



1800s Literature Part I – Syllabus

Course Description: An excerpt-based class, students are introduced to primary works of literature from the early and middle 1800s, including poems by William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1812), Charles Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers* (1836) and *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), poems by John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892), *Jane Eyre* (1847), and *Moby Dick* (1851). All texts are included as part of the class; no materials are required for purchase.

Prerequisite: *Essay Basics* or equivalent experience writing five-paragraph essays.

Course Outline:

Week One: Welcome to the 1800s

- Intro to Poetry
- William Wordsworth
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Week Two: How Stories Can Change

- Reviewing the Oral Tradition
- The “Robinsonade”
- *The Swiss Family Robinson*

Week Three: Cliffhangers & Characterization

- Introducing Charles Dickens
- *The Pickwick Papers*

Week Four: Addressing Society

- *Oliver Twist*

Week Five: Literature and the Slave Trade

- *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*
- The Importance of Reading
- A Turning Point

Week Six: Poetry and the Slave Trade

- John Greenleaf Whittier
- Anti-Slavery Poems
- *Snow-Bound: A Winter Idyl*

Week Seven: Literature and Culture

- *Jane Eyre*
- A Controversial Character

Week Eight: Going Deeper

- *Moby Dick*
- Literary Devices
- Final Response

Grading Information: All assignments will be graded using *The Growing Writer Rubric* and averaged to receive a final course grade.



1800s Literature Part I

Lesson Six: Poetry and the Slave Trade

SAMPLE LESSON

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) was born on a rural homestead in Haverhill, Massachusetts to Quaker parents. Whittier grew up on the family farm—built by his great-great grandfather—with his brother and two sisters. Although Whittier received little formal education, he gained important life lessons on the farm—the values of family, morality, compassion, and hard work.

Without her brother's permission, Whittier's sister sent one of her brother's first poems to the Newburyport *Free Press*. The poem was published by editor William Lloyd Garrison on June 8, 1926, when Whittier was just nineteen years old. This was to be the beginning of a prolific writing career for John Greenleaf Whittier, who wrote hundreds of poems during his lifetime.

John Greenleaf Whittier was known not only for his writing but also for his political efforts and moral stance as he worked tirelessly for thirty years in the fight to abolish slavery. An excerpt from the poem below is quoted in Frederick Douglass' autobiography and Douglass calls Whittier the “slave's poet” (pg. 42).

“THE FAREWELL OF A VIRGINIA SLAVE MOTHER TO HER DAUGHTERS SOLD INTO SOUTHERN BONDAGE” – Whittier (1838)

GONE, gone, — sold and gone,
To the rice-swamp dank and lone.
Where the slave-whip ceaseless swings,
Where the noisome insect stings,
Where the fever demon strews
Poison with the falling dews,
Where the sickly sunbeams glare
Through the hot and misty air;
Gone, gone, — sold and gone,

To the rice-swamp dank and lone,
From Virginia's hills and waters;
Woe is me, my stolen daughters!

Gone, gone, — sold and gone,
To the rice-swamp dank and lone.
There no mother's eye is near them,
There no mother's ear can hear them;
Never, when the torturing lash
Seams their back with many a gash,
Shall a mother's kindness bless them,
Or a mother's arms caress them.
Gone, gone, — sold and gone,
To the rice-swamp dank and lone,
From Virginia's hills and waters;
Woe is me, my stolen daughters!

Gone, gone, — sold and gone,
To the rice-swamp dank and lone.
Oh, when weary, sad, and slow,
From the fields at night they go,
Faint with toil, and racked with pain,
To their cheerless homes again,
There no brother's voice shall greet them;
There no father's welcome meet them.
Gone, gone, — sold and gone,
To the rice-swamp dank and lone,
From Virginia's hills and waters;
Woe is me, my stolen daughters!

Gone, gone, — sold and gone,
To the rice-swamp dank and lone.
From the tree whose shadow lay
On their childhood's place of play;
From the cool spring where they drank;
Rock, and hill, and rivulet bank;

From the solemn house of prayer,
And the holy counsels there;
Gone, gone, — sold and gone,
To the rice-swamp dank and lone,
From Virginia's hills and waters;
Woe is me, my stolen daughters!

Gone, gone, — sold and gone,
To the rice-swamp dank and lone;
Toiling through the weary day,
And at night the spoiler's prey.
Oh, that they had earlier died,
Sleeping calmly, side by side,
Where the tyrant's power is o'er,
And the fetter galls no more!
Gone, gone, — sold and gone,
To the rice-swamp dank and lone,
From Virginia's hills and waters;
Woe is me, my stolen daughters!

Gone, gone, — sold and gone,
To the rice-swamp dank and lone.
By the holy love He beareth;
By the bruised reed He spareth;
Oh, may He, to whom alone
All their cruel wrongs are known,
Still their hope and refuge prove,
With a more than mother's love.
Gone, gone, — sold and gone,
To the rice-swamp dank and lone,
From Virginia's hills and waters;
Woe is me, my stolen daughters!

