

## 2 American Literature and Art

**TERMS & NAMES**  
romanticism  
Hudson River school  
transcendentalism  
civil disobedience

### MAIN IDEA

Inspired by nature and democratic ideals, writers and artists produced some of America's greatest works.

### WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Nineteenth-century writers such as Hawthorne and Thoreau laid the foundation for American literature.

### ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

As a young man, Washington Irving published articles that made fun of society in the early 1800s. Although he studied to be a lawyer, he eventually made writing his full-time career.

Irving wrote some of the first stories to describe America. For example, "Rip Van Winkle" tells of a man in New York State. Rip wakes up after a 20-year nap to find everything changed. He goes to the inn, which once had a picture of King George on its sign.

#### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

The red coat was changed for one of blue and buff, a sword was held in the hand instead of a sceptre [staff of authority], the head was decorated with a cocked hat, and underneath was painted in large characters, GENERAL WASHINGTON.

Washington Irving, "Rip Van Winkle"

While Rip slept, the Americans had fought and won their revolution!

Irving's work helped to win European respect for American writing for the first time. This section discusses other individuals of the 1800s who created uniquely American literature and art.

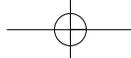
### Writing About America

Irving and other writers were influenced by a style of European art called **romanticism**. It stressed the individual, imagination, creativity, and emotion. It drew inspiration from nature. American writers turned their interest in nature into a celebration of the American wilderness.

Many books featured the wilderness. James Fenimore Cooper wrote five novels about the dramatic adventures of wilderness scout Natty Bumppo. One that remains popular is *The Last of the Mohicans*. Francis Parkman wrote a travel book, *The Oregon Trail*, about the frontier trail.



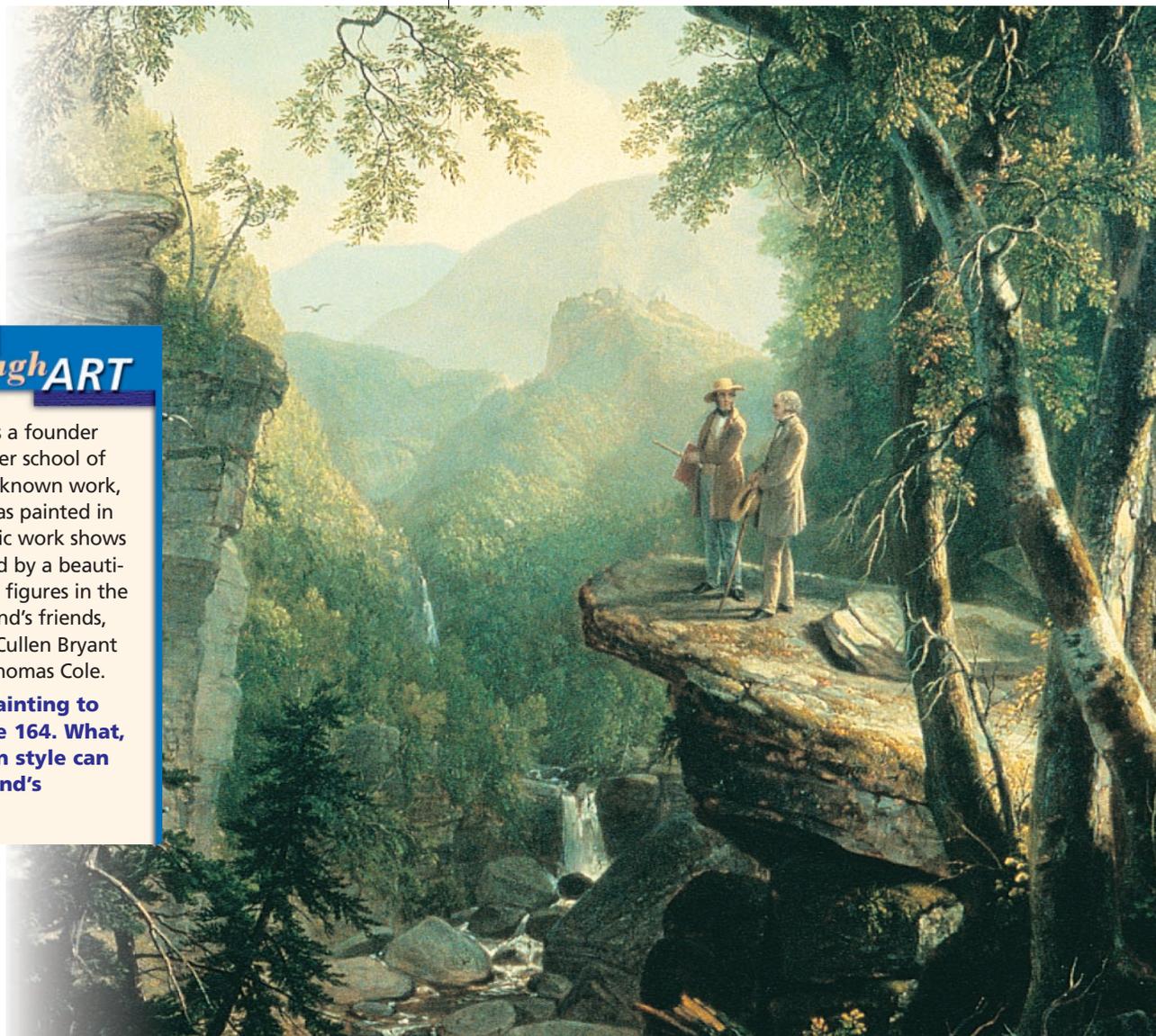
In another Irving tale, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," a spooky creature—perhaps a ghost from the Revolution—chases a teacher.



