Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_\_

**The Romantic Era (1850 – 1920)**

**Reasons, Literature, and Language**

**Directions:** Read the following article. As you read, respond to the comprehension questions that follow. Write the responses onto your own sheet of paper. Submit it before you leave class today.

Great change swept the Western world at the end of the 18th century. A successful revolution in America and an ongoing one in France shattered the political stability of the day. In Britain, revolutions in industry and agriculture rocked the social and economic structure of the nation. Reflecting and responding to these dramatic changes was a movement that came to be called Romanticism, which dominated Western intellectual and artistic life in the early 19th century.

Romanticism was an outgrowth of 18th century neoclassicism as well as a reaction against it. The spiritual father of the movement was the French Enlightenment thinker Jean Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau’s argument that human society is based on a contract between the government and the governed echoed earlier ideas of England’s John Locke and helped inspire the French Revolution. Rousseau attributed evil not to human nature but to society, insisting that in the natural state a human being was essentially good and happy—a “noble savage”. This idealization of nature and human beings became basic tenets of romantic thinking. Also basic was an emphasis on the individual, the personal, and the emotional—in sharp contrast to the emphasis on society, science, and reason that had been at the root of neoclassical thought.

Literary Romanticism was pioneered in Germany by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and in Britain by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. However, unlike the artistic ideals of neoclassicism, those of Romanticism did not reflect the mainstream views of British society. During its peak period from 1798 to 1832, while the political instability and violence emanating from continental Europe prompted a conservative reaction throughout most levels of British society, Romanticism flowered mainly to a movement of protest—a powerful expression of a desire for personal freedom and radical reform.

**Development of the English Language**

In Victorian times, as education spread and people entering the middle class attempted to speak “proper” English, the English language became more homogeneous. Increased literacy also stabilized English since the written language tends to change more slowly than the spoken. The period also saw the beginning of an effort to compile a definitive record of the histories, uses and meanings of English words, resulting in the massive *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first volume of which was published in 1884. This landmark work, not completed until 1928 and revised several times since, traces each word’s changes in meaning from its first recorded use to the present.

Victorian advances in the natural and social sciences spurred the coinage of new words, such as telephone, photography, psychiatrist, and feminism. As the new fields of study developed their own jargons, their specialized and technical vocabulary began to infiltrate everyday speech. Euphemisms—mild, indirect, or vague terms substituted for ones considered harsh or offensive-- also grew more popular as Victorian propriety made certain words taboo. A chicken breast became “white meat”; its legs “drumsticks”. Even words that today seem rather benign--such as belly, buck and stallion--were prudishly avoided.

Although “proper” circles frowned on slang, it was widely used among the lower classes as means of conversing safely in the presence of outsiders, including the police. The Cockneys of London’s East End developed an elaborate system of rhyming slang in early Victorian times-using, for example, loaf to mean “head” because loaf is the first word in the expression loaf of bread, which rhymes with head. The expression “use your loaf” is still common in the East End today.

**Literary History**

Though no longer the radical movement it once was, Romanticism continued to influence Victorian writing; but a new movement, called Realism, increasingly began to take hold.

**Answer the following questions in complete sentences based on the above reading.**

1. What swept the Western World at the end of the 18th century?
2. What rocked Britain’s economic and social structure?
3. Reflecting to these changes was a movement called \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
4. Romanticism was an outgrowth of 18th century \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
5. In Germany, who pioneered the literary Romantic movement?
6. In Britain, what two men led the Romantic movement?
7. When was the peak period of Romanticism?
8. Romanticism was a powerful expression of what two things?
9. What was the Romantic period best known for?
10. What happened due to the middle class trying to speak proper and become

educated?

1. What first volume was published in 1884?
2. What did this volume do?
3. What is a euphemism?
4. What was widely used among the lower classes as a means of conversing

safely in the presence of outsiders?

1. What new movement came after Romanticism?