In American Literature and Composition Honors, students examine the belief systems, events, and literature that have shaped the United States. They begin by studying the language of independence and the system of government developed by Thomas Jefferson and other enlightened thinkers. Next, they explore how the Romantics and Transcendentalists emphasized the power and responsibility of the individual in both supporting and questioning the government. Students consider whether the American Dream is still achievable and examine the Modernists' disillusionment with the idea that America is a "land of opportunity."

Reading the words of Frederick Douglass and the text of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, students look carefully at the experience of African Americans and their struggle to achieve equal rights. In addition, students explore how an individual copes with the influence of war and cultural tension while trying to build and secure a personal identity. Finally, students examine how technology affects our contemporary experience of freedom: Will we eventually change our beliefs about what it means to be an independent human being?

In this course, students analyze a wide range of literature, both fiction and nonfiction. They build writing skills by preparing analytical and persuasive essays, personal narratives, and research papers. Opportunities for self-directed study, including outside readings, open-ended journal entries, and free-form projects, challenge Honors students to use their creativity and critical thinking skills to gain independent mastery of reading and writing. Finally, in order to develop speaking and listening skills, students participate in discussions and prepare speeches. Overall, students gain an understanding of the way American literature represents the array of voices contributing to our multicultural identity.

Length: Two Semesters

Unit 1: The American Revolution

- Increasing Tension
- Declaring Independence
- Setting Up a Nation
- Wrap-Up: The American Revolution

Unit 2: Romanticism and Transcendentalism

- Whitman and Dickinson
- "The Raven"
- Emerson and Thoreau
- Wrap-Up: Romanticism and Transcendentalism

Unit 3: The American Narrative

- Humor and Subjectivity
- Formality in Personal Narratives

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- Diaries and Journals
- Wrap-Up: The American Narrative

Unit 4: Modernism and The American Dream

- The Rise of Modernism
- The Great Gatsby, Part I
- The Great Gatsby, Part II
- Wrap-Up: Modernism and The American Dream

Unit 5: Semester Wrap-Up

Unit 6: Modernism and Language

- Steinbeck and the Depression
- The Modernist Poets
- Experimenting with Language
- Wrap-Up: Modernism and Language

Unit 7: Redefining Home

- A Raisin in the Sun, Part I
- A Raisin in the Sun, Part II
- The Reaction to Change
- Wrap-Up: Redefining Home

Unit 8: Fractured Identities

- Vietnam
- Divided Loyalties
- Culture Clash
- Wrap-Up: Fractured Identities

Unit 9: The Influence of Science and Technology

- Humans and the Environment
- Humans and Media
- Humans and Machines
- Wrap-Up: The Influence of Science and Technology

Unit 10: Semester Wrap-Up

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