



SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI COLLEGE

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TIRUCHIRAPPALLI – 620 002.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

STUDY MATERIAL

SEMESTER -V

AMERICAN LITERATURE

22ACCEN11

SUBMITTED BY

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B.A. ENGLISH

CHOICE BASED CREDIT SYSTEM – LEARNING OUTCOMES BASED
CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK (CBCS - LOCF)

(Applicable to the candidates admitted from the academic year 2022-2023 onwards)

ORE COURSE-XI Semester-V

AMERICAN LITERATURE

Code: (Theory) Credit:5

OBJECTIVES:

- To introduce learners to important aspects in various genres of American literature.
- To help learners get acquainted with the richness of American literature through representative works of poets, essayists and novelists.
- To enable learners to know more about American writers and their works.

UNIT – I POETRY:

Walt Whitman : O Captain! My Captain!

Maya Angelou : On the Pulse of Morning

UNIT – II POETRY:

Robert Frost : Birches

Edgar Allan Poe : Annabel Lee

UNIT – III PROSE :

Martin Luther King : I Have a Dream

Ralph Waldo Emerson : Self-Reliance

UNIT- IV DRAMA :

Arthur Miller : All My Sons

UNIT – V FICTION:

Toni Morrison : The Bluest Eye

TWO MARK QUESTIONS

1. Who is honoured by the speaker in the poem ‘O Captain! My Captain!’?

The sixteenth president of the United States of America, Abraham Lincoln, is honoured by the speaker in this poem.

2. Why are the people exulting?

The people are exulting because the ship is returning with the treasure it had sailed for after a difficult voyage. Allegorically, the people are exulting because the northern states of America led by Abraham Lincoln have won the American Civil War which means that slavery is abolished.

3. What kind of preparation has been made to welcome the captain?

The people have lined the shores of the port and are shouting with joy. They are waving flags and blowing on bugles. They have brought bouquets and ribboned wreaths to greet the captain.

4. Which country is represented as a ship in the poem? What figure of speech is it?

The northern states of America is represented as a ship in the poem. The figure of speech is a metaphor.

5. Why is the captain not responding to the speaker?

The captain is not responding to the speaker because he is dead.

6. Why do you think some phrases are repeated throughout the poem?

Some phrases are repeated in the poem to act as a refrain and focus attention on the person referred to.

7. What does the phrase ‘bleeding drops of red’ mean?

The phrase ‘bleeding drops of red’ refers to the drops of blood oozing from the wound.

8 Who is lying on the deck?

The ship’s captain is lying on the deck.

9 Comment on the tone of the speaker?

The speaker’s tone is one of utter despair.

10. How is the ship described?

The ship is described as victorious.

11 What does the phrase ‘voyage closed and done’ mean?

The phrase means that the ship’s voyage,

12. Why does the speaker call the trip fearful?

The speaker calls the trip fearful because the ship had to face many a storm and tempest during its voyage

13 What does the “ship” in the poem symbolize?

- a) The American navy
- b) The Civil War
- c) The United States
- d) The journey of life

14 What event is being celebrated in the poem?

- a) The end of the American Revolution
- b) The end of the Civil War
- c) The discovery of America
- d) The signing of the Constitution

15 Why does the poet repeat the phrase “O Captain! My Captain!”?

- a) To show excitement
- b) To express deep respect and grief
- c) To give commands to the Captain
- d) To describe the Captain’s actions

16 What poetic device is used in the phrase “fallen cold and dead”?

- a) Metaphor
- b) Alliteration
- c) Repetition
- d) Personification

17 Who is the poet of the poem "On the Pulse of Morning"?

- a) Emily Dickinson
- b) Maya Angelou
- c) Langston Hughes
- d) Robert Frost

Answer: B) Maya Angelou

18 What is the central theme of the poem "On the Pulse of Morning"?

- a) The joy of living
- b) The importance of history and change
- c) The beauty of nature
- d) The sadness of human life

