British literature timeline
(till the 19th century)

Old English literature
A legendary hero who kills powerful frightening creatures and becomes a king was celebrated in the Old English epic, Beowulf, written by an unknown writer in the 8th century.
The most important king of this Anglo-Saxon period, Alfred the Great (849 - 901) was also a scholar and writer. He supported the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle describing the life, history and language of this time.

Medieval literature
Geoffrey Chaucer (1340 - 1400) is considered to be the father of English poetry because he wrote in English rather than in French or Latin. His Canterbury Tales records the imagined conversations of pilgrims as they journeyed from London to Canterbury.

Renaissance and Reformation
The Renaissance in England culminated during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (ruled 1558 - 1603), a period of prosperity, successful sea voyages, and cultural activities. The Reformation of the Church in England from Catholic to Protestant was begun by Elizabeth’s father, King Henry VIII in the 1530s.

William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616), the world’s greatest playwright, wrote historical plays about Kings of England (Richard II, Henry V), comedies (Twelfth Night, As You Like It), tragedies (Romeo and Juliet, Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Macbeth), Kings (King Lear) as well as love poetry, in the form of sonnets. Many well-known English sayings come from Shakespeare’s work, and he had a great influence on the English language.

The English Revolution and Restoration
In 1640, a revolutionary struggle, The Civil War between the King’s army and Oliver Cromwell’s Parliamentary forces, began. In 1660, the bourgeoisie decided to restore the monarchy and Charles II (the son of executed Charles I) returned from exile in France.

John Milton (1608 - 1674) one of the greatest poets is celebrated for his powerful, rhetoric poetry and is famous mainly for his epic poem Paradise Lost. Besides poems, Milton published pamphlets defending civil and religious rights.

18th century literature
This century is the time of the Enlightenment, the ”Age of Reason”, when all branches of science were developed and resulted in great technical progress.

Jonathan Swift (1667 - 1745) uses his black humour and irony in his satirical pamphlets (The Battle of Books). His most famous work is Gulliver’s Travels, a satire on British society.

Daniel Defoe (1660 - 1731) is remembered for his book Robinson Crusoe, which is still one of the most popular books among children. In Moll Flanders, he gives a realistic picture of the life of a prostitute in London.

Henry Fielding’s (1707 - 1754) masterpiece, Tom Jones, is a novel about a rather controversial character of an adventurous sincere boy, who had no respect for the moral codes of society, but had a natural sense of justice.

Romantic literature
Literature at the end of the 18th century turned again to sentiments, traditions, and exotic settings.

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788 - 1824) represents the so-called ”Romantic Revolution.” His work is concerned with the freedom of the individual as well as nations (The Prisoners of Chillon).

Sir Walter Scott (1771 - 1832) took for his novels themes from Scottish history (Waverly, Rob Roy) and from English history (Ivanhoe).

Themes of horror and mystery appeared in prose called ”Gothic novels”.

Mary Shelley (1797 - 1851) wrote Frankenstein, which is the most well-known of the Gothic novels with the horror genre that we are so familiar with in films and on TV today.

Victorian novels
During the Victorian Age (Queen Victoria ruled from 1837 - 1901), novels in which writers described English society with all its characters became the most popular literary form.

There were many talented women writers: The Brontë sisters lived isolated in North Yorkshire. Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë (1816 - 1855) and Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë (1818 - 1848) were two of the most original novels of the day as they were very fresh and unconventional.

Charles Dickens (1812 - 1870) wrote novels where heroes and villains were taken from the hustle and bustle of Victorian London (Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, Great Expectations, Bleak House).

Thomas Hardy (1840 - 1928) wrote about life in the Dorset countryside. He depicted the tragedy of the common man in his struggle with the elements and the social system of the time (Tess of the D’Urbervilles).

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vocabulary
frightening [frɪtnɪŋ] - děsivý
epic [ˈɛpɪk] - epos
scholar [ˈskələr] - učenec
to support [səˈpɔːt] - podporovat
is considered to be [ɪz kəˈɜːzd tə bi] - je považován za
records the imagined [rɪkərds da ɪmˈdʒɪnd] - zachycuje mýšlené
pilgrim [ˈpɪlgrɪm] - poutník
saying [ˈseɪɪŋ] - řeč
forces [foʊrsz] - vojska, armáda
pamphlets defending civil and religious rights [ˈpæmflɪts dəˈfɛndɪŋ sɪv(ɪ)l ənd riˈlɪdʒ(ə)n(ə)ts] - pamphlety obránující občanská a náboženská práva
Enlightenment [əˈlaɪntmənt] - osvícenství
controversial [kəntrəˈvɜːs(ə)l] - kontroverzní, sporný
adventurous sincere boy [ədˈvɛntʃərəs sərˈni boɪ] - duchovně dobrodruh, jejichž vhodnost je zdůrazněna
moral codes [məˈrəul kəʊdз] - morální pravidla
sense of justice [sens əv dʒəstɪs] - smysl pro spravedlnost
is concerned with [ɪz kənˈɜːzd wɪð] - se zabývá
prose [prəʊs] - próza
fresh and unconventional [ˈfrest ənd ʌnˈkɒnvəntʃuəl] - svěží a nekonvenční
villain [ˈvɪlɪn] - padouč
hustle and bustle [ˈhʌstlənd bʌstlə] - rychlý šum

to depict [dɪˈpɪkt] - kreslit