

- Subgenres are smaller categories within a genre. Some subgenres — like romance, adventure or humor — can fit into almost any genre. However, fiction is not limited to these three subgenres. Engage students on a reflective search for other subgenres of fiction. Some students, for example, are drawn to the sports subgenre that is common in contemporary realistic fiction. Others enjoy superhero fantasies found only in the fantasy genre. Students can create a recommended reading list of books from their favorite genres and subgenres. Students may also enjoy getting creative and coming up with their own subgenres.
- Science fiction, as its name implies, is based on the impact of actual, imagined or potential science. Discuss with students the importance of technology in this genre. Is this more important than having a futuristic setting? Do technology and the future go hand-in-hand? Have students select and read a science fiction novel or short story. As they read, they should seek out the role technology plays in the novel. Does the technology serve as an antagonizing force that is working against the protagonist? Or is technology working in the favor of the protagonist? Or does technology play much more of a background role?
- The graphic novel is a format of literature that is growing in popularity. A survey of popular titles will reveal that this format is not limited to any particular genre and can appeal to many reading interests. Encourage students to visit the school or neighborhood library to see the graphic novels recommended for students at their grade level. The "Great Graphic Novels for Teens" list by the American Library Association is another helpful resource for recommended titles. (Visit www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/booklistsawards/greatgraphicnovels/forteens/gn.htm to view and learn more about this list.) Have students select a fiction graphic novel that they would recommend to classmates and design a poster about it using illustrations and text in the style of the novel's author. Students can also conduct a book talk about the novel when they share their posters.
- Mysteries have kept readers on the edge of their seats for many years. In fact, the Mystery Writers of America organization hosts the Edgar Allan Poe Awards each year to give recognition to authors of distinguished works in this genre. There are even "Best Juvenile" and "Best Young Adult" novel categories. (Visit www.mysterywriters.org/pages/awards/index.htm to learn more about these awards.) As a class, host your own version of these awards. Encourage students to submit nominations for the award, "Best Mystery for Middle School Readers." Students can even create posters and book reviews so that everyone can be familiar with all of the nominations. Narrow the field of nominations to five entries and then have the class vote by ballot. Hold a special ceremony to announce the winner.

Suggested Resources

Periodically, Internet and print resources are updated on our web site at www.LibraryVideo.com.

- www.readwritethink.org/student_mat/index.asp
The Student Materials Index of ReadWriteThink presents a variety of engaging interactive tools that can students can use in their study of literature. There is a Mystery