American Romanticism

- America’s first great creative period, aka the American Renaissance.
- A reaction to The Enlightenment/Age of Reason, the Industrial Revolution
- Growing tension between the North & South
• American writers looked to westward expansion and the frontier for inspiration, creating a break with European tradition.

• Folktales by regional writers offered glimpses of the supernatural. For example...

**Paul Bunyan**

**Pecos Bill**

**Johnny Appleseed**
• Basically, this is when American writers set themselves apart from the British. American literature had distinct characteristics, different from British literature.
The Age of Reason / The Enlightenment

Founded on
• Deism - belief in the existence of a god on the evidence of reason and nature only, with rejection of supernatural revelation
• Logic
• Inalienable rights

It also brought
• Industrialization, growth of cities, and factories
• American expansion (Lewis and Clark and Manifest Destiny)
• More encounters with Native Americans
## Romanticism: a reaction to the Age of Reason

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of Reason</th>
<th>Romanticism</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Realism</td>
<td>- Idealism/Utopia</td>
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<td>- Patrician Classicism ($Patricians were the wealthy, upper class)</td>
<td>- Glorification of the common man</td>
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<td>- Dominion (power) over the Native American</td>
<td>- Recognition of the nobility of the primitive – the “noble savage”</td>
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<td>- Logic, always facts to counter fear and doubt</td>
<td>- Imagination to engender faith and hope</td>
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The City was a Place of . . .

- The Rationalists saw the city as a place of industry, success, self realization, and civilization.

- The Romantics saw the city as a place of poor work conditions, moral ambiguity, corruption, and death.
The Journey: 
Romanticism was often seen as a journey.

- The journey from the city to the country
- The journey from rational thought to the imagination
Tenets (characteristics) of Romanticism

The 5 - I’s
I is for Imagination

- Imagination was emphasized over reason (more important than reason)
- Imagination was considered necessary for all art.
I is for Intuition

- Feelings & instincts were more valued than reason
- Emotions were important
I is for Idealism

• Idealism is the concept that we can make the world a **better place**
• Looking at life through “rose-colored glasses”
I is for Inspiration

• The Romantic is an “inspired creator” rather than a “technical master.”
• Being spontaneous is more important than getting it exactly right.
I is for Individuality

• Romantics celebrated the individual
• The individual is at the center of Life and Experience
• Women’s rights & the abolition movement were taking root during this time.
Other characteristics of Romantic literature

1. **The Past:** Romantics were fascinated by the past.
2. **Mystery & the Supernatural**
3. **Common Man** & the glorification of common life
4. **Nature:** nature reveals truth
5. **Emotion:** literature is about emotion & feelings