Answer: B) The importance of history and change

19 Which historical event is hinted at in the poem?

- a) the civil rights movement
- b) the end of world war ii

c) the first man landing on the moon

d) The abolition of slavery

Answer: A) The Civil Rights Movement

20 Who does the poet speak to in the poem?

a) nature

b) the nation

c) the human race

d) The spirits of the past

Answer: C) The human race

17 What is the significance of the "pulse" in the poem?

a The heartbeat of life

b The rhythm of the earth

c) The rhythm of the morning

d) All of the above

Answer: D) All of the above

18 Which of the following is a symbol used in the poem?

a The river

b The sky

c The mountain

d All of the above

Answer: D) All of the above

19 What is the tone of the poem "On the Pulse of Morning"?

- A) Hopeful and optimistic
- B) Sad and mournful
- C) Angry and vengeful
- D) Indifferent and cold

Answer: A) Hopeful and optimistic

20 What does the poet suggest the reader should do?

- A) Forget the past
- B) Embrace change and move forward
- C) Seek vengeance
- D) Ignore the pulse of nature

Answer: B) Embrace change and move forward

21 "On the Pulse of Morning" was recited at the inauguration of which U.S. president?

- a) Barack Obama
- b) Bill Clinton
- c) George H.W. Bush
- d) Jimmy Carter

Answer: B) Bill Clinton

22 What does the "Morning" symbolize in the poem?

- a) the start of a new day
- b) hope and renewal
- c) a new era
- d) All of the above

Answer: D) All of the above

23 Who is the poet of "Birches"?

- a) William Wordsworth
- b) Robert Frost
- c) Emily Dickinson
- d) John Keats

Answer: b) Robert Frost

24 What does the poet see when birch trees are bent?

- a) Birds sitting on them
- b) Snow falling from them
- c) A boy swinging them
- d) Leaves turning yellow

Answer: c) A boy swinging them

25 What causes the birch trees to bend permanently?

- a) Human activity
- b) Ice storms
- c) Strong winds

d) Animal movements

Answer: b) Ice storms

26 Why does the poet prefer to think a boy bends the birches?

a) It reminds him of his youth

b) He dislikes ice storms

c) It is a symbol of strength

d) It shows man's power over nature

Answer: a) It reminds him of his youth

27 What is the tone of the poem "Birches"?

a) Angry and violent

b) Humorous and sarcastic

c) Reflective and nostalgic

d) Mysterious and thrilling

Answer: c) Reflective and nostalgi

Fill in the Blanks / One-word Answers:

28 The poet associates the image of a bent birch tree with a _____ swinging them.

Answer: boy

29 The poet wants to "get away from earth awhile" and then return to it. (True/False)

Answer: True

30 The ice storm leaves the birches permanently bent and _____.

Answer: bowed

31 The poet expresses a desire to escape from the _____ of life.

Answer: troubles / hardships / reality (any one)

32 The poem "Birches" is written in which verse form?

Answer: Blank verse

33 Who is the author of the poem "Annabel Lee"?

a) William Blake

b) Robert Frost

c) Edgar Allan Poe

d) Alfred Tennyson

Answer: c) Edgar Allan Poe

34. Where did the poet and Annabel Lee live?

a) In a valley

b) In a kingdom by the sea

c) In a forest

d) On a mountain

Answer: b) In a kingdom by the sea

35 According to the poet, why did the angels envy Annabel Lee?

a) Because she was rich

b) Because she was beautiful

c) Because of the love between the poet and Annabel Lee

d) Because she was wise

Answer: c) Because of the love between the poet and Annabel Lee

36 What happened to Annabel Lee?

a) She ran away

- b) She was kidnapped
- c) She became a queen
- d) She died

Answer: d) She died

37 How does the poet show that his love for Annabel Lee is eternal?

- a) By marrying again
- b) By forgetting her
- c) By sleeping by her tomb
- d) By moving to another kingdom

✓ Answer: c) By sleeping by her tomb

38 Who delivered the speech "I Have a Dream"?

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered the speech "I Have a Dream" on August 28, 1963, during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

39 What is the central theme of the speech "I Have a Dream"?

The central theme is the demand for racial equality, freedom, and justice for African Americans. It envisions a future where all people are judged by their character and not by their skin color.

