modernism:

not a school or a trend, but a synthesis of artistic and cultural developments spanning the first half of the 20th c that set out to reform literature and society, seeking new artistic idioms and modes of representing reality

*desire to escape or reformulate the past
*radical critique of traditional metaphysics
*philosophic and cultural relativism
*antiromantic conception of the subject
*artistic awareness and self-determination
*reliance on symbolistic techniques, structural and thematic irony
*formal innovation

Ezra Pound, “make it new”

modernists openly confronted the bourgeois notion of modernity with its exclusive emphasis on material progress and commercialism, looking for more complex patterns of order. Their opposition took two different forms:

*combated middle-class philistinism (ignorant, guided by materialism) and dehumanization through deliberate adoption of alienated and artificial forms. typical mod. vision is apocalyptic, provocative, highlighting the fragmentation of the modern experience
*utopian, recuperative strategy, seeking spiritual enlightenment and wholeness against the fragmentation and divisiveness of modern life.

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Mrs. Dalloway, day 1
Virginia Woolf
1882-1941

biography
known primarily as a novelist, although she was a prolific writer of essays
1882: Adeline Virginia Stephen born in London, educated at home, but given run of her father’s extensive library.
1904: after the death of their father, she and her sister and brothers, Vanessa, Thoby and Adrian, moved to the Bloomsbury section of London; they’re all in their 20s at this point
Moved to Bloomsbury, where became center of the “Bloomsbury group”

name given to the literary group that made the Bloomsbury area of London the center of its activities from 1904 to World War II. It included Virginia Woolf, Leonard Woolf, E. M. Forster, Vita Sackville-West, Roger Fry, Clive Bell, and John Maynard Keynes. The group began as a social clique: a few recent Cambridge graduates and their closest friends would assemble on Thursday nights for drinks and conversation. Its members were committed to a rejection of what they felt were the strictures and taboos of Victorianism on religious, artistic, social, and sexual matters. They remained a fairly tight-knit group for many years; recent biographers have detailed their tangled personal relations. By the 1920s Bloomsbury’s reputation as a cultural circle was fully established to the extent that its mannerisms were parodied and Bloomsbury became a
widely used term connoting an insular, snobbish aestheticism. Unique in the brilliance, variety, and output of its members, the group has remained the focus of widespread scholarly and popular interest.

when the group was formed, Virginia was 22 and an aspiring writer and her sister Vanessa was 25 and already an artist (show painting). From the start, men and women were equal members. This included the freedom to discuss sexual matters openly. One story that’s repeated a lot is when one male member of the group, Lytton Strachey, came into the room, pointed at a stain on Vanessa’s white dress and inquired, “semen?” She was totally shocked – then everyone burst out laughing; one of the great Victorian taboos had been broken. 1912: married Leonard Woolf. 1917: she and Leonard began printing their own works and works of friends on an old printing press in the dining room of their home, Hogarth House; this soon developed into a full-fledged publisher of experimental writings, including all of Woolf’s books.

struggles with mental illness her whole life and after her final attack of mental illness Woolf loaded her pockets with stones and drowned herself in the River Ouse near her Sussex home on March 28, 1941.

Position of women in society
• years preceding Woolf’s birth, legal status of women the same that it had been since the Middle Ages
• right were extremely limited; married women couldn’t dispose of the money they’d earned, or enter into contracts
• they could be deprived of a say in upbringing of their children; in one famous case, a husband, upon being estranged from his wife, sent their children to live with his mistress and wouldn’t allow his wife to see them; this was totally within his rights to do. In response to this, in 1839, a law was passed – which allowed women to argue for custody of their children up to seven years old
• basically, law assumed there was no difference in the desires or needs between a husband and his wife; a woman couldn’t sue her husband or hold him to any agreement that would have been legally binding in other circumstances
• no matter how brutally a husband treated his wife, she was legally bound to keep his house and share his bed
• but the late 19th, early 20th c was a time of massive change for the status of women; the year W was born, 1882, was also the year of the “Married Women’s Property Act” – married women could actually own property and do what they wanted with it
• around the turn of the century people began to talk about something called the “new woman.” Women determined to retain their independence
• in other words, W part of very first generation to enjoy on a large scale the freedoms that feminists had been fighting for
• year Woolf moved to Bloomsbury was beginning of heroic phase of women’s movement – suffrage activists were loud, used the tactics of civil disobedience and made a massive nuisance of themselves to get publicity for their cause
narrative perspective?
setting? place? time?
compare to 19th c fiction?
read sentence p 3.
modernism – stream-of-consciousness

take a few moments, find one example of a change between characters, one with shift from one time to another

describe Clarissa and Septimus (1/2 class does one, ½ class does other, charts on board)

where does war come up?
5. deaths
9. the world’s wells of tears

look in detail at car/airplane scene and discuss possible significance (16-19)
airplane, 20
how is sexuality/desire represented in novel?
what would Freud say about these characters, about their anxieties and what’s important to them?
are there any moments you can identify as seeming “feminist” in the novel?