Realism vs Romanticism

- A literature movement in American, English, and European literature
- A response to excessive romantic and sentimental literature of 1820-1900

Romanticism—wrote about life as it “ought to be lived”; idealistic
- The Romance—depicted life as more picturesque, fantastic, adventurous, heroic—think of Cooper’s *Last of the Mohicans*

Realism—wrote about life as it really was; truthful accurate representation of America life as it was experienced by most Americans
- Uncompromising, literal representations of the material world and the human condition
- Writers explored characters, places, and events that never before seemed appropriate subject matter for literature

Naturalism

- An extension or intensification of realism; it introduces characters from the fringes of society whose fates are determined for them by heredity, environment, or bad luck
- Influenced by Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* in 1859; humans are not special, not created in God’s image; rather humans, like all creation, evolve because they adapt to their environment
- Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Jack London, Frank Norris are examples of naturalist writers

Regionalism

- An expression of the realist aesthetic; in other words, if writers are to be accurate in representing their world, they must include the peculiarities of their world
- Writers emphasized characteristics of specific geographic settings—the culture, speech (dialect), customs, landscape
- Writers saw a shift to a homogenized world because of railroad, newspapers, migration patterns after Civil War; thus, writers sought to preserve the distinctive ways of life and habits of speech in regions of America
- All regions were represented—South (Charles Chestnutt and Mark Twain), New England (Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary Wilkins Freeman), Creole/Cajun (Kate Chopin); West (Bret Harte; Mark Twain, Jack London, Ambrose Bierce)
- Many regional writers became adept at chronicling dialect; they recorded dialect with phonetic spellings to force readers to pronounce words as speakers of a regional dialect would

**“The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life.” – Henry James**

**“True Art Speaks Plainly” is a naturalist motto and the title of Dreiser’s essay on the importance of naturalist writing.**

**Spare the rod and spile the child, as the good book says. I’m a-laying up sin and suffering for us both, I know. He’s full of the old scratch, but laws-a-me! He’s my own dead sister’s boy, poor thing, and I ain’t got the heart to lash him somehow. Every time I let him off my conscience does hurt me so; and every time I hit him my old heart most breaks. – Mark Twain, *Tom Sawyer***