40 What does Dr. King mean by the phrase "the content of their character"?

Dr. King means that people should be judged based on their personal qualities, morals, and behavior, rather than their race or skin color.

41 What historical document does Dr. King refer to in his speech?

He refers to the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), which freed enslaved people in the U.S., and also to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, which promise liberty and equality.

Describe the dream that Martin Luther King Jr. envisions in his speech.

SUMMARY

Walt Whitman : O Captain! My Captain!

The speaker expresses sheer excitement to the ship's captain, exulting over the successful return after a long, grueling journey. After braving fierce storms and relentless winds, the ship is finally approaching the harbor. Though weary from the demanding voyage, the mission has been a triumphant success. The ship is not yet in the harbor, but the shore is in sight, and the crew exclaims "land ahoy," signaling their proximity to safety. The sight of land brings an overwhelming sense of joy, with church bells ringing and people on the shore eagerly waiting to welcome the ship. The mood is electric, building with anticipation as the vessel nears its destination. The keel is lowered to steady the ship, a symbol of stability during the final approach.

However, as the ship draws closer to the harbor, a darker, ominous shift occurs in the poem, foreshadowing something tragic. The terms "grim and daring" suggest a twist in the mood. The once-celebratory ship, now approaching with heavy news, carries the weight of an unexpected loss.

At this point, the speaker's tone becomes deeply personal and sorrowful. The sailor's heart is broken, devastated by the death of the captain, who lies beside him in all his glory—yet lifeless. Blood stains the ship's deck, symbolizing the blood of Abraham Lincoln. The sailor, overwhelmed with grief, implores the fallen captain to rise from the dead, using apostrophe as he speaks to the deceased. The people on shore eagerly await the captain's arrival, anticipating a hero's return. They celebrate with flags raised in victory, flowers in hand, and joyous cheers. However, the sailor knows that the man they celebrate is no longer with them.

In truth, the captain is not the sailor's biological father, but the respect and reverence he holds for him far surpasses any familial ties. The sailor wishes that this heartbreak reality were merely a bad dream, but as the truth sets in, he realizes the damage is irreversible. He gazes at the dead captain, his heart heavy with anguish. The once-vibrant captain now appears pale and lifeless, his lips the color of death, and his pulse has stopped. The ship has safely docked, and the voyage is complete, but the sailor can no longer share in the joy of the return.

In the poem's final lines, the sailor addresses the celebratory crowd, who eagerly await the return of their captain. Using synecdoche, Whitman represents the American people at large, reflecting the nation's mourning for Lincoln. The sailor, now burdened with the painful news, struggles with the discomfort of sharing this tragic truth. As the victory celebrations come to an abrupt halt, the sailor faces the uncomfortable task of delivering the devastating news to the jubilant crowd.

Maya Angelou : On the Pulse of Morning

"On the Pulse of Morning" is a poem by Maya Angelou, written and performed for Bill Clinton's presidential inauguration in 1993. The poem serves as a powerful call to confront America's history of slavery, racism, and environmental degradation. It urges listeners to acknowledge the painful past in order to build a more promising future.

Angelou reflects on the struggles of earlier generations in what is now the United States, connecting their hardships with those of their descendants. She mentions the forced displacement and genocide of Indigenous Americans, the brutal transatlantic slave trade, and the hopes and struggles of immigrants arriving on American shores. The poem also celebrates the nation's rich diversity, highlighting the various cultural and ethnic identities that shape contemporary America.

