real people. Some of the most important writers of the time were considered Realists, including fiction writers Henry James, O. Henry, and William Dean Howells.

The Birth of Realism
Before Realism appeared in America, it was already flourishing in Europe. French novelist Honoré de Balzac is commonly considered the father of Realism. His masterpiece *The Human Comedy* is a massive collection of ninety novels and novellas that detail the panorama of French society. Balzac did not limit the scope of his masterpiece to an examination of one class of people or cultural environment. Instead he invented a complex and textured fictional world based on all levels of society.

Advanced by such authors as Gustave Flaubert, Leo Tolstoy, George Eliot, and Charles Dickens, Realism soon became the most prominent literary movement in Europe. These novelists examined the psychology of human behavior and created characters who struggle with problems that nineteenth-century readers would have recognized in their own lives or in the lives of their contemporaries.

The rise of Realism in the United States can be traced to disillusionment following the Civil War. For many, the war had destroyed the Romantic view of humanity. Like Mathew Brady in his famous photographs of the Civil War dead or Jacob Riis in his portraits of New York slum children, the Realists wanted to present life as it actually was—often cruel and never embellished. In fact, the rise of photography in general, and Brady’s images in particular, fundamentally altered the ways in which Americans perceived reality. Photography enabled artists to capture and convey, with stark objectivity, the world as it appeared through the camera’s lens. As a reporter observed upon seeing an exhibit of Brady’s photographs, “If he has not brought bodies and laid them in our dooryards and along [our] streets, he has done something very like it.” Many Realist writers aspired to adapt this kind of photographic realism to their literary works.

Kate Chopin and Women
During her lifetime, Kate Chopin was widely criticized for her realistic portrayal of women. She was the first American woman to write frankly about the suppressed passion and discontentment of women who were confined to the traditional roles of wives and mothers. She believed that the role of an artist was to rebel. As a character in her novel *The Awakening* observes, an artist must have “a soul that dares and defies.” Chopin wrote of women “awakening” to their confined state and challenging the social values and patriarchal rules that defined and limited them. Chopin is sometimes considered to be a Regionalist writer, because in some of her stories she depicted the customs of Creoles and Cajuns in Louisiana, using their language and describing their lifestyles. She made their world real and confirmed their humanity by refusing to judge their lives or their struggles.

Paul Laurence Dunbar and African Americans
Paul Laurence Dunbar was one of the earliest African American poets to gain widespread recognition. William Dean Howells’s favorable review of Dunbar’s book *Majors and Minors* in *Harper’s Weekly* helped to establish Dunbar as an international literary figure. While Dunbar wrote the bulk of his verse in the lofty poetic diction of his day, he is best known for his use of rural African American dialect. Dunbar’s dialect poems depict the post-war lives of African Americans and reflect their frustrated aspirations in an era of white dominance. Throughout his life, Dunbar tried to strike a balance between the conventions of the European literary tradition and those of African American folk culture.
Edith Wharton and the Upper Classes

The characters in Edith Wharton’s fiction, like Wharton herself, inhabited the upper crust of New York society. Crafted with penetrating psychological insight, her stories and novels depict the desires, prejudices, and foibles of her privileged and affluent characters. In two of her most famous novels, *The Age of Innocence* and *The House of Mirth*, Wharton presents a culture that devalues the individual in favor of class divisions, social status, and the pursuit and enjoyment of wealth. Her best fiction satirizes the hypocrisy of the American aristocracy of which she was a member.

*from The Awakening* by Kate Chopin

It was then past midnight. The cottages were all dark. A single faint light gleamed out from the hallway of the house. There was no sound abroad except the hooting of an old owl in the top of a water-oak, and the everlasting voice of the sea, that was not uplifted at that soft hour. It broke like a mournful lullaby upon the night.

The tears came so fast to Mrs. Pontellier’s eyes that the damp sleeve of her *peignoir* no longer served to dry them. She was holding the back of her chair with one hand; her loose sleeve had slipped almost to the shoulder of her uplifted arm. Turning, she thrust her face, steaming and wet, into the bend of her arm, and she went on crying there, not caring any longer to dry her face, her eyes, her arms. She could not have told why she was crying. Such experiences as the foregoing were not uncommon in her married life. They seemed never before to have weighed much against the abundance of her husband’s kindness and a uniform devotion which had come to be tacit and self-understood.

An indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness, filled her whole being with a vague anguish. It was like a shadow, like a mist passing across her soul’s summer day. It was strange and unfamiliar; it was a mood. She did not sit there inwardly upbraid- ing her husband, lamenting at Fate, which had directed her footsteps to the path which they had taken. She was just having a good cry all to herself. The mosquitoes made merry over her, biting her firm, round arms and nipping at her bare insteps.
What do you think contributes most to shaping a person’s life? Is it the biological factor of heredity? Is it the social and economic factor of environment? Or is it the result of other factors, such as an individual’s own will? Realistic writers, for the most part, did not concern themselves with these philosophical questions. Toward the end of the 1800s, however, a group of writers known as Naturalists, who were strongly influenced by Charles Darwin’s scientific theory of evolution by natural selection, adopted the view that people had little control over their own lives. They believed that human destiny was shaped by powerful forces, including heredity, social and economic pressures, and the natural environment. Like the Realist writers, Naturalists wrote about ordinary people, but they often focused on the working class and the poor, presenting the futile battles of individuals against a brutal society or an indifferent universe.

**Edwin Arlington Robinson and Fate**

Edwin Arlington Robinson said he felt “doomed, or elected, or sentenced for life, to the writing of poetry.” His most famous poems are set in fictional Tilbury Town, which was modeled on his childhood hometown of Gardiner, Maine. The characters in his poems, like Robinson himself, are often loners or misfits. They live in communities where people feel pressure to conform and where creativity is misunderstood or simply ignored. Robinson’s poems focus almost exclusively on an individual or on individual relationships. His tone is a blend of irony and compassion toward his characters, many of whose lives end in personal failure and despair.

**Jack London and Nature**

From the age of nine, Jack London was helping to support his family through hard physical labor. His early experiences made him sympathetic toward the working class and convinced him that capitalist society was brutal and repressive. London was also drawn to Social Darwinism, a movement that—unlike Darwin himself—attempted to apply Darwin’s biological theories to human behavior. These ideas are important in several of London’s works, including his most popular novels, *The Call of the Wild* and *The Sea-Wolf*. London spent time in the Alaskan wilderness and the South Seas, and many of his stories demonstrate the power of nature over civilization: “Nature has many tricks wherewith she convinces man of his finity—the ceaseless flow of the tides, the fury of the storm, the shock of the earthquake, the long roll of heaven’s artillery.”

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**A man said to the universe:**

“Sir, I exist!”

“However,” replied the universe,

“The fact has not created in me
A sense of obligation.”

—Stephen Crane

**Stephen Crane and War**

In his writing, Stephen Crane was attracted to war and other forms of violent struggle. Though the Civil War had ended six years before Crane was born, he used it as the subject of his best-known book, *The Red Badge of Courage*. Later short stories express Crane’s belief in the necessity of courage, honesty, and poise in the face of an indifferent universe. In “The Blue Hotel,” Crane described humans as so many lice clinging “to a whirling, fire-smote, ice-locked, disease-stricken, space-lost bulb.” The pathos of human helplessness in the face of brute fact closes the story “An Episode of War” as a young officer reacts to the loss of his arm: “‘Oh, well,’ he said, standing shamefaced amid these tears. ‘I don’t suppose it matters so much as all that.’” In *The Red Badge of Courage*, Crane presents his hero, a young recruit named Henry Fleming, who responds to his first experience of a new, violent environment—battle.
from *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane

He was at a task. He was like a carpenter who has made many boxes, making still another box, only there was furious haste in his movements. He, in his thoughts, was careering off in other places, even as the carpenter who as he works whistles and thinks of his friend or his enemy, his home or a saloon. And these jolted dreams were never perfect to him afterward, but remained a mass of blurred shapes.

Presently he began to feel the effects of the war atmosphere—a blistering sweat, a sensation that his eyeballs were about to crack like hot stones. A burning roar filled his ears.

Following this came a red rage. He developed the acute exasperation of a pestered animal, a well-meaning cow worried by dogs. He had a mad feeling against his rifle, which could only be used against one life at a time.

He wished to rush forward and strangle with his fingers. He craved a power that would enable him to make a world-sweeping gesture and brush all back. His impotency appeared to him, and made his rage into that of a driven beast.

Buried in the smoke of many rifles his anger was directed not so much against the men whom he knew were rushing toward him as against the swirling battle phantoms which were choking him, stuffing their smoke robes down his parched throat. He fought frantically for respite for his senses, for air, as a babe being smothered attacks the deadly blankets.

**Reading Check**

**Comparing and Contrasting** How did the attitude of the Naturalists toward the place of humanity in the universe differ from that of the Transcendentalists?
Why It Matters

Between 1880 and 1910, a new type of writer appeared in the United States. New England writers no longer dominated American literature. Writers from the Midwest, the Great Plains, and the West expanded our country’s literary frontiers, presenting exciting, unfamiliar worlds to readers at home and abroad. Known as Regionalists or local colorists, these writers enriched our literature with new kinds of American landscapes, characters, and styles of speech.

The effects of Realism are widespread and can be seen in journalism, film, the novel, and painting. By challenging the conventions of Romanticism, writers like Wharton, Chopin, and Dunbar redefined the boundaries of acceptable content in literature and paved the way for future workers.

