



evropský
sociální
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MINISTERSTVO ŠKOLSTVÍ,
MLÁDEŽE A TĚLOVÝCHOVY



OP Vzdělávání
pro konkurenceschopnost



INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

Student's Worksheet

SOME OUTSTANDING AMERICAN WRITERS 2

William Styron, Joseph Heller, Ken Kesey, Beat Generation

Task One: Read the characteristics of the period.

POST WWII PERIOD

Some authors used their war experiences in their novels. Joseph Heller was a bombardier and used his experiences in his satirical novel *Catch-22*, a black comedy about military life.

William Styron described the devastating impact of war in *Sophie's Choice*, a novel about a Polish woman who, while imprisoned in a concentration camp was forced to make a cruel choice – which of her two children would survive and which would be killed.

Social changes continued through the '50s and '60s. Family life was important; so many people had children and settled in the suburbs. Writers, however, looked at it a bit differently. The 1950s gave birth to a literary movement known as the "Beat Generation". Authors rejected a traditional society and looked for new experiences through drugs, jazz music and Eastern mysticism. Jack Kerouac celebrated the lifestyle in his book *On the Road*, describing his road trip across America. No one can forget the experimental '60s when drugs and rock and roll inspired a generation of youth. The Vietnam War and civil rights also played an important role in many people's lives. Vietnam continued to dominate the 1970s as did the Cold War and an oil crisis. Ronald Reagan was the president during much of the '80s. Many credit him with helping to end Communism in Europe.

Ken Kesey gained fame with his first book, *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, a story of a man who pretends to be mad in order to escape imprisonment and is shocked by the inhuman conditions in a mental hospital. It was made into an Oscar-winning movie directed by Miloš Forman.

1. What were the most important historical events that influenced authors in the after WWII period?
 2. Which writers used the war or the impact of war as the theme of their books?
 3. Who were the Beatniks? What were they famous for? Can you name any other writers belonging to this literary group?
 4. Is there a theme (also very important) that is not mentioned in the text? Which one? Can you name any writers focused on this theme?
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Task Two: Who is who?

Match the pictures, the names and the life characteristics.

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. William Styron | 4. Jack Kerouac |
| 2. Joseph Heller | 5. Allen Ginsberg |
| 3. Ken Kesey | |



A) He managed to make himself into a legendary figure as a “guru” and spokesman for the “Beat Generation”. He uses free-form poetry to praise the free life-style. In his poems, he simultaneously records and expresses personal experience as well as provides sharp commentary on social and political problems. He is well known in the Czech Republic for his anti-communist poem *Kral Majales* (1965), which he wrote on a plane after being crowned King of May by Czech students, then seized by the Czech secret police and deported to London as the persona non grata. His other work includes e.g. *Kaddish and other Poems* (1961).

B) In 1953 he started writing his first novel inspired by his own war experience, *Catch-22* (1961), which became a literary sensation. It is still considered the best anti-war novel dealing with WWII. The novel shows, with “black humour” and irony, the absurdity of war represented by an absurd Air Force rule, called Catch 22. It says (simply said) that anyone who wants to get out of combat missions (air attacks) is not really crazy and thus cannot leave the army service. So the only characters who escape destruction are those who mastered the laws of absurdity.



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C) His writing style is influenced by the Zen idea of spontaneity. He wrote his novel *On the Road* (1957) in a hectic rush in a few weeks. It tells the story of a group of Beats travelling westward across America. Symbolically, they make a trip from the “unfree” city to the emotional, spiritual and psychic freedom. In his later novels, e.g. *The Dharma Bums* (1958), he again depicts people on their road to individual freedom. But their trips are enriched by a deeper, almost religious, meaning of “inner journeys” searching for the meaning of life.

D) He comes from the South, Virginia. He grew up in a traditional Southern family with its nostalgia of the old past, racial prejudices, suppressed desires and frustrated eroticism, later reflected in his novels. He is considered to be the heir of the Faulkner’s style. His best work is supposed to be *Sophia’s Choice* (1979), which confronts a young and very autobiographically drawn Virginian, beginning writer Stingo, with a Polish refugee, Sophia, who has undergone the horrors of a concentration camp, and her lover, Nathan Landau, a New York Jew who is a brilliant conversationalist and charming companion but turns out to be quite mad.

E) He grew up in Oregon and returned there to teach until his death in 2001. While he was at Stanford University, he became a volunteer in a program to test the effects of new drugs at the local hospital. During this time, he discovered LSD and became interested in studying alternative methods of perception. His *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* is based largely on his experiences with mental patients. Through the conflict between Nurse and McMurphy, the novel explores the themes of individuality and rebellion against conformity and the institutional power. Later he reached high profile as an LSD guru. He fled to Mexico after he was caught trying to flush some marijuana down a toilet. When he returned to the United States, he was arrested and sent to jail for several months.

Task Three:

- a) In pairs read the texts in Task Two again. Student A reads the texts A) and E). Student B reads the texts B), C) and D).
- b) Complete the charts in your worksheets with the facts from your texts. Then tell your partner about the authors you have just read about. Try to add as many details as possible. Then change your roles.

Author	
Life	
Themes/Influences	
Works	

INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

Style	
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Author	
Life	
Themes/Influences	
Works	
Style	

Author	
Life	
Themes/Influences	
Works	
Style	

Author	
Life	
Themes/Influences	
Works	
Style	

INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

Author	
Life	
Themes/Influences	
Works	
Style	

Evaluation:

How many correct answers have you had in the previous exercises?

- 100 – 80% Excellent 
- 80 – 70% Very good 
- 70 – 50% Good 
- 50 – 30% Average 
- Less than 30% Poor 

How much do you remember about the period after WWII, the authors and their works?

Tick :

I remember a lot

I need some revision