The speaker in the poem adopts a fluid voice, embodying the perspectives of a tree, a rock, and a river. These natural elements act as witnesses to both human and pre-human history, urging people to embrace peace, unity, and knowledge over war, cynicism, and ignorance. The poem is written in free verse, consisting of thirteen stanzas of varying lengths.

"On the Pulse of Morning" received widespread critical praise. Mary Jane Lupton, a prominent critic, noted that Angelou's performance was a revival of the African-American tradition of oral storytelling, aligning her with the oratory traditions of figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Additionally, Angelou made history as the first Black person and the first woman to deliver an inaugural poem, following the tradition that began with John F. Kennedy's inauguration in 1961.

Robert Frost : Birches

Essay on Robert Frost's *Birches*

Robert Frost's poem "*Birches*" is a delicate exploration of youth, age, and the desire for escape, told through the imagery of birch trees bending under the weight of ice. Frost's skillful blending of nature with deeper philosophical reflections invites readers to meditate on the inevitable passage of time, the longing for simplicity, and the relationship between reality and fantasy.

Theme of Escapism

At its core, "*Birches*" is about the human desire to escape from the burdens of adult life and return to the innocence and freedom of youth. The speaker, who is observing a boy swinging on birch trees, reflects on how the boy seems to defy gravity and the constraints of the world around him. The bending of the birches, initially caused by the weight of ice, is transformed in the speaker's imagination into an act of voluntary escapism. Frost uses the image of the boy "swinging" on the trees as a metaphor for the way individuals sometimes wish to leave the

complexities of their lives behind and return to the carefree, playful days of childhood. This desire for a temporary escape is universal, as we all experience moments of longing for simpler times when life felt less burdened by responsibilities.

The Passage of Time and Aging

Frost's meditation on time is central to the poem's emotional depth. While the boy's swinging on the birches symbolizes the innocence of youth, the speaker also reflects on his own aging process. The bending of the trees, caused by the ice storm, becomes a poignant symbol of the passage of time and the toll it takes on both nature and human beings. As the ice forms and the branches bend, Frost paints a picture of the inevitable weight of years that accumulate over a lifetime. The trees may eventually return to their natural state once the ice melts, but the human desire to escape the burdens of time and aging is far more complex.

The speaker contrasts the childhood fantasy of swinging on birches with the harsh reality of adulthood, where such carefree moments become fleeting and almost unreachable. However, the act of imagining such a return to childhood becomes a form of solace, offering temporary relief from the frustrations of growing older. In this way, the birch trees act as both a literal and symbolic conduit to a more youthful, untroubled state of mind.

Nature and Its Dual Role

Frost's depiction of nature in "*Birches*" is multifaceted. The birch trees serve as both a real, tangible part of the natural world and a metaphor for emotional and spiritual states. The poem starts with a naturalistic description of the trees in winter, their branches weighed down by ice, which adds a layer of realism. This image of ice, both beautiful and destructive, introduces the tension between nature's harshness and its ability to evoke deeper reflections on the human experience.

However, as the speaker imagines the boy swinging on the trees, nature begins to take on an allegorical role, representing the desire for a return to youth and simplicity. The natural world, then, becomes a bridge between the harsh realities of the present and the innocence of the past. By personifying the trees and blending them with human desires, Frost creates a harmonious relationship between man and nature, where nature does not just mirror human life but also offers a kind of solace through its cycles and beauty.

The Speaker's Relationship with Nature

The speaker's interaction with nature is intimate and reflective, demonstrating Frost's ability to use nature as a means of personal exploration. His meditation on the birches is not only about the boy or the trees but also about his own personal journey through life. Frost carefully positions the speaker's gaze, creating a sense of longing and reflection, where the speaker wants to take a break from his own existence—just as the boy takes a break from the ground by swinging through the trees.

