

Foundation of American Children's Literature and its Famous Representatives

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Abstract:

This article discusses in detail the periods of development of American literature, the famous works created in those periods, and their authors.

Keywords: moral lessons, colonial period, Post-Revolutionary, fairy tale, adventure, fantasy novel.

Introduction. Children's literature encompasses many written and illustrated works specifically created for children. This genre includes books, stories, poems, and illustrations aimed at young readers, typically from infancy through adolescence. This type of literature has characteristics, such as age-appropriateness, themes, and language. Thus, content is tailored to the cognitive and emotional development of children of different ages. Moreover, common themes include friendship, adventure, family, and moral lessons. Furthermore, simple, engaging language is often used, with rhythmic and repetitive elements to aid comprehension and retention.

Discussion. American children's literature began to take shape in the 17th and 18th centuries. Before then, most literature for children was imported from Europe, particularly Britain. The foundational texts in American children's literature reflect Puritan values, the colonial experience, and later, a growing sense of national identity. We can divide this history into five groups:

The first period is called Early Colonial Period (17th Century). The earliest works were religious and instructional. They aimed to instill moral values and a sense of piety in young readers. *The New England Primer* (1680s): The most influential early textbook in colonial America, combining the alphabet with biblical lessons. John Cotton's *Spiritual Milk for Boston Babes in Either England* (1646): A catechism designed for children. The second period is called Imported Stories and Early Originals (18th century). During this time, most children's books in America were imported from England, including works by John Bunyan (*Pilgrim's Progress*) and Daniel Defoe (*Robinson Crusoe*). American authors began creating works specifically for children, reflecting colonial life. For instance: *The Prodigal Daughter* by Samuel Goodrich: An early attempt to blend moral lessons

with storytelling. The third period is called Post-Revolutionary America (Late 18th - Early 19th Century). The American Revolution fostered a sense of independence, which influenced children's literature. Stories began to reflect the ideals of democracy, education, and national pride. Noah Webster's *The American Spelling Book* (1783): A landmark in American educational literature, aiming to unify American English and instill patriotic values. Early magazines like *The Children's Magazine* (1789) started catering specifically to young readers. The fourth period is called "The Golden Age" (Mid to Late 19th Century). With the advent of mass printing, American children's literature diversified and grew. Writers such as Louisa May Alcott (*Little Women*, 1868) and Mark Twain (*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, 1876) redefined children's storytelling by creating relatable, realistic characters and entertaining narratives. Fairy tales and adventure stories also gained popularity, with American authors drawing inspiration from European traditions while adding uniquely American elements. The last period is called "20th Century and Beyond Literature". The early 20th century saw an explosion in children's literature, with publishers like *Macmillan* and *Harper & Brothers* leading the way. Writers like Dr. Seuss (*The Cat in the Hat*) and Laura Ingalls Wilder (*Little House on the Prairie*) introduced imaginative storytelling and a focus on American history and culture. The mid-20th century also brought a greater emphasis on diversity and social issues in children's literature, laying the foundation for the modern genre.

American children's literature has been enriched by numerous authors who have shaped the genre through imaginative storytelling, moral lessons, and cultural representation. There are so many prominent figures in the field and their iconic works. One of them is Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888), her notable works are *Little Women* (1868), a semi-autobiographical novel following the lives of four sisters during the Civil War. *Little Men* (1871): A continuation of *Little Women*, focusing on Jo March's school for boys. Alcott's works emphasized family bonds, moral growth, and the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society. The second representative is Mark Twain (Samuel Langhorne Clemens) (1835–1910). His famous work *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876): A humorous tale of a mischievous boy growing up along the Mississippi River. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884): Considered one of the greatest American novels, addressing themes of freedom and morality. Twain brought humor, realism, and social critique to children's literature, creating characters who resonated deeply with readers. The next American children's literature representative is L. Frank Baum's (1856–1919), works are *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) and *The Marvelous Land of Oz* (1904) The first work is a fantastical tale of Dorothy's journey to the magical land of Oz. The second one is a sequel exploring the adventures in Oz after Dorothy's return home. Baum's works established a distinctly American fantasy tradition, combining imaginative settings with relatable characters. Another famous writer is Dr. Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel) (1904–1991). His "*The Cat in the Hat*" (1957) is very famous, and it is a playful, rhyming story promoting early literacy. *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960) is a whimsical tale about trying new things, written using only 50 unique words. Dr. Seuss revolutionized early childhood literature with his rhymes, imaginative illustrations, and engaging stories. Laura Ingalls Wilder (1867–1957) is also famous with his *Little House on the Prairie* (Chronicles the struggles and joys of pioneer life, 1935) and *Farmer Boy* (Focuses on her husband Almanzo's childhood on a New York farm, 1933). Wilder's semi-autobiographical series captured the American frontier experience, blending history with personal narrative. Another writer is Margaret Wise Brown (1910–1952) and her notable works are *Goodnight Moon* (1947) and *The Runaway Bunny* (1942). *Goodnight Moon* is classic bedtime story featuring rhythmic language and soothing illustrations and *The Runaway Bunny* is a tender story of a mother's unconditional love. Brown's works emphasized rhythm and simplicity, creating calming stories for young children. Other famous works: *Charlotte's Web* (1952) and *Stuart Little* (1945) are written by E.B. White (1899–1985). *Charlotte's Web* (1952) is a tale of friendship and loyalty between a pig and a spider. *Stuart Little* (1945) is the adventures of a small mouse living in a human family. White's works combine whimsy with profound themes of friendship, loyalty, and resilience. The next author Madeleine L'Engle (1918–

2007). His famous works *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962): A science-fantasy novel about a young girl traveling through space and time to save her father and *A Wind in the Door* (1973): A sequel exploring cosmic battles and self-discovery. L'Engle introduced philosophical and scientific themes into children's literature, appealing to older children and young adults. Beverly Cleary (1916–2021) is also got his place in Children Literature. He wrote several books and his famous works are *Ramona the Pest* (Chronicles the humorous and relatable escapades of a mischievous young girl, 1968) and *Henry Huggins* (A series about a boy and his dog, 1950). Cleary's realistic portrayal of children's lives and emotions made her stories beloved by generations. Judy Blume (b. 1938) is also popular American writer. His *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* (1970) is a coming-of-age story addressing puberty and faith. His another book *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* (1972) is a humorous look at sibling rivalry and family dynamics. Blume's honest approach to sensitive topics like adolescence and relationships broke new ground in children's literature.

Conclusion. In conclusion, American children's literature has evolved significantly over centuries, reflecting the cultural, moral, and societal shifts of the nation. From its early roots in religious instruction and moral education during the colonial period to the imaginative and diverse narratives of the 20th century and beyond, this genre has continually adapted to meet the needs and interests of young readers. Iconic authors such as Louisa May Alcott, Mark Twain, Dr. Seuss, and Laura Ingalls Wilder have made profound contributions, each bringing unique themes, styles, and perspectives that resonate across generations. By blending entertainment with life lessons, American children's literature has not only shaped the literary landscape but also nurtured the emotional and intellectual growth of countless readers. Its enduring legacy reflects the universal power of stories to inspire, educate, and connect across time and culture.

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