Characteristics of Literary Periods and Movements

**Medieval period**: After the fall of Rome, Medieval literature focuses on Christianity (since the centers of learning were located in the Church and in monasteries). Since news was difficult to come by, since people didn't move, the ballad form, the epic form, and the Christian pageant or dramatic form is created here. There is a great focus on the difference between men & women and their relationship to God. The allegory and parable are popular literary forms and devices. Includes Middle English (1066-1500)

**Elizabethan Period (Renaissance) (1500-1670)**: A flourishing period of literature, particularly drama. The Sonnet form of poetry was all the rage. Sonnets are poems about love.

**Enlightenment (1700-1800)**: An intellectual movement in France that emphasized the importance of reason, progress, and liberty. The Age of Reason brings in the popularity of non-fiction and essays, as well as philosophy. Voltaire's *Candide*.

**Romanticism (1798-1870)**: Reaction against reason and the Neoclassical/Enlightenment periods, it celebrated nature, spontaneity, imagination, and subjectivity. The ode comes back into favor. As well as women writers. Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, various poets: Byron, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, etc.

**Gothic (1764-1829)**: A style of literature that focuses on tone, mood, and mysterious brooding settings. Characters succumb to base desires, temptation, and corruption.

**Victorian era (1837–1901)**: The period of English history between the passage of the first Reform Bill (1832) and the death of Queen Victoria (reigned 1837–1901). Though remembered for strict social, political, and sexual conservatism and frequent clashes between religion and science, the period also saw prolific literary activity and significant social reform and criticism. Notable Victorian novelists include the Brontë sisters, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, William Makepeace Thackeray, Anthony Trollope, and Thomas Hardy, while prominent poets include Matthew Arnold; Robert Browning; Elizabeth Barrett Browning; Gerard Manley Hopkins; Alfred, Lord Tennyson; and Christina Rossetti. Notable Victorian nonfiction writers include Walter Pater, John Ruskin, and Charles Darwin, who penned the famous *On the Origin of Species* (1859).

**Transcendentalism (1830-1860)**: An American philosophical and spiritual movement that focuses on a communion with nature. Similar in feel and style to the Romantics.

**Realism (1820-1920)**: The period of literature that attempts to portray life honestly, without sensationalism, exaggeration, or melodrama. Characters and plots are taken largely from middle class for middle class readers. Ordinary contemporary life. Dickens.

**Naturalism (1870-1920)**: When realism isn't real enough, this period describes social conditions, heredity, and environment as an inescapable force in shaping human character.

The **Bloomsbury Group** (1903-1964) : It was an influential group of associated English writers, intellectuals, philosophers and artists, the best known members of which included Virginia Woolf, John Maynard Keynes, E. M. Forster and Lytton Strachey. This loose collective of friends and relatives lived, worked or studied together near Bloomsbury, London, during the first half of the 20th century. According to Ian Ousby, "although its members denied being a group in any formal sense, they were united by an abiding belief in the importance of the arts". Their works and outlook deeply influenced literature, aesthetics, criticism, and economics as well as modern attitudes towards feminism, pacifism, and sexuality.
Existentialism (/ɛɡˈzɪstənˈʃəlɪzəm/) (1850–today): It is a term applied to the work of certain late 19th- and 20th-century European philosophers who, despite profound doctrinal differences, shared the belief that philosophical thinking begins with the human subject—not merely the thinking subject, but the acting, feeling, living human individual. While the supreme value of existentialist thought is commonly acknowledged to be freedom, its primary virtue is authenticity. In the view of the existentialist, the individual’s starting point is characterized by what has been called “the existential attitude”, or a sense of disorientation and confusion in the face of an apparently meaningless or absurd world. Many existentialists have also regarded traditional systematic or academic philosophies, in both style and content, as too abstract and remote from concrete human experience.

Lost Generation (c. 1918–1930s): A term used to describe the generation of writers, many of them soldiers that came to maturity during World War I. Notable members of this group include F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, and Ernest Hemingway, whose novel The Sun Also Rises embodies the Lost Generation’s sense of disillusionment.

Harlem Renaissance (1920s):
Genre/Style: Allusions to African-American spirituals, Uses structure of blues songs in poetry (repetition), Superficial stereotypes revealed to be complex characters
Effect/Aspects: Gave birth to “gospel music”. Blues and jazz transmitted across American via radio and phonographs
Historical Context: Mass African-American migration to Northern urban centers; African-Americans have more access to media and publishing outlets after they move north
Examples: Essays & Poetry of W.E.B. DuBois, Poetry of McKay, Toomer, Cullen, Poetry, short stories and novels of Hurston and Hughes; Their Eyes Were Watching God

The Beat Generation (1945–1965): A group of American writers in the 1950s and 1960s who sought release and illumination though a bohemian counterculture of sex, drugs, and Zen Buddhism. Beat writers such as Jack Kerouac (On The Road) and Allen Ginsberg (Howl) gained fame by giving readings in coffeehouses, often accompanied by jazz music.

Modernism: (1890-1945): A literary and artistic movement that radically breaks with traditional modes of Western art, thought, and morality. Major themes include isolation, alienation, subjectivity, and self-referentiality (often to illuminate the connection between reader and literature or viewer and art). Lots of stream of consciousness.

Postmodernism (1965–today): It is a late-20th-century movement in the arts, architecture, and criticism that was a departure from modernism. Postmodernism includes skeptical interpretations of culture, literature, art, philosophy, history, economics, architecture, fiction, and literary criticism. It is often associated with deconstruction and post-structuralism because its usage as a term gained significant popularity at the same time as twentieth-century post-structural thought.

The term postmodernism has been applied to a host of movements, mainly in art, music, and literature, that reacted against tendencies in modernism, and are typically marked by revival of historical elements and techniques.