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Introduction

The eighteenth century is sometimes referred to as the Age of Satire, and the writings often highlight reason, wit, and irony. Improvements in printing led to magazines and newspapers; literacy increasingly became the norm for ordinary people. This unit opens with four writers from the period. Jonathan Swift today is most famous for “A Modest Proposal” and for *Gulliver’s Travels*, although he was also a poet. An Anglo-Irish minister, Swift was capable of biting satire that criticized both social customs and government. Alexander Pope was famous for wit, philosophy, and poetry. *The Rape of the Lock* is a mock epic that pokes fun at vanity. Daniel Defoe wrote a kind of journalistic fiction and was responsible for one of the most well-known stories ever written, *Robinson Crusoe*. Samuel Johnson, perhaps the most influential man of his period, created the first comprehensive dictionary of the English language.

With the turn to the nineteenth century came a literary revolution and the birth of English Romanticism, represented by giants in the history of poetry. Then the long reign of Queen Victoria (1837–1901) saw industrial development and empire-building and brought a plethora of writers of both poetry and prose, including fiction and nonfiction. This unit emphasizes the Victorians’ prose writings; you can find lessons about the major Victorian poets in *British Literature 3*.

Writings from these centuries sometimes pose a serious challenge to today’s students. Paragraphs can often be a great deal longer than those characteristic of modern writing; sentence structures can be quite convoluted; the vocabulary may seem difficult. You will want to point out that by the mid-nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution was under way, but the pace of living was not nearly as frantic as ours is today.

These two centuries of British literature include so many great writers and writings that it is necessary—and often difficult—to decide what to include and what to omit. As you and your students continue your journey through the great writings of the English Isles, you will want to stress ways that eighteenth and nineteenth century writers continue to impact novelists, poets, and dramatists today. The Romantics’ idealism and love for nature can exert a powerful appeal; on the other hand, reality has a way of intervening and often leads to less optimistic perspectives.

Devices of Satire

Directions: Listed below are some devices often characteristic of satires. Read the descriptions and the examples.

Device	Description	Example
Mockery	Derision; making fun of something	“Man is the only animal that blushes—or needs to.” —Mark Twain
Sarcasm	Harsh language that uses praise in a mocking way and is usually intended to hurt	Someone refers to a thin, weak person as a “real he-man.”
Overstatement	Hyperbole or exaggeration; saying more than one means	“I had to wait about a thousand years in the dentist’s office.”
Understatement	Saying less than one means	“Mount Everest is not a small climb.”
Parody	Imitation, often involving mockery	General MacArthur: “Old soldiers never die; they just fade away.” Parody: “Old blondes never gray; they just dye away.”
Verbal irony	Saying one thing but meaning another	On a cold, sleety morning, someone says, “Lovely weather we’re having!”
Bathos	A quick shift from the serious to the ridiculous	“I love my country, my family, my friends, and chocolate candy.”
Mock heroic language	Imitation and exaggeration of the literary style of an epic	Describing a shoe store clerk with language one would use about a hero like Beowulf

Another Song of Experience

Directions: Read the following poem by William Blake, and answer the questions.

A Poison Tree

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I watered it in fears,
Night and morning with my tears;
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,
Till it bore an apple bright.
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine,

And into my garden stole,
When the night had veiled the pole;
In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.

—William Blake

1. Why would someone discuss anger with a friend, but withhold the discussion from an enemy?
2. What seems to have been the purpose of the smiles mentioned in line 7?
3. What metaphor develops in the second stanza?
4. Whose fault is the enemy's death?
5. Does the poem have a theme? Why did Blake classify it as a "Song of Experience"?

Scientific Progress and Human Limitations

Directions: *Frankenstein* is much more than a scary horror story. In it Mary Shelley deals with serious issues regarding science and technology. These issues continue to be relevant today. Give your opinion regarding each of the following topics, and explain your reasoning.

1. In 1997 a scientific institute in Scotland announced the birth of Dolly, who was cloned from a cell from an adult sheep. This was the first time a mammal had been successfully cloned. The scientists and technicians involved in the project were immensely proud of their success. Do you think this was an important step forward for humanity?
2. Suppose scientists discovered a potential way to reintroduce dinosaurs as living species. How exciting this would be! People would be able to see how these creatures really look and act instead of relying on guesswork. Should the scientists go ahead with the project?
3. Some people advocate cryonics. The idea is that we could freeze a person or animal that is terminally ill and plan to resuscitate this being at some time in the future when science has come up with a cure. In your opinion, is this a good plan?
4. Technology has enabled us to put satellites into orbit for various purposes. The problem is that Earth now has a lot of “space junk” orbiting it; some pieces are tiny, some huge. As these objects orbit our planet, there is always the danger of collisions, and, as with automobile accidents, one collision can trigger another. Gravity can pull pieces through Earth’s atmosphere and send them plunging to the surface, with potentially disastrous results. Have the space agencies around the world overstepped themselves, as Victor Frankenstein did?
5. Despite their desire to have children, some couples find themselves unable to achieve a pregnancy. Doctors today can provide fertility treatments for both men and women. People can try in vitro fertilization and artificial insemination. Some women serve as surrogate mothers. Is this ability to influence human reproduction a good thing?

Web Quest: The Victorian Era

Directions: The Victorian era was a time of unprecedented change in every area of life. Find information about each of the following topics, and think of connections with our lives today.

Topic	Facts	Connections
1. Queen Victoria		
2. Great Exposition of 1851		
3. Great Famine of 1845–1848		
4. Ten Hours Act of 1847		
5. Charles Darwin		
6. William Booth		
7. Elementary Education Act of 1880		
8. Charles Dickens		
9. George Cayley		
10. The Tube in London		