Despite this longing for escapism, the speaker is also acutely aware that such escapism cannot last forever. In the final stanzas, the speaker acknowledges that he can never truly return to the carefree days of youth. He realizes that while one might "love" the idea of swinging on the birches, one must eventually face the harsh realities of life, much like the trees that will eventually return to their original, frozen state. This realization brings a sense of acceptance: even though the speaker longs for a momentary escape, he knows that true peace lies not in returning to the past, but in accepting the present for what it is.

Conclusion: The Healing Power of Nature

In the final analysis, Robert Frost's "*Birches*" is a poem about the interplay between nostalgia, the passage of time, and the human need for escapism. It explores how individuals respond to the complexities of life and aging by drawing upon the simplicity and purity of childhood memories. The birch trees, both physical and symbolic, offer a momentary escape, yet the speaker ultimately accepts that life, like nature, must continue its cycle. Through nature, Frost teaches that we are both grounded in reality and capable of dreaming, and it is in balancing both that we find peace.

Frost's ability to combine vivid imagery with deep philosophical themes makes "*Birches*" not just a reflection on nature, but also a meditation on the human condition. The poem encourages readers to embrace both the beauty and challenges of life, finding solace in the natural world while facing the inevitability of time and change.

Edgar Allan Poe : Annabel Lee

Edgar Allan Poe's poem "*Annabel Lee*" is a haunting and emotional elegy that explores the enduring power of love, even in the face of death. Written in Poe's signature Gothic style, the

poem reflects his deep sense of loss and longing, themes that appear frequently in his works. Through lyrical language, repetition, and vivid imagery, Poe immortalizes his love for a young woman named Annabel Lee, who dies but remains ever-present in the speaker's heart and soul.

The poem is set in a "kingdom by the sea," a timeless, dreamlike place that symbolizes an idealized and eternal world of love. Poe uses this setting to emphasize the purity and intensity of the love he shared with Annabel Lee. He claims that their love was so strong and perfect that even the angels in heaven became jealous and caused her death. This supernatural element adds a mystical tone to the poem while also expressing the speaker's emotional pain and his need to find meaning in tragedy.

A central theme in "*Annabel Lee*" is the idea that **true love never dies**. Although Annabel Lee is physically gone, the speaker insists that nothing—not even angels or demons—can separate their souls. He says, "*And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side / Of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride.*" This reveals the speaker's eternal devotion and his inability to let go. The poem portrays love as a spiritual and almost obsessive force that transcends time, space, and mortality.

Poe uses poetic devices such as **repetition**, **rhyme**, and **alliteration** to create a musical, hypnotic rhythm that enhances the poem's emotional intensity. Repetition of phrases like "*kingdom by the sea*" and "*Annabel Lee*" evokes a sense of longing and obsession.

In conclusion, "*Annabel Lee*" is a deeply moving poem that celebrates love's eternal nature while mourning its tragic loss. Through symbolic language and emotional depth, Edgar Allan Poe captures both the beauty and sorrow of undying love

Martin Luther King : I Have a Dream

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s historic speech "*I Have a Dream*", delivered on August 28, 1963, during the March on Washington, is one of the most powerful and inspiring speeches in American history. It was a defining moment in the American civil rights movement and continues to influence the global fight for equality and justice. Through his use of powerful imagery, repetition, and moral conviction, Dr. King advocated for a world where people are judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

At the heart of King's speech is the dream of a racially equal and just America. He refers to the U.S. Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, calling them a "promissory note" to all Americans, including Black citizens. His dream envisions a future where children of all races can live and grow together in harmony and freedom. This dream, while deeply personal, reflects the shared hopes of millions of oppressed people in the United States.

Dr. King's use of repetition, particularly in the phrase "*I have a dream,*" gives the speech a poetic and persuasive rhythm. It emphasizes his message of hope and determination. He also uses vivid metaphors, such as comparing justice to "*waters*" and righteousness to "*a mighty stream,*" drawing from biblical imagery to inspire moral urgency and action.

