



**Otázka:** American Literature

**Jazyk:** Angličtina

**Přidal(a):** Prezu

### **Historical and Cultural context**

- Pre-Columbian era – little written work, stories and beliefs handed down generation by generation (The Native Americans shared their tales, legends and myths by word of mouth)
- 1607 – Jamestown, one of the first colonies founded
- During 1700s – immigrant population expanded westwards – results in conflicts with the Native Americans (the conflict described a century later in the book by **James F. Cooper – The Last of the Mohicans**)
- 18<sup>th</sup> century – Almanacs became popular – e.g. Benjamin Franklin's almanac
  - Almanac – includes the weather forecasts, puzzles, calendars, games, household hints and proverbs
- late 18<sup>th</sup> century – the Revolutionary War (lasted from 1775-1783) against British oppression breaks out
  - the Declaration of Independence written primarily by Thomas Jefferson is adopted and the whole conflict results in America being an independent country
  - the literature of that time is mostly anti-British
- 1860<sup>th</sup> the country went through the Civil War, ending with the abolition of slavery
  - a variety of authors was busy at that time
  - **Washington Irving** – humorous short stories and folk tales about Dutch settlers (**The Legend of Sleepy Hollow**)
  - **Edgar Allan Poe**
  - **Herman Melville** – his novel **Moby Dick** based on his real life experience as a sailor
    - obsessive hunt for a white whale
  - **Mark Twain** – he describes what the life is like along the Mississippi river (**The**

### **Adventures of Huckleberry Finn)**

- **Walt Whitman** – one of the greatest American poets of 19<sup>th</sup> century
  - introduces free verse, celebrates nature and human-self
  - **Jack London** – adventurous books, mostly about his experience from the Klondike gold rush (**White Fang**)
- 20<sup>th</sup> century – new laws introduced dealing with child labour and food regulation of food industry
- the authors of that time focused on social issues
- 1917 – the USA joins the WW1
- 1920 – Prohibition, 1930 – women get the right to vote

### **Between the Wars**

- **Francis Scot Fitzgerald** – wrote about people trying to follow the American Dream – to become wealthy and respected in society – **The Great Gatsby**
- **William Faulkner** – a Nobel-prize winner, wrote about American south- **The Sound and the Fury**- examined how the past, especially the era of slavery affected the present, he often uses long chaotic sentences to show the thoughts and feelings of his characters
- The Lost Generation – used for the authors influenced by WW1
- **Ernest Hemingway** – served as a war correspondent in WW1 and the Spanish Civil War
  - short stories about soldiers and other men of action
  - **A Farewell to Arms** and **The Old Man and the Sea**
  - a Nobel-prize winner
  - his style of writing is considered to be plain (easy to read)
- in 1930<sup>th</sup> America suffers from the Great Depression
- **John Steinbeck** – the author captures this period of time in his masterpiece – **Of Mice and Men** – often writes about poor people struggling to lead their decent life during the Great Depression
- President Roosevelt's New Deal helps the USA out of crisis and starts the period of prosperity which lasted till 1941
- 1941- the USA joins WW2 after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, women starts to work in factories on behalf of men who had to fight in the war
- an atomic bomb is used for the first time
- **Joseph Heller** – served as a bombardier during the war
  - used his experience from the war in his satirical novel **Catch 22**
  - a novel about a Polish woman who while imprisoned in a concentration camp, had to make a cruel choice – which of her children should live and which should be



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## Post WW2 period

- 1950s **the Beat Generation** starts to form
  - they rejected traditional society and wanted to acquire new experience through drugs, jazz music and Eastern mysticism
  - **Jack Kerouac** - celebrated the new lifestyle in the book - **On the Road** - describing his road trip around America
- the Vietnam War and the civil right movement in 60s also played an important role in the literature of that time
- 70s - Cold War and oil crisis
- 80s - Ronald Regan was the president at that time, he is given credit for helping to end Communism in Europe
- **D. Salinger** - **The Catcher in the Rye**, a story of a troubled sensitive teenager who runs away from his school in search of someone who'd understand him
- **Ken Kesey** - gained fame with his book **One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest** - a story of a man who tries to escape imprisonment by pretending to be mad, he's shocked by the inhuman conditions in a mental hospital, the book was made into an Oscar-winning film by Miloš Forman, starring Jack Nicholson
- **John Irving** - **The World According to Garp** - a novel characterized by a colourful plot, eccentric characters and humour
- **Toni Morrison** - an Afro-American author- wrote about racism, child abuse and slavery
- Jewish authors - explaining the conflicting relationship between modern society and Jewish tradition
- the beginning of 90s - America gets involved in the Gulf War
- The internet came into widespread
- 21<sup>st</sup> century - terrorist attacks, development of new technology (iPod, iPhone, E-readers...)
- Barack Obama elected as the first Afro-American president

## Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

- an American author, poet, editor, and literary critic

- he is considered part of the American Romantic Movement
- he is best known for his tales full of mystery and the macabre
  - the macabre = a piece of art having a grim and ghostly atmosphere, Macabre works emphasise the symbol of death
- he was one of the first authors who wrote short-stories and he is considered to be the father of the detective fiction genre
- he was the first author to try to earn a living through writing alone, resulting in a financially difficult life and career
- he had a difficult life since the very beginning, abandoned by his own father and having become an orphan at the age of two
- he married his 13 years old cousin, published his famous poem **The Raven**, his wife died because of tuberculosis 2 years after the publishing of the book
- Poe's death is as mysterious as his books because the cause of his death has never been revealed
- **The Pit and the Pendulum**
  - a short story about the torments endured by a prisoner of the Spanish Inquisition
  - The narrator of the story describes his experience of being tortured. The story is especially effective at inspiring fear in the reader because of its heavy focus on the senses, such as sound, emphasizing its reality
  - no supernatural force typical for Poe's work appears in the story

## **The Pulitzer Prize**

- a U.S. award for achievements in newspaper and online journalism, literature, and musical composition
- it was established in 1917 by provisions in the will of American publisher Joseph Pulitzer
- 20 categories, 10 000 dollars cash