## HISTORY through ART

Asher Durand was a founder of the Hudson River school of painting. His best-known work, *Kindred Spirits*, was painted in 1849. This romantic work shows two artists inspired by a beautiful landscape. The figures in the painting are Durand's friends, the poet William Cullen Bryant and the painter Thomas Cole.

**Compare this painting to the one on page 164. What, if any, change in style can you see in Durand's painting?**

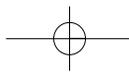


In addition, writers began to use a more American style. A teacher and lawyer named Noah Webster gave guidelines to that style in his *American Dictionary of the English Language*. Webster first published his dictionary in 1828. He later revised it in 1840. The dictionary gave American, not British, spellings and included American slang.

Other writers besides Irving celebrated America's past. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote many poems that retold stories from history. For example, "Paul Revere's Ride" depicted the Revolutionary hero's ride to warn of a British attack. Generations of students memorized lines from the poem, such as, "One if by land, and two if by sea; / And I on the opposite shore will be."

## Creating American Art

European styles continued to influence American artists, but some took these styles in new directions. One group of painters influenced by romanticism worked near the Hudson River in New York State. **Hudson River school** artists painted lush natural landscapes. Several members of this school went west for a change of scenery. For example, Albert Bierstadt took several trips to America's mountainous West. He produced huge paintings that convey the majesty of the American landscape. (See page 294.)



### Background

The National Audubon Society, whose goal is the protection of wildlife today, is named for John James Audubon.

Other artists also went west. John James Audubon came to the United States from France at age 18. Traveling across the continent, Audubon sketched the birds and animals of his adopted country.

Enslaved African Americans also contributed to American art. They made beautiful baskets, quilts, and pottery. Most of these slaves remained anonymous, but one did not. David Drake worked in a South Carolina pottery factory and signed the pottery he created. He was the only factory worker to do so.

## Following One's Conscience

By the 1840s, Americans took new pride in their emerging culture. Ralph Waldo Emerson, a New England writer, encouraged this pride. He urged Americans to cast off European influence and develop their own beliefs. His advice was to learn about life from self-examination and from nature as well as books.

Emerson's student, Henry David Thoreau, followed that advice. In 1845, Thoreau moved to a simple cabin he had built by Walden Pond near the town of Concord, Massachusetts. Thoreau furnished it with only a bed, a table, a desk, and three chairs. He wrote about his life in the woods in *Walden*. Thoreau said that people should live by their own individual standards.

*“No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature.”*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

### Reading History

#### A. Making

**Inferences** What do you think it means to “hear a different drummer”?

#### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

Emerson and Thoreau belonged to a group of thinkers with a new philosophy called **transcendentalism**. It taught that the spiritual world is more important than the physical world. It also taught that people can find the truth within themselves—through feeling and intuition.