The tone of the speech is both emotional and hopeful. Despite the pain and injustice that African Americans had endured, King refuses to give in to hatred. Instead, he speaks of love, unity, and nonviolent resistance. His message is not just for Black Americans, but for all of humanity.

In conclusion, "*I Have a Dream*" is more than a speech—it is a call to action, a vision of a better world, and a legacy of courage and leadership. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s words continue to remind us that true freedom and equality are only possible when we stand together in justice and peace.

Arthur Miller : All My Sons

Arthur Miller's play *All My Sons* is a powerful critique of the American Dream and a profound exploration of moral responsibility, guilt, and the consequences of personal choices. First performed in 1947, the play is set in post-World War II America and centers around the Keller family, whose past decisions come back to haunt them. Through the tragedy of Joe Keller and his family, Miller raises important questions about the conflict between self-interest and social responsibility.

The central character, **Joe Keller**, is a successful businessman who knowingly shipped defective airplane parts during the war, resulting in the deaths of 21 pilots. He justifies his actions by claiming he did it for the sake of his family and to secure a future for his sons. However, his actions reflect a deeper moral failure: choosing profit over human life. As the

truth is revealed, Joe's world unravels, and he ultimately realizes the tragic consequences of his decision.

The play's title, *All My Sons*, carries deep symbolic meaning. It reflects the idea that **all human beings are interconnected**, and that the lives of the 21 dead pilots should have been valued as much as Joe's own son. This realization is what leads to Joe's suicide, marking the climax of the play's emotional and moral conflict.

Miller uses the play to criticize a society that prioritizes **wealth, business success, and personal gain** over ethics and communal values. Through the character of **Chris Keller**, who believes in honesty and accountability, the audience is presented with a voice of conscience and idealism. Chris's disappointment in his father represents the generational and moral clash at the heart of the drama.

In conclusion, *All My Sons* is a deeply moving and thought-provoking play that remains relevant even today. Arthur Miller masterfully exposes the tragic cost of moral compromise and challenges us to consider our own responsibilities—not just to our families, but to society as a whole. The play is a reminder that true success comes not from profit, but from integrity and accountability.

Toni Morrison : The Bluest Eye

Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* is a deeply moving and painful exploration of race, beauty, identity, and the devastating effects of societal standards on the self-worth of Black individuals—especially young Black girls. Set in 1940s America, the novel tells the tragic story of **Pecola Breedlove**, an African-American girl who believes she is ugly and wishes for blue eyes, thinking that will make her beautiful, loved, and accepted.

At the heart of the novel is a powerful critique of **Eurocentric beauty standards**. Pecola internalizes the idea that beauty is defined by whiteness—blonde hair, light skin, and blue eyes. As a result, she begins to hate her own Blackness. Morrison shows how the media, school, family, and even other members of the Black community reinforce these damaging ideals. This self-hatred ultimately leads to Pecola's psychological breakdown, symbolizing the destructive power of racism and internalized oppression.

Morrison's use of **multiple narrators** and fragmented narrative structure allows readers to see the world through different perspectives—especially that of **Claudia MacTeer**, a young girl

who resists these beauty ideals. Claudia's voice provides contrast and critique, showing that not all Black girls succumb to the same sense of inferiority, but that many are still surrounded by harmful messages.

The novel also explores **themes of trauma, abuse, and neglect**. Pecola's family life is filled with violence and instability, and she is ultimately raped by her own father. Morrison does not present these events for shock value but to show the deep-rooted social and psychological damage caused by racism, poverty, and generational pain.

In conclusion, *The Bluest Eye* is a powerful and disturbing novel that challenges readers to confront the harsh realities of racialized beauty, internalized racism, and the loss of innocence. Through Pecola's tragic story, Toni Morrison urges us to reconsider how society defines beauty and to understand the importance of self-worth beyond appearance. The novel remains a profound and necessary work in American literature, especially in discussions of race, identity, and representation.