Dark Romanticism and the Gothic Literature movement
Learning Target: RL9

1. What is Dark Romanticism?
I know not how it was—but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible. --From “The Fall of the House of Usher” by Edgar Allan Poe
A literary subgenre of Romantic Literature that emerged from the transcendental philosophical movement popular in nineteenth-century America.

Works in the dark romantic spirit were influenced by Transcendentalism, but did not entirely embrace the ideas of Transcendentalism.
1. What is Dark Romanticism?
2. How are the Dark Romantics different from the Transcendentalists writing at the same time?

Notes Here!
Transcendentalism vs. Dark Romanticism

- The basic philosophy of the transcendental movement was a belief in man’s spiritual essence and his soul’s ability to transcend the physical.
- Dark Romantic works are notably less optimistic than Trans. texts about mankind, nature, and divinity.
- The Romantic era was characterized by flair, extravagance, emotion and imagination.
Transcendentalism vs. Dark Romanticism

- While both groups believe nature is a deeply spiritual force, Dark Romanticism views it in a much more sinister light than does Transcendentalism, which sees nature as a divine and universal organic mediator.

- Some, including Poe, Hawthorne and Melville, found Transcendental beliefs far too optimistic and egotistical and reacted by modifying them in their prose and poetry.
Transcendentalism vs. Dark Romanticism

Differences

Transcendentalist
- Saw divine goodness and beauty beneath everyday reality
- Embraced the mystical and idealistic elements of Puritan thought

Dark Romantic
- Believed spiritual truths may be ugly or frightening
- Reintroduced the dark side of Puritan beliefs: the idea of Original Sin and the human potential for evil.
# Transcendentalism vs. Dark Romanticism

**Similarities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcendentalist</th>
<th>Dark Romantic</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>True reality is spiritual</td>
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<td>Intuition is superior to logic or reason</td>
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<td>Human events contain signs and symbols of spiritual truths</td>
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I can describe the foundational works of eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century American literature. I can compare and contrast how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.

2. How are the Dark Romantics different from the Transcendentalists writing at the same time?

3. What are some characteristics of Gothic Romanticism?
Dark Romantics present individuals as prone to sin and self destruction, not as inherently possessing divinity and wisdom.

The natural world is dark, decaying, and mysterious; when it does reveal truth to man, its revelations are evil and hellish.

Dark Romanticism frequently show individuals failing in their attempts to make changes for the better.
Themes of Dark Romanticism

- A collection of works concentrating upon themes of horror, tragedy, the macabre and the supernatural.
- The success of this movement also relies on the fact that the human psyche is attracted in a subtle way to the fear, pain and tragedy.
- It has lead to the birth of the Gothic style and has greatly influenced music and art.
I can describe the foundational works of eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century American literature. I can compare and contrast how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.

3. What are some characteristics of Gothic Romanticism?

4. Who were some of the Dark Romantic authors, and what were their styles like?
Emily Dickinson

- A reclusive 19th century poet who lived in most of her adult life in isolation
- She was a deeply energetic, intense person
- She wrote and read widely but wasn’t published until after her death
- Her family organized and published her poetry, but it didn’t gain national recognition until 1955
Edgar Allan Poe

- Mother died when he was 2, he was adopted by a merchant and his wife.
- After taking up drinking and having to quit university, he joined the army.
- He eventually lived in New York, became a newspaper and magazine editor, and began publishing writing.
- His personal life was plagued with tragedy and he died suddenly of an unexplained illness on October 7, 1849.
Edgar Allan Poe

- Considered master of Gothic Romantics of in the United States
- Characteristics of his writing:
  - Weird settings (decaying castles or other secluded settings) for terrifying events.
  - Insane male narrators
  - Beautiful female characters that are dead or dying
Edgar Allan Poe

- Characteristics of his writing continued:
  - Involved extreme situations:
    - Buried alive
    - Murder
    - Physical and mental torture
    - Retribution from beyond the grave

- Poe believed that only in these extreme situations could you reveal people’s true nature.

- Poe explored the human mind searching for an essential truth
Nathaniel Hawthorne

- Born in Salem, Massachusetts to a family with a long New England history
- Changed his name from Hathorne to Hawthorne to separate himself from the legacy of judge Hathorne (witch trials)
- Friends with transcendentalists but was rather reclusive with his wife
- Works: Scarlet Letter, Minister’s Black Veil
Nathaniel Hawthorne

- Instead of looking into the human mind (like Poe) Hawthorne focused on the human heart under various conditions: Fear, Greed, Vanity, Mistrust, Betrayal.

- Hawthorne was also sensitive to the subject of secret sin and whether it should remain a secret or be out in the light.
Herman Melville

- Raised in a prominent New York family until his father’s death
- At age 12 he was attempting to support his family with odd jobs
- His adventures as a seaman inspired him to write
- Works: Moby Dick, Bartleby the Scrivner
Learning Target:
RL9

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4. Who were some of the Dark Romantic authors, and what were their styles like?

5. What is the legacy of the Gothic Romantics?
Dark Romantic themes still appear in stories, books, movies, TV shows, and comic books.

- Present-day horror stories and movies borrow images and themes from the original master of horror, Edgar Allan Poe.
- The conflict between good and evil and the effects of guilt and sin are major themes in current literature, popular writing, and television.
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5. What is the legacy of the Gothic Romantics?

6. What’s an easy way to remember the Dark Romantic characteristics?
Dark Acronymy

- Crazy Acting People
- People At their Worst
- Truth In Extreme Situations
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I can describe the foundational works of eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century American literature. I can compare and contrast how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.

6. What’s an easy way to remember the Dark Romantic characteristics?

7. What are some characteristics of the Byronic/Gothic hero?
“The death... of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetic topic in the world—and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover.”
--Edgar Allan Poe
Wait -- You’re Still There?
The Dark Hero Characteristics

Including but not limited to:

i. Issues with societal norms associated with expectations and class

ii. An outcast or outlaw

iii. Arrogant and/or Cynical

iv. Moody or unpredictable

v. Cunning, Clever, extremely intelligent or perceptive, sophisticated and well educated

vi. “Darker” attributes not usually assigned to heroes
The Dark Hero Characteristics

Including but not limited to:

vii. Mysterious with hidden or tragic past
viii. Charismatic and seductive
ix. Self destructive
x. Broody and introspective
xi. Morally ambiguous

Escapism -- Same as romantic escapism, but escape into darkness...
Read “One Summer Night” and decide is it a Gothic story and does it have a Gothic hero?