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Washington Irving, “Sleepy Hollow”

1) Consider the point of view of the narrator of “Sleepy Hollow.” How is Irving directing our sympathies? How is he playing with common expectations of the protagonist in works of fiction?

2) What does Irving’s treatment of the physical environment contribute to our experience of “Sleepy Hollow”?
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James Fenimore Cooper and Catharine Sedgwick

1) Given the excerpts from Cooper included in our anthology, what kind of hero is Hawkeye (Natty Bumppo)? What are the essential elements of his character?

2) What does the narrative suggest about Cooper’s attitude toward Native Americans?–toward westward expansion?

3) What are we to make of the long sections of dialogue (and sometimes monologue) that enter into the chapters from Hope Leslie included in our anthology? What do they contribute to the development of the narrative? What other motives, besides the development of the narrative, might Sedgwick have had for writing these passages? [By the way, we will see this pattern again in The Scarlet Letter.]
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**Ralph Waldo Emerson**

1) In “Nature,” how does Emerson characterize the relationship between humanity and God?

2) Considering the various ideas explored in the assigned essays, to what extent is Emerson’s philosophy cohesive? What are some of the constants in his writings? Consider, for example, conceptions of divinity, or human achievement, or value, or beauty, etc. Are there also inconsistencies?

3) Referring to “The Poet,” scholar Bruce Michaelson calls Emerson's voice “aggressively male…. All about gaining dominion…. or playing some version of the wild bard that Emerson imagines as powerfully male,” or “the struggle to say the profoundest and most permanent possible thing, and to have the Last Word.” Do you think so?
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**Native Americans: Removal and Resistance**

1) Compare the voices (as translated) between Black Hawk and Petalesharo. What subtle differences do you hear in these voices?

2) What does Boudinot’s article (in English) from the *Cherokee Phoenix* (“To the Public”) tell us about the position of the Cherokee nation in the young republic?

3) What elements of Emerson’s letter to Martin Van Buran reflect the consciousness revealed in his essays?
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**Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Scarlet Letter** (double credit)

1) “The Custom House”—subtitled “Introductory to the ‘Scarlet Letter’”—occupies a curious space between fiction and non-fiction, the speaker claiming to assume “a personal relation with the public.” The material conditions of this speaker’s life bear a striking resemblance to the conditions of Hawthorne’s life, yet he (Hawthorne? Hawthorne’s invented narrator?) weaves fiction into this piece, most conspicuously in form of the found manuscript. What does this “introduction” give us? What is added to our experience of the novel by the notion that it is a found document (see esp. 467 f).

2) Some readers have seen the story of Hester Prynne as a testament to the improved condition of women between the mid-17th Century and the early 19th Century. How does Hawthorne’s treatment of Hester in particular, and female characters in general, support or complicate this reading?

3) Critics have made much ado about a one-sentence paragraph, “The scarlet letter had not done its office” (541); the controversy over how to interpret this sentence is fuel for fruitful discussion. What does it mean to you, in the context of the story?

4) What does Dimmesdale’s speech on the scaffold (Ch.XXIII) do for the structure of the novel, for the complexity of Dimmesdale’s character, and/or for the novel’s thematic considerations such as the “sanctity” of natural love, the disparity between appearance and reality, the nature of good and evil, etc.

5) What is Pearl’s function in story? Consider her reactions to Dimmesdale, her behavior with her mother, her words (not many), and what the narrator tells us, for example that her tears were “a pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it” (589).
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Edgar Allan Poe (Choose two)

1) How do Poe’s ideas in "The Poetic Principle" apply to his poetry? Identify some lines that illustrate or challenge his theory.

2) Can we read any of these stories allegorically, or as being fundamentally about the mind? What happens if we try reading "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Masque of the Red Death" this way—as allegories for mental states or emotions?

3) Choose any of the poems or tales and analyze the character of the speaker or narrator.

4) Poe is considered by some to be the inventor of detective fiction. Which elements in the selections that we have read can account for this reputation?

5) Where do you see Poe’s influence in subsequent literature, including popular media—such as film—in our own age?
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**Margaret Fuller** (Choose one)

1. Fuller’s review of Douglass, for all its praise, describes the Narrative as having “torrid energy and saccharine fullness,” and pauses to chide Garrison’s introductory remarks for their “usual over emphatic style.” What do these observations suggest about Fuller’s temperament? Do they dilute the praise of Douglass’s book or have some other effect?

2. A crucial paragraph in “Fourth of July” seems to veer away from the expected path of the essay—public history and public obligations—to emphasize that “private lives, more than public measures must be the salvation of the country.” Within the context of the essay, what is Fuller suggesting with this assertion? How does this sentiment resonate with other readings—Emerson, for instance?

**Slavery, Race, and the Making of American Literature** (Choose two)

1) In the excerpt from “Notes on the State of Virginia,” what is Jefferson’s assessment of Phillis Wheatley’s work? Within the context of this writing about the institution of slavery, how might we interpret his reactions?

