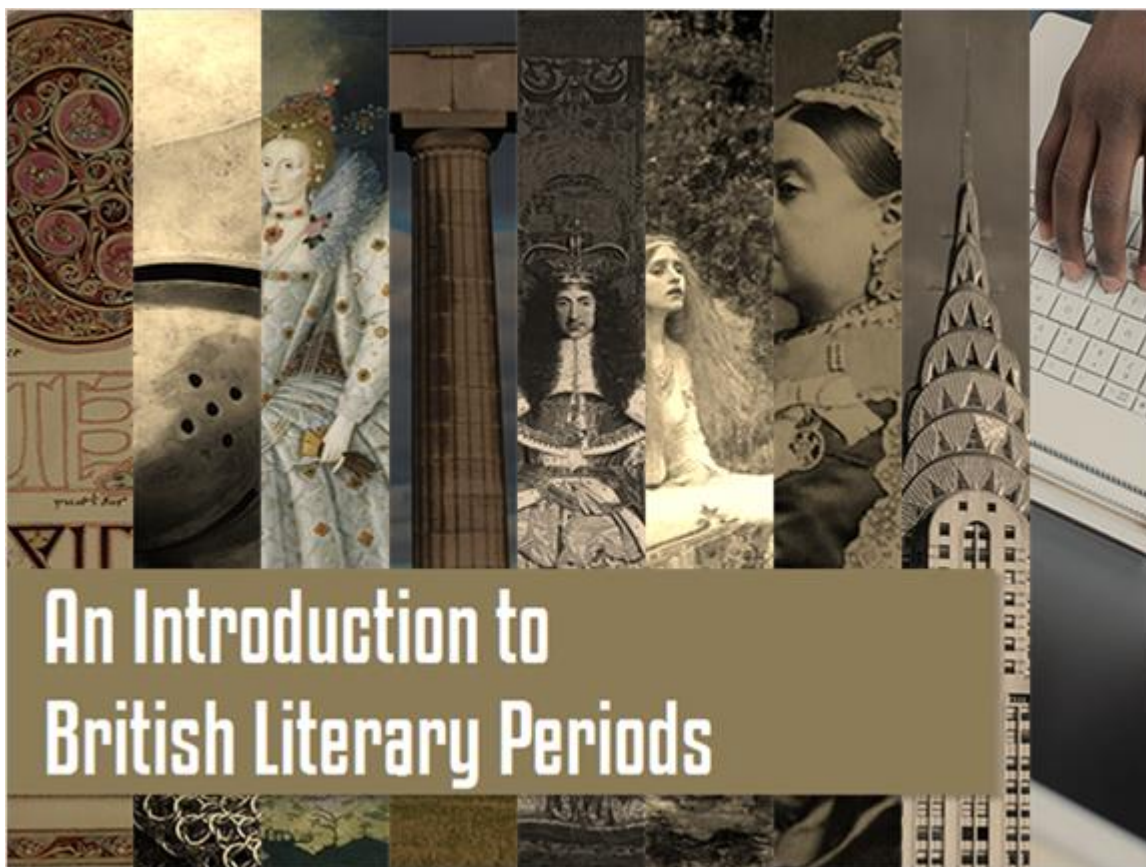


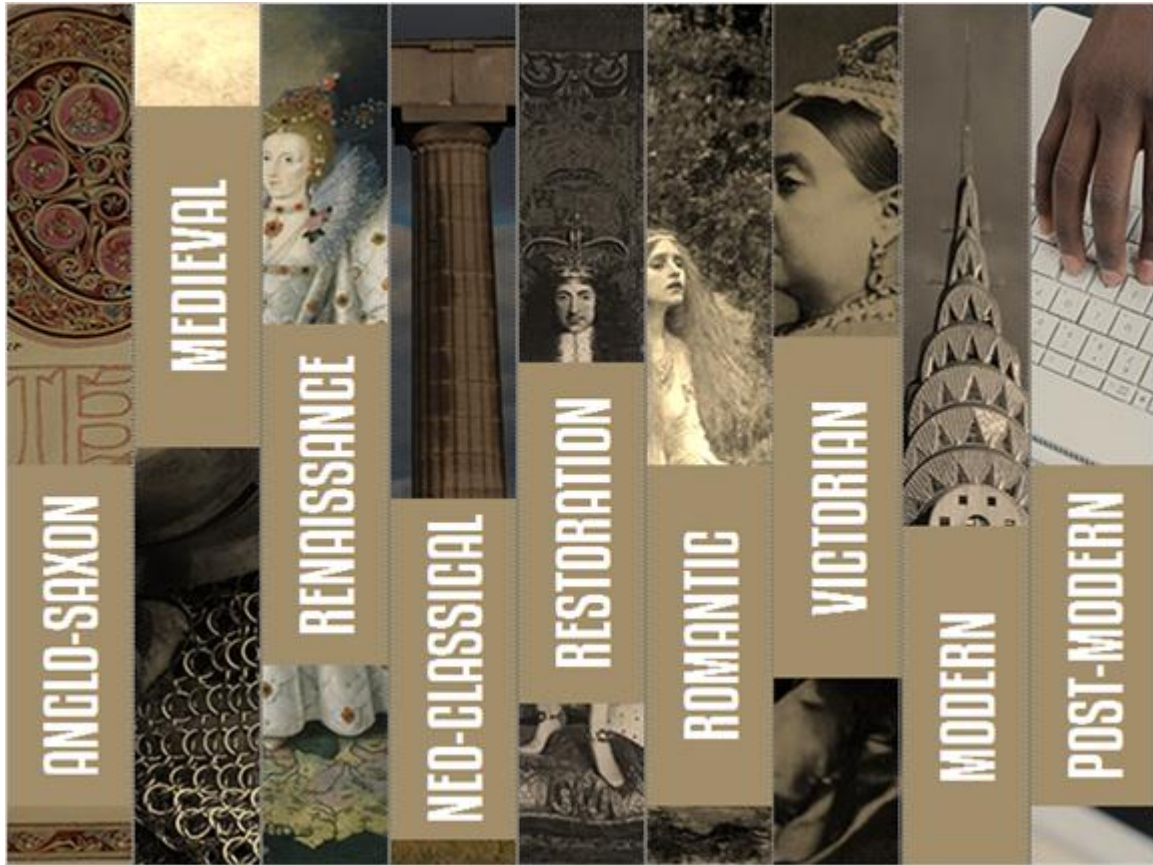
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An Introduction to British Literary Periods

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All of the British literary periods were influenced by important historical, political, social, and economic events. Click on each of the literary periods shown here for an overview of each. Make sure to view the information associated with each of the literary periods.

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The Anglo-Saxon Period was the first in British literary history. It lasted from 450 A.D. to 1066 A.D. Because of invasions by Germanic people into Britain, the Anglo-Saxon Period was filled with fighting. During this time, Old English was the spoken language. Literature during this time was not written; instead, it was passed down through generations by storytellers called scops.

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The Medieval Period began in 1066, when William of Normandy, a French duke, invaded England and took the crown. Social life during this period was defined by the feudal system, a social structure in which everyone had a certain position with specific job-related tasks. During this time, Middle English was the spoken and written language. In 1450, Johannes Gutenberg of Germany invented a printing press that used movable type. This allowed for the mass production and distribution of books.

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The word renaissance means rebirth. With books available to more of the population, artists and scientists embraced new ideas and charted a new direction for society. Many of the new ideas were rooted in the values of ancient Greece and Rome. The English Renaissance lasted from 1485 to 1660. It was during this period that Britain's most famous writer, William Shakespeare, composed his sonnets, plays, and other works.

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In a continuation of the Renaissance, writers during the Neo-Classical period drew on the “new classical” style of Roman and Greek models. It is during this time that journalism became a solid profession, and journalists saw themselves as reformers. During this time, England underwent the Age of Enlightenment, which was a time when scientists, artists, and philosophers created ideas and works based on reason and logic rather than religion. England became industrialized, and many people moved to the city and lived in poor conditions. The Neo-Classical Period lasted from 1660 to 1798.