Beginning in the 1890s, literary Naturalism shone a bright but harsh light on the human condition. Naturalist writers presented life as a brutal, losing battle between individuals and the forces of their environments, which could be as diverse as an Alaskan wilderness or a Chicago factory.

Cultural Links

The influence of the American Regionalist writers on subsequent American literature has been enormous. Ernest Hemingway once said, “All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn.”

Combining vivid, realistic descriptions of California frontier life with sentimental plots, Bret Harte largely invented the genre of the Western.

Kate Chopin’s work is valued for its portrayals of attitudes toward race, class, ethnicity, and gender relations.

Stephen Crane was neglected for a time after his death in 1900 until writers began to recognize his experiments with subject, theme, and form.

Connect to Today

Use what you have learned about the period to do one of these activities.

1. Speaking/Listening Work with other students to research art and music from the late 1800s to the early 1900s. Choose a piece of art or a song and find a connection to the social and economic situation of the United States during this time. Present your findings to the class.

2. Visual Literacy Create a map showing the regions of the country that were represented by Mark Twain, Willa Cather, Kate Chopin, and Bret Harte. For each area, create an icon to represent the author and the region.

3. Writing How would the muckraking social reformers of this period—such as Jane Addams and Upton Sinclair—view city life in the United States today? Write a brief essay that explores this question.

OBJECTIVES

- Use appropriate appeals to support claims and arguments.
- Interpret the influences of historical context on a literary work.
- Organize and convert information into charts, graphs, or maps.
- Analyze and synthesize ideas in writing.

Try using this organizer to explore your personal responses to the poetry, short stories, and nonfiction in this unit.
PART 1

Regionalism and Local Color

“Elsewhere the sky is the roof of the world; but here the earth is the floor of the sky.”

—Willa Cather, Death Comes for the Archbishop

The Rise of Local Color Fiction

In 1871, Bret Harte signed a $10,000 contract with *The Atlantic Monthly* magazine, the highest sum ever paid to an author at the time. The impressive sale of Harte’s stories marked the beginning of the local color fiction boom. Still recovering from the devastation of the Civil War, readers welcomed the relief that Harte’s light-hearted tales of the California Gold Rush provided.

Writers culturally reunited the country by crafting stories about real people, small towns, and regional lifestyles.

After the political reunification of the North and South, the focus on national issues gave way to smaller, regional concerns. Writers culturally reunited the country by crafting stories about real people, small towns, and regional lifestyles. In many cases, local color fiction reflected old-fashioned values, as if authors were writing to remember the country before it had been ravaged by war.

The Importance of Setting

Setting was the most distinct feature of local color stories, which most often took place in rural towns. Authors depicted in meticulous detail the time, place, and historical background in which events in their fiction occurred. The setting of local color fiction spanned the continent, from Harte’s tales of California miners to Sarah Orne Jewett’s stories of country dwellers in New England. Jewett, a prominent local colorist, wrote about common people living in coastal towns: doctors, sailors, mothers, and wives. Her most famous book, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, was well received all over the nation. Local color writing appealed to a wide audience, regardless of its setting.

The Role of Character

While Harte and Jewett may have been among the first local colorists, the best known is Mark Twain. Twain’s “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” (page 484) continues to be one of the most popular works of local color fiction. Smiley, the story’s protagonist, is typical of characters portrayed in local color writing. Characters are usually small-town residents, shown in their everyday lives performing everyday tasks.

Smiley speaks with a regional dialect, another important trait of local color fiction. Twain, like many local colorists, peppered Smiley's dialogue with words and abbreviations unique to the area where the story takes place. For example, near the end of the story, Smiley exclaims, “Why, blame my cats, if he don’t weigh five pound!” The realistic dialogue helps shape the reader's impression of both the character and what the town might be like.

The Lives of Women

Women writers had a strong presence in the local color movement. Willa Cather’s “A Wagner Matinée” (page 520) relates the experience of a woman who gives up her passion for music in order to raise a family. Much local color fiction, especially from women authors, deals with the contrast between traditional values and changing perspectives. One of Cather’s contemporaries, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, wrote about women’s social roles in her short story “A Church Mouse.” Freeman’s characters struggle with the desire for independence as opposed to the safety of marriage. Her work was widely published in women’s magazines, which flourished in the late 1800s. The emergence of women’s local color fiction was also influenced by the woman suffrage movement, which had become active again after being halted by the Civil War.

RESPONDING AND THINKING CRITICALLY

1. Explain why you think local color fiction became so popular in the United States in the late nineteenth century.
2. Why did women writers have a strong presence in the local color movement?
3. How would you compare and contrast local color fiction with its predecessor, Romantic literature?
4. What are some examples of local color fiction that you know from books, movies, or television?
Realism and Naturalism

“There are two ways of spreading light: to be The candle or the mirror that reflects it.”