Whittier's anti-slavery poems were numerous, ultimately published in two collections—*Poems Written during the Progress of the Abolition Question in the United States* (1830-1838) and *Voices of Freedom* (1846). If you are interested in reading more of his anti-slavery poems, you can find many of them here: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/amverse/BAE0044.0001.001?view=toc>.

Throughout his writing, Whittier employs numerous literary devices to make his point. One of his poems, “Song of the Negro Boatmen”, is a great example of dialect. Read this excerpt below:

Oh, praise an' tanks! De Lord he come
 To set de people free;
An' massa tink it day ob doom,
 An' we ob jubilee.
De Lord dat heap de Red Sea waves
 He jus' as 'trong as den;
He say de word: we las' night slaves;
 To-day, de Lord's freemen.
 De yam will grow, de cotton blow,
 We'll hab de rice an' corn;
 Oh nebber you fear, if nebber you hear
De driver blow his horn!

Assignment 6A: Read each of the following anti-slavery poems by John Greenleaf Whittier, attached with this week's lesson.

- “Hymn”
- “Stanzas for the Times”
- “The Moral Warfare”

Assignment 6B: After completing your reading, choose **one** of Whittier's poems and complete the analysis questions below for this poem. Remember to use complete sentences throughout your responses! (You may wish to review the attached example as well.)

Poetry Analysis Questions:

1. **Details:** What is the poem's title? Who is the poem's author? Who is the poem's audience? What is the poem's setting? Do you see any forms of imagery or figurative language such as simile, repetition, alliteration, etc? Do you see any literal language?
2. **Patterns:** How many lines does this poem have? How many stanzas (groups of lines)? What is the rhyme scheme?
3. **Mood & Atmosphere:** What is the tone of this poem? Is it happy, sad, etc?
4. **Theme:** What is the theme or main idea of this poem?
5. **Vocabulary:** Were there any words in this poem that you did not know? If so, look them up and explain their definition.
6. **Connections:** What does this poem make you think of? How does this poem relate to your own experiences, another piece of literature or art, or the world around you?

Assignment 6C: Using Whittier's anti-slavery poems as inspiration, write your own poem in opposition to a historical or modern-day problem/injustice.

Although Whittier wrote poetry for much of his life, his work took on important changes after the Civil War. After having written hundreds of anti-slavery poems, Whittier felt that he had written too much on the subject and had written most of his anti-slavery works too quickly and primarily for political means. With this in mind, Whittier began to focus his poems on religion, nature, and rural life. The following poem is one such example –

“Forgiveness”

My heart was heavy, for its trust had been
Abused, its kindness answered with foul wrong;
So, turning gloomily from my fellowmen,
One summer Sabbath day I strolled among
the green mounds of the village burial place;
Where, pondering how all human love and hate

Find one sad level; and how, soon or late,
Wronged and wrong-doer, each with meekened face,
And cold hands folded over a still heart,
Pass the green threshold of our common grave,
Whither all footsteps tend, whence none depart,
Awed for myself, and pitying my race,
Our common sorrow, like a mighty wave,
Swept all my pride away, and trembling I forgave!

Whittier's most popular work, *Snow-Bound*, was published in 1866 and sold more than 20,000 copies. John Greenleaf Whittier was known as one of the Fireside (or Schoolroom) Poets, a group of men which included Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and William Cullen Bryant. Of this group of poets, Whittier was considered the most popular, because his work spoke to a large group of American people, even those who would not otherwise read poetry. People enjoyed Whittier's poems because of his "moral tone . . . , heroic or prophetic voice, . . . and characteristic optimism." (1)

To conclude this week, we will be close reading portions of *Snow-Bound* (we will not read the entire thing, as it contains 759 lines and some 4,800 words!), discussing the idea of mood in poetry. **Mood is the atmosphere of the poem, or the feelings and emotions evoked by the words/structure used.**

Assignment 6D: Read excerpts from John Greenleaf Whittier's *Snow-Bound*, attached with this week's lesson. Then, answer the questions below in complete sentences.

Discussion Questions –

1. One way that an author can create mood in a poem is through rhyme scheme and meter. Study the first eight lines of this poem. Write down the words that rhyme. Then consider – what mood do these words help create?
2. Another way to create mood in poetry is by using similes. Remember, a simile is a figure of speech involving a comparison between unlike things using *like*, *as*, or *as though*. What is the simile used in lines 39-40 of this poem? How does this simile contribute to the mood?
3. Yet another way to create mood in poetry is by using allusion, a reference to a famous person, place, or event in life or literature. In lines 63-92, what three allusions are made?
4. What is the mood in lines 116-142, and how does the author create this mood?

OTHER POEMS by John Greenleaf Whittier

that you may enjoy reading on your own –

- “An Autograph”
- “Barbara Fretchie”
- “Flowers in Winter”
- “Ichabod”
- “In School-Days”
- “The Barefoot Boy”
- “The Pumpkin”
- “What the Birds Said”

Source –

1. “John Greenleaf Whittier.” *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/john-greenleaf-whittier>.