Because Thoreau believed in the importance of individual conscience, he urged people not to obey laws they considered unjust. Instead of protesting with violence, they should peacefully refuse to obey those laws. This form of protest is called **civil disobedience**. For example, Thoreau did not want to support the U.S. government, which allowed slavery and fought the War with Mexico. Instead of paying taxes that helped to finance the war, Thoreau went to jail.

Another New England transcendentalist, Margaret Fuller, also called for change. In her magazine, *The Dial*, and in her book, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller argued for women's rights.

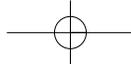
### Connections TO LITERATURE

#### “CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE”

In his essay “Civil Disobedience,” Thoreau wrote that “Under a government which imprisons any unjustly the true place for a just man is also a prison.”

Thoreau did land in prison when he refused to pay his taxes. According to legend, Emerson visited Thoreau in jail and asked, “Why are you here?” Thoreau replied, “Why are you not here?”

In the 20th century, Mohandas K. Gandhi of India and Martin Luther King, Jr., of the United States both used civil disobedience to fight injustice.



## STRANGE but True

### GIFTS ON POE'S GRAVE

Every year a mysterious figure dressed in black celebrates Edgar Allan Poe's birthday. He leaves three roses on the author's Baltimore grave at 3:00 A.M.

The puzzling tradition began in 1949, exactly 100 years after Poe's death. In 1993, a new black-coated visitor took over the tradition. The person who began the ritual was ill—and later died in 1999.

Although many witnesses watch the ritual each year, none ask the visitor his name. Poe's fans have always liked mysteries.

## Exploring the Human Heart

Like Thoreau, other writers broke with tradition. In 1855, poet Walt Whitman published *Leaves of Grass*, a book that changed American poetry. His bold, unrhymed poems praised ordinary people. Emily Dickinson lived in her family's home almost her entire life. She wrote poems on small pieces of paper that she sewed into booklets. Her subjects include God, nature, love, and death. Most of her 1,775 poems were published only after her death. Both Whitman and Dickinson shaped modern poetry by experimenting with language.

Fiction writers of the 1800s also shaped American literature. Edgar Allan Poe wrote terrifying tales that influence today's horror story writers. He also wrote the first detective story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue."

Nathaniel Hawthorne depicted love, guilt, and revenge during Puritan times in *The Scarlet Letter*. The novel shows that harsh judgment without mercy can lead to tragedy. Hawthorne may have learned that lesson from his family history. One of his ancestors condemned people at the Salem witchcraft trials.

Herman Melville won fame by writing thrilling novels about his experiences as a sailor. In 1851, Melville published his masterpiece, *Moby Dick*. This novel tells about a man's destructive desire to kill a white whale. Although the novel was not popular when it was published, it is widely read now. Several movie versions exist.

These fiction writers portrayed the harmful effects of cruel actions. Other people thought that individuals could alter society for good. Section 3 describes those reformers.

### Reading History

**B. Recognizing Effects** How did Poe influence the fiction that people read today?



## Section 2 Assessment

### 1. Terms & Names

**Explain the significance of:**

- romanticism
- Hudson River school
- transcendentalism
- civil disobedience

### 2. Taking Notes

Use a chart like the one below to list important individual writers and artists. For each one, name or describe one of his or her works.

Writer or artist	His or her work

Which one would you like to learn more about? Why?

### 3. Main Ideas

- What was romanticism and how did Americans adapt it?
- What is civil disobedience and what did Thoreau do that is an example of it?
- How did the writers of the mid-1800s shape modern literature?

### 4. Critical Thinking

**Evaluating** Why do you think the literature and art of the mid-1800s are still valued?

#### THINK ABOUT

- the way they feature U.S. history and culture
- their universal themes—themes that relate to all people in all time periods
- the way they reflect changes happening at that time

### ACTIVITY OPTIONS

#### ART

#### TECHNOLOGY

Choose an American painting, sketch it, and make it into a **jigsaw puzzle**; or make an **audio recording** of a museum guide's description of it.