

Guide to Responding to Defining Romanticism, Part 1

In your answer, you should have mentioned some of the following points. They are divided into 10 essential points and then a list of other points, of which you should have mentioned at least 5. You should be most concerned with having mentioned and defined some of the key terms rather than echoing the exact language provided here. In other words, in evaluating your answer, try to be sure you get the gist of the idea.

While romanticism has been defined in many ways, some of the key ideas that most scholars address follow.

Essential

- Romanticism arose, in part, as a *reaction to the Enlightenment* (7 points) through its emphasis on *reason* (7 points) and its conception of an eternal order that could be accessed through *objective* methods as epitomized by science. (7 points)
- Instead, romanticism emphasizes the *subjective*, the perception of the individual (7 points), as the starting point for exploring the world and the role of the *imagination* (7 points) in creating art and discovering truth.
- Romanticism elevates the *natural* over the social (7 points) and conceives of undisturbed nature as the foundation and source of *truth*, which sometimes leads to viewing it as a kind of *naturalistic religion*. (7 points)
- Like the gothic and sentimental novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, romanticism valued *emotion* above logical reflection and attempted both to capture and recreate emotional reactions. (7 points)
- Following earlier thinkers such as Rousseau, romanticism tended to view humans in their *primitive state* as *innocent and noble* and to see society as a corrupting influence on human nature. This tendency can be seen in romanticism's celebration of supposedly primitive or uneducated peoples, whether American Indians or Scottish highlanders, children or rustic farm workers. (7 points)
- The romantic *artist* often conceived of himself or herself as a special *seer or prophet*, who had a message to correct society, either politically or spiritually or both. (7 points)

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Page 1 of 3

Other Possible Points

You should have mentioned 5 of the following 9; each is worth 6 points.

- For the romantics, the *French Revolution* and its aftermath – seen as epitomizing the Enlightenment’s faith in human progress and the possibility of a more egalitarian, just society – was central to their understanding of politics and society.
- Many romantics saw the *Industrial Revolution* and the development of *capitalism* as antithetical to all they believed, as they fostered mass conformity and an emphasis on material wealth rather than individual spiritual growth and expression.
- Romanticism was fascinated by both the most *common*, particularly working people and people seen as most connected to nature, and the *exotic*, especially non-European peoples who were seen to provide an alternative to a stultified, materialistic culture.
- British romanticism is particularly known for *lyric poetry*, which most often gives expression to the individual, particularly his or her reflections and feelings.
- Romantic poetry is usually marked by the extensive use of *symbols* to connect individual truth and facts with nature.
- The *romantic hero*, as epitomized by the *Byronic hero*, did not display his heroism through his virtue and his devotion to his community but rather through his alienation from society and his willingness to suffer in order to live by his own rules.
- Romanticism often was interested in *folklore and legends*, especially ones that seemed to speak to the spirit of the nation’s people.
- Along with that interest, romanticism often emphasized the importance of *national traits* and frequently imagined art as *national expression* as opposed to speaking, primarily, to universal truths.
- Romanticism can be aligned with the rise of the *bourgeoisie*, with their emphasis on the individual, individual self-fulfillment, and individual conscience over community, honor, and traditional morality.

After scoring your answers, use the following guide to help you evaluate your work:

90–100 points: Great job! You have clearly formulated a good and thorough working definition of romanticism.

80–89 points: Good work. You have got a solid grasp of the key features of romanticism and are well-prepared for the unit that follows.

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70–79 points: You clearly have begun to develop a broad understanding of what romanticism is taken to comprise. If you were particularly weaker on one area or another, you probably should review the pertinent materials.

Under 70 points: You should review the pertinent materials mentioned above before moving on. Consider posting to the discussion board for help from your peers if you are having difficulty grasping particular ideas.

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Page 3 of 3