**Early American Literary Movements**

**Classicism**

* Idealistic about reason and order
* Values emotional restraint, clarity, and harmony
* Believes the universe is governed by fixed, unchanging laws
* Focuses on universal principles rather than particular cases
* Nature is seen as a machine that could be rationally understood
* Truth can be discovered through scientific inquiry and reason
* Reveres the aesthetics of Antiquity, especially Ancient Greece
* Prefers line over color, straight lines over curves, and clear portrayals over mystery
* Beauty is reflected in balance and order
* Upholds tradition, social standards, and community projects

**Romanticism**

* Highly imaginative and subjective; not limited by reason or restriction
* Emotionally intense
* Individualism; the vision of a greater personal freedom for the individual
* Escapism; settings are often made up; if actual settings are used, the focus is on the exotic, strange, mysterious
* Nature is seen as a refuge and a source of knowledge or spirituality
* There is a combination of strangeness and beauty; aspiration; wonder; mystery
* Description provides a "feeling" of the scene
* Writer is interested in history or legend
* The heroism of early Americans; optimism of the frontier
* Common man as a hero; characters may be “larger than life”
* Plot contains unusual events, mystery, or high adventure
* Supernatural foreshadowing (dreams, visions)
* Ending is often happy
* The language is often “literary” (inflated, formal, etc.)

**Transcendentalism**

* An extreme form of Romanticism
* Primarily a philosophical and literary movement
* Characterized by the belief that the truest things are those that go beyond what can be seen. Truth is discovered by intuition rather than reason. People must “transcend” what their reason and senses tell them.
* Belief in the divinity of all people and primary importance of the human spirit
* Focus on the beauty of nature
* Reject material possessions
* Believe in the “oversoul” (a shared universal soul that unites all forms of being)
* Value individuality, non-conformity, freedom, self-reliance, simplicity

**Realism**

* Reaction against romanticism
* Protest against falseness and sentimentality
* Realism aims at an interpretation of the actualities of any aspect of life, free from subjective prejudice, idealism, or romantic color
* Realism is not concerned with the unusual
* Characters resemble ordinary people
* Value the individual very highly
* Writer is interested in recent or contemporary life
* Settings actually exist or have actual prototypes
* Plot is developed with ordinary events and circumstances
* Ending might be either unhappy or happy
* Writer uses ordinary speech and dialect in the common vernacular (the everyday language spoken by a people)
* Realism is the ultimate middle-class art; subjects often focus on ordinary life and manners

**Regionalism**

* Emphasizes a special geographical setting and concentrates upon the history, manners, and folkways of the area as these help to shape the lives or behaviors of the characters
* Accurate representation of its habits, speech, mannerisms, history, folklore, or beliefs
* Characters may become character types, sometimes quaint or stereotypical
* The setting is integral to the story and may sometimes become a character in itself. A test of regionalism is that the action and personages of a work called regional cannot be moved, without major loss or distortion, to any other geographical setting
* Plot: Contemporary critics said that "nothing happened" in these stories, particularly those by women authors -- and often very little does happen. Stories may include lots of storytelling and revolve around the community and its rituals.

**Naturalism**

* Is an outgrowth of 19th-century scientific thought following ideas that came from the biological determinism of Darwin's theory or the economic determinism of Marx’s
* Holds to the philosophy of determinism--the doctrine that everything, especially one's choice of action, is determined by a sequence of causes independent of one's will
* There is a struggle for survival and only the strongest will survive -- i.e. "the survival of the fittest."
* Humans are acted upon (and controlled) by outside forces beyond their control.
* Humans are seen as victims of fate or destiny.
* Humans have no control, no free will, and cannot understand the natural world.
* Human beings are animals in the natural world, responding to environmental forces and internal stresses and drives, none of which they can control or understand.
* Aims at a detached, scientific objectivity in the treatment of natural man
* Writers neither condemn nor praise humans for actions beyond their control. However, there is pessimism about human capabilities.