

Genre Definitions

I. Fiction

- A. **Realistic Fiction** – Imaginative writing that accurately reflects life as it could be lived today. Everything in a realistic fiction story could conceivably happen to real people living in today's natural physical world. Realistic fiction helps children move toward a fuller understanding of themselves and others.
- B. **Historical Fiction** – realistic stories that are set in the past. There are three types of historical fiction. In one type, the author weaves a fictional story around actual events and people of the past. In another type, the story has little or no reference to recorded historical events or real persons, but how the characters live and make their living and the conflicts they must resolve are true to the time period. In the third type, the story tells of the past through another genre, such as fantasy.
- C. **Modern Fantasy** – requires the willing suspension of disbelief. Fantasy creates another world for characters and readers, asking that the reader believe this other world could exist. There are two types of fantasy – fantastic stories and high fantasy.
- i. **Fantastic stories** - are realistic in most details but still require the reader to willingly suspend disbelief. They contain fantastic elements, such as talking animals, eccentric characters in preposterous situations, anthropomorphism, or extraordinary worlds. *Charlotte's Web* (White) and *Tuck Everlasting* (Babbitt) are examples.
 - ii. **High fantasy** - takes place in a created world or imaginary kingdom. Serious in tone, the story primarily focuses on the conflict between opposing forces, and concerns itself with cosmic questions and ultimate values, such as goodness, truth, courage, or wisdom. *The Book of Three* (Alexander), *The Chronicles of Narnia* (Lewis), and *The Hobbit* (Tolkien) are examples.
- D. **Mystery** – presents a puzzle or riddle to be solved. Mysteries contain a character who acts as the detective, and contain clues to help the reader solve the puzzle. Mysteries written for older students have a suspenseful mood and contain foreshadowing.

E. **Science Fiction** – speculates on a world that, given what we know of science, might one day be possible. It stresses the scientific laws and technological inventions, scientific plausibility, and “future history.” What distinguishes science fiction from fantasy is that fantasy presents a world that never was and never could be, while the world presented in science fiction may one day exist. Science fiction involves the interactions between humans and scientific laws.

II. **Traditional Literature**

Traditional literature can be defined as all forms of narrative, written or oral, which have come to be handed down through the years. The time period of traditional literature is not defined, but it occurs in the past. All forms have plots and problems, often with a clear conflict between good and evil. The tales and stories usually have happy endings.

A. **Fables** – very brief stories, usually with animal characters, that point clearly to a moral or lesson.

B. **Fairy Tales** – tales of magic and the supernatural; usually begin “Once upon a time” and end “and they lived happily ever after.”

C. **Folk Tales**

i. **Beast Tales** – tales in which animals talk and act like human beings.

ii. **Cumulative Tales** – tales that sequentially repeat actions, characters, or speeches until a climax is reached.

iii. **Noodlehead Stories** – humorous stories that involve ridiculous, absurd happenings.

iv. **Pour quoi Stories** – stories that answer a question or explain how animals, plants, or humans were created and why they have certain characteristics.

v. **Trickster Tales** – tales featuring a character who plays tricks or cheats. Most well-known trickster may be coyote of Native American tales.

- D. **Legends** – stories that are similar to myth but are based on more historical truth and less upon the supernatural. Examples include Trojan War, Robin Hood, and King Arthur.
- E. **Mother Goose and Nursery Rhymes** – rhymes, including counting-out rhymes, finger plays, and alphabet verses, which originated in the spoken language of both common folk and royalty.
- F. **Myths** – stories containing fanciful or supernatural incidents intended to explain nature of tell about gods and demons of early peoples.
- G. **Tall Tales** – stories that contain exaggerations and lies. American tall tales are a combination of history, myth, and fact.

III. **Poetry**

Poetry includes written literature that is not prose. It expresses how the poet feels, makes the reader see something ordinary in a new way, and tends to be rhythmic. It includes a variety of forms and styles such as:

- A. **Ballad** – narrative poems that have been adapted for singing or that give the affect of song. Ballads usually deal with heroic deeds.
- B. **Concrete** – picture poems that make the reader see what the poet is saying. The message of the poem is presented not only in words but in the arrangement of the words. Meaning is reinforced or even carried by the shape of the poem.
- C. **Free Verse** – poetry characterized by lack of rhyme and less predictable rhythm.
- D. **Haiku** – (beginning verse) 17-syllable, delicate, unrhymed Japanese verse, usually about nature
- E. **Limerick** – five-line poems in which the first, second, and fifth lines rhyme and the third and fourth lines rhyme. Oddities and humorous twists characterize this form of poetry.
- F. **Lyrical** – poems emphasizing sound and picture imagery rather than narrative or dramatic movement. Lyrical poems emphasize musical, pictorial, and emotional qualities.

G. **Narrative** – story poems that relate a particular event or tell a long tale. They may take different forms; the one requirement is that they tell a story.

H. **Nursery Rhymes** – see traditional literature

IV. **Drama**

Unlike a short story or novel, a play is a work of storytelling in which the characters are represented by the actors and which is acted out on a stage before an audience. Plays typically include an introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. The action speaks for itself as it unfolds. Important features of plays are set, stage, lighting, gesture, and oral interpretation.

V. **Nonfiction**

A. **Informational Materials**

- i. **Concept Book** – a book that describes various dimensions of an object (size, shape, color), a class of objects (trucks, tools), or an abstract idea (over, under, love). Counting books and alphabet books are examples.
- ii. **Experiment and Activity Books** – books that provide children with scientific experiments and activities.
- iii. **How-to Books** – books that present an array of crafts and directions to guide the reader in performing an activity.
- iv. **Identification Books** – naming books, such as Peterson's *Guide to Birds*.
- v. **Informational Picture Books** – information books published in picture book format; may or may not have words.
- vi. **Life-cycle Books** – books that are structured around the life span of an animal or plant.
- vii. **Photographic Essays** – books that rely on the camera to particularize information, to document emotion, or to assure the reader of truth in an essentially journalistic way.

- viii. **Survey Books** – books that give an overall view of a substantial topic and furnish a representative sampling of facts, principles, or issues.
- ix. **Reference Materials** – materials that allow for rapid access to information. Dictionaries, encyclopedias, periodicals, and electronic media are examples.

B. Biography and Autobiography

Biography and autobiography provide a history of the life of an individual, with information about the time period in which the person lived. They bring a person to life in a way that is true to reality.

C. Essay

Essays are nonfiction prose that advance a thesis and illustrate or defend it by means of various methods of development, including definition, comparison/contrast, example and illustration, cause and effect, analysis, and argument. A good essay expresses the voice of its author while communicating its message simply, clearly, and logically.

VI. **Other**

A. **Wordless Picture Books**

B. **Pattern Books** - patterns might be based on word/sentence structure, opposites, days of the week, shapes, etc.

C. **Graphic Novels** – a narrative related through a combination of text and art, often complex and presented in a comic-book format