—Edith Wharton, “Vesalius in Zante”
The Two Faces of Urban America

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, despite the emergence of a growing middle class, rapid industrialization created two sharply contrasting urban classes: wealthy entrepreneurs and poor immigrants from Europe and Asia who provided them with cheap labor. Although dependent upon each other, these two groups seldom met, as they lived in starkly different neighborhoods. The wealthiest families established fashionable districts in the hearts of cities, where they built fabulous mansions.

By contrast, the majority of factory workers squeezed into dark, overcrowded tenements where crime, violence, fire, and disease were constant threats. U.S. writers of the time responded to and reflected these urban conditions in their novels, stories, essays, and articles.

“The entire metropolitan center possessed a high and mighty air calculated to overawe and abash the common applicant, and to make the gulf between poverty and success seem both wide and deep.”
—Theodore Dreiser
Sister Carrie

The Face of the Urban Rich

Two major Realist writers from the upper class who reflected and criticized its values, and who formed a famous literary friendship, were Edith Wharton and Henry James.

Edith Wharton was born in 1862 into one of New York’s most prominent families. Her interest in architecture prompted her to criticize and satirize the “conspicuous consumption” (a term coined by social critic Thorstein Veblen) that led to the fashionable, cluttered interior decoration favored by the members of her social class. Wharton’s early novel The House of Mirth (1905) uses architecture metaphorically, as her heroine Lily Bart’s descent from wealth into poverty is mirrored by a decline in the houses she is forced to inhabit.

Wharton’s older contemporary and friend Henry James was born into a distinguished Boston family in 1843. James became the master chronicler of the inner lives of his characters, and his subtle innovations in narrative point of view contributed to the literary technique that his brother William, the famous psychologist, called “the stream of consciousness.” James used this technique to probe the complex relationship between wealth and culture. One of his favorite themes was the confrontation between naïve, wealthy, uncultured Americans and highly cultivated and sophisticated Europeans, whose aristocratic civilization was in decline. James’s treatment of this theme reached its zenith in his late novel The Ambassadors (1903), in which the elderly, respectable American Lambert Strether is charmed by the pleasures of European civilization and learns too late that there is more to life than making money.

The Face of the Urban Poor

The plight of the urban poor was a favorite subject of the new group of Naturalist writers. Stephen Crane’s Maggie: A Girl of the Streets is a bleak study of life in
the slums of New York City. Although Crane later turned to other subjects, he retained his sympathy for urban characters such as Maggie.

Some writers focused their attention on the hardships of immigrants and ethnic groups who faced bigotry and discrimination as well as poverty in U.S. cities. Anzia Yezierska and Abraham Cahan wrote about the social, cultural, and political tensions experienced by Eastern European Jews living in New York's Lower East Side.

Perhaps the most famous writer to address the socioeconomic plight of the urban poor was Theodore Dreiser. Despite a mediocre education, his writing propelled him to the pinnacle of American Naturalism. In his first and perhaps greatest novel, *Sister Carrie* (1900), Dreiser tells the story of Carrie Meeber, a naïve country girl who comes to Chicago looking for work. While there, she endures the impersonal cruelty and loneliness of life in a large U.S. city at the turn of the century.

### Reformers and Muckrakers

A social reform movement arose in the late nineteenth century that was dedicated to providing better conditions for the urban working class. Perhaps the most prominent of these reformers was Jane Addams. In *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (1910), she tells how she turned an old home in an immigrant neighborhood in Chicago into a settlement house where neighborhood residents could learn to speak English, discuss political events, and hold celebrations.

A group of journalists and novelists known as “muckrakers,” a term coined by Theodore Roosevelt, began to critically examine the social, economic, and political system that created the huge gulf between the rich and the poor. In his book *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), Jacob Riis attracted the attention of President Roosevelt to the squalor of life in New York City slum tenements. The result was an improved water supply, child labor laws, and other improvements. *The Jungle* (1906), Upton Sinclair's exposé of the brutal and degrading working conditions in the meatpacking industry, led to the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906.

#### Literature Online

**Literary History** For more about the literature of urban America, go to [www.glencoe.com](http://www.glencoe.com).

**Viewing the Photograph:** How do the people in this scene compare with those of the previous page?

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**RESPONDING AND THINKING CRITICALLY**

1. In Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*, the protagonist believes that the city will provide her with new opportunities and a new life. Would you have wanted to live in a large city at the turn of the twentieth century? Why or why not?

2. What were Edith Wharton’s and Henry James’s main criticisms of the wealthy upper class in the United States?

3. What was the chief aim of the muckrakers? Do you think that they were successful? Explain.

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**OBJECTIVES**

- Analyze literary periods.
- Connect to cultural events.
- Understand Realism and Naturalism.