

# American Arts

## SECTION 2

### If YOU were there...

You are a teacher living in Massachusetts in the 1840s. Some of your neighbors have started an experimental community. They want to live more simply than present-day society allows. They hope to have time to write and think, while still sharing the work. Some people will teach, others will raise food. You think this might be an interesting place to live.

**What would you ask the leaders of the community?**

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** Great changes were taking place in American culture. The early 1800s brought a revolution in American thought. Artists, writers, and philosophers pursued their ideals and developed truly American styles.

## Transcendentalists

Some New England writers and philosophers found spiritual wisdom in **transcendentalism**, the belief that people could transcend, or rise above, material things in life. Transcendentalists also believed that people should depend on themselves and their own insights, rather than on outside authorities. Important transcendentalists included **Ralph Waldo Emerson**, **Margaret Fuller**, and **Henry David Thoreau**.

### What You Will Learn...

#### Main Ideas

1. Transcendentalists and utopian communities withdrew from American society.
2. American Romantic painters and writers made important contributions to art and literature.

#### The Big Idea

New movements in art and literature influenced many Americans in the early 1800s.

### Key Terms and People

transcendentalism, p. 443  
Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 443  
Margaret Fuller, p. 443  
Henry David Thoreau, p. 443  
utopian communities, p. 444  
Nathaniel Hawthorne, p. 444  
Edgar Allan Poe, p. 445  
Emily Dickinson, p. 445  
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, p. 445  
Walt Whitman, p. 445

### TAKING NOTES

Create a graphic organizer like the one shown below. Use it to take notes on the new movements in art and literature.

	Transcendentalism	Romanticism
What		
Who		

Walden Pond, where Thoreau lived for two years

## Art of the Romantic Movement



Emerson was a popular writer and thinker who argued that Americans should disregard institutions and follow their own beliefs. “What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think,” he wrote in an essay called “Self-Reliance.” Fuller edited the famous transcendentalist publication *The Dial*. Thoreau advised even stronger self-reliance and simple living away from society in natural settings. He wrote his book *Walden* after living for two years at Walden Pond.

Some transcendentalists formed a community at Brook Farm, Massachusetts, in the 1840s. It was one of many experiments with **utopian communities**, groups of people who tried to form a perfect society. People in utopian communities pursued **abstract** spirituality and cooperative lifestyles. Communities sprang up in New Harmony, Oneida, and many other places. However, few communities lasted for long.

### ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

**abstract**  
expressing a quality or idea without reference to an actual thing

### READING CHECK Drawing Inferences

Why did utopian communities last a short time?

## American Romanticism

Ideas about the simple life and nature also inspired painters and writers in the early and mid-1800s. Some joined the Romantic movement that had begun in Europe. Romanticism involved a great interest in nature, an emphasis on individual expression, and a rejection of many established rules. These painters and writers felt that each person brings a unique view to the world. They believed in using emotion to guide their creative output. Some Romantic artists, like Thomas Cole, painted the American landscape. Their works showed the beauty and wonder of nature in the United States. Their images contrasted with the huge cities and corruption of nature that many Americans saw as typical of Europe.

Many female writers, like Ann Sophia Stephens, wrote historical fiction that was popular in the mid-1800s. New England writer **Nathaniel Hawthorne** wrote *The Scarlet Letter* during that period. One of the greatest classics of Romantic literature, it explored Puritan

## CONNECT TO THE ARTS

Artists of the Romantic movement celebrated nature in their dramatic paintings. Their work was made popular by their leader, Thomas Cole. Other important painters of the era were Frederick Church and Asher Durand.

What words would you use to describe this painting?

- 1 The light in the painting has a delicate, glowing quality. Artists of the Romantic movement pioneered this technique.
- 2 The human presence in this scene is dwarfed by nature but is in harmony with it.

Asher Durand's *The First Harvest in the Wilderness*

life in the 1600s. Hawthorne's friend Herman Melville, a writer and former sailor, wrote novels about the sea, such as *Moby-Dick* and *Billy Budd*. Many people believe that *Moby-Dick* is one of the finest American novels ever written.

American Romantic authors also wrote a great deal of poetry. The poet **Edgar Allan Poe**, also a short story writer, became famous for a haunting poem called "The Raven." Other gifted American poets included **Emily Dickinson**, **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow**, and **Walt Whitman**. Most of Dickinson's short, thoughtful poems were not published until after her death. Longfellow, the best-known poet of the mid-1800s, wrote popular story-poems, like *The Song of Hiawatha*. Whitman praised American individualism and democracy in his simple, unrhymed poetry. In his poetry collection *Leaves of Grass*, he wrote, "The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem."

**READING CHECK** Summarizing Who were some American Romantic authors, and why were they important?

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** American Romantic artists and authors were inspired by ideas about the simple life, nature, and spirituality. In the next section you will learn about ideas that changed American society.

## Section 2 Assessment

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KEYWORD: SC7 HP14

### Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People

1. **a. Identify** What were the main teachings of **transcendentalism**?  
**b. Summarize** What was one **utopian community** established in the United States, and what was its goal?  
**c. Elaborate** Do you agree with transcendentalists that Americans put too much emphasis on institutions and traditions? Explain your answer.
2. **a. Recall** Who were some important American authors and poets at this time?  
**b. Explain** What ideas did artists in the Romantic movement express?  
**c. Evaluate** Do you think the Romantic movement was important to American culture? Explain.

### Critical Thinking

3. **Comparing and Contrasting** Review your notes on art and literature. Then copy the graphic organizer below and use it to show the similarities and differences between the two movements.

Transcendentalism

Similarities

Romanticism

### FOCUS ON WRITING

4. **Describing Artistic Movements** Two artistic movements are described in this section, transcendentalism and romanticism. Write these two movements in the first column of your chart. Then in the second column, write a brief description of each and explain how writings from each either described or influenced life in the United States.