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The Restoration Period was the first part of the Neo-Classical Period, and it lasted through end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century. During the Restoration Period, King Charles II was restored to the English throne, and England, Scotland, and Wales united to become Great Britain.

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The Romantic Period lasted from 1798 to 1832. As a reaction to the industrialization of the economy and the Age of Enlightenment, when reason was valued most, the Romantic Period celebrated the experience of the artist. During the Romantic Period, artists were dedicated to expressing social change, valuing the imagination, presenting nature as transformative, and focusing on personal experience and emotion.

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Lasting from 1833 through 1901, the Victorian Period was named after Queen Victoria of Great Britain. Like Queen Victoria herself, people during this period observed many social rules and valued decorum. The literature of this time is reflective of this shift in morality, as well as the social changes of the time, including reforms related to the rights of workers and women.

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The Modern Period began with the start of the 20th century and lasted until after World War II. During the modern period, people shifted away from the conservatism of the Victorian Period and embraced new ideas in science, psychology, and economics. Fashion became less formal and new forms of music, like jazz, became popular.

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After World War II, the people of Great Britain lived in a world in transition. After the devastation of two world wars, as well as the rise of communism, many of the accepted political and social ideas were shifted. Writers in the Post-Modern Period shy away from being associated with any specific “school” or “ideology.” Many of their stories do not end neatly, and they often use experimental literary techniques.