2) In his discussion of African Americans and race slavery, Jefferson alludes to “the Creator”; Walker invokes Jehovah and “the Lord God of heaven”; citing Jefferson’s words in *The Declaration of Independence*, Garrison quotes the famous phrase “endowed by their Creator” but closes with a capitalized, ferocious vow, “SO HELP ME GOD!” Describe the differences you sense in the way the Almighty is invoked by each writer.

3) The shortest passage in the set is Sojourner Truth’s complete speech at the Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, and this speech is transcribed, as the speaker never learned to write. What does Sojourner Truth accomplish in this brief address, and what lessons can we learn here about the effectiveness of brevity?

4) Grimké relies heavily on the New Testament to support her argument for abolition; Martin Delany, however, makes powerful use of a narrative from the Old Testament. What relationships do you see between the tone and intention of these excerpts and their respective use of one Testament or the other?
Harriet Jacobs

1) In Chapter XXI, Jacobs uses the intriguing metaphor of the loophole; what does this mean?

2) If escaping to the North would have better served her, and her children, why did she stay?
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**Harriet Beecher Stowe** (Choose two or more)

1) Chapter I of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* opens with two white men in conversation, mixing business with a bit of front-porch moralizing. Think of this chapter as a reader might have encountered it in 1851, as an installment of a serialized novel—in other words, with no foreknowledge of where it is going. After you’ve finished the chapter, look back at its title and comment on any undertones or hints you might find there.

2) Considering the mixed cultural ancestry of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (the Puritan heritage, the founding of the republic, the values of the Enlightenment, and the values of transcendentalism), on what does Stowe’s moral fervor seem to be based? Latter-day Calvinism? Concord-style ethics? Rationalism and self-reliance? Some fusion of all of these?

3) Why, over the decades, has the character of Tom been variously admired and vilified for his temperament? Why does Stowe create this kind of character in the foreground, at this particular historical moment?

4) Why does Stowe give so much attention to genteel whites, who carry no whips and do no violence themselves and who have elaborate and sometimes eloquent excuses for their disinterest in the issue of race slavery? How might the portraits of these complacent whites be received by her audience? Which characters, in particular, might have the strongest effect.

5) In Chapter XIII, “The Quaker Settlement,” we have a vignette of a family on the north shore of the Ohio River, at the lower reach of the Underground Railroad. Eliza, who has escaped over the ice floes, listens to a conversation between Rachel and Ruth and remains largely silent. We know from previous episodes that Eliza is quite articulate; why is she quiet at this point? What might Stowe’s purposes be in unfolding the family conversation at such length?
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**Henry David Thoreau, “Resistance to Civil Government”**

1) How does Thoreau’s rhetoric (tone, writing style, argumentation) in “Resistance to Civil Government” compare with Emerson’s in “Nature” or “Self-Reliance”?

2) Is it possible to read Thoreau’s argument as anti-democratic? What do you think Thoreau would say about the U.S. federal government in 2012?
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**Thoreau: “Economy” from *Walden***

1) What are Thoreau’s practical concerns in “Economy”? Why does he decide to go to Walden, and why does he write the book?

2) Is it possible to read “Economy” as an analogy, as a “How To” manual? How might one apply his principles in our world?
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Walt Whitman

1) Is it true, what they say, that Whitman is a great Emersonian poet? In what ways does Whitman embody Emerson's philosophical and poetic ideals?

2) If it seems to some readers that all the rules and qualities distinguishing poetry from prose have been abandoned by Whitman, what can you identify in his work as being truly poetic?

3) What is the effect of Whitman’s use of repetition?
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Herman Melville

1) What do we know about the narrator of "Bartleby the Scrivner"? Might he be using the character of Bartleby as an evasion, a way of not looking at the emptiness of his own life?

2) What, if anything, is the matter with Bartleby? How are we supposed to feel about him?

3) On your first reading of "Benito Cereno," how successfully does Melville organize your sympathies and expectations for dramatic effect? At what point does the reader understand what is going on? Is the effect of Melville's storytelling dramatic only, or is there a political dimension to it?
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**Emily Dickinson**

1) What seems to be Dickinson’s relationship with the? How does she negotiate the tension between the Calvinist tradition and the antheistic tradition of her place and time.

2) Scholar and teacher Bruce Michaelson suggest that Emily Dickinson has many voices:
   In the teaching of poetry, and especially of nineteenth-century British and American “public” poetry up to this point, one explicit or implicit subtext is coherence of theme and temperament, the implication that one or two Bryant or Longfellow poems, well chosen, can provide a moral and psychological map for dozens or hundreds, or that you can follow a Whitman into the darkness of disbelief with full confidence that sooner or later he will bring you back into the sunlight. Dickinson presents us with a modern human being, an artist with a full range of moods and flashes of insight and joy and terror that do not “add up,” much as our own agglomerations of thought and feeling might not add up. A comfort with contradiction and dramatic contrast is important to a reading of Emily Dickinson.

   Write about some of the contradiction and contrast that you see in Dickinson’s poetry.

3) Dickinson and Whitman are often seen as “opposites,” especially in rhythms, word choices, the sense of who the speaker is and who the audience is, and the ultimate purpose of poetry. But can you find anything Whitmanesque in any of Dickinson’s poems? Consider mood, theme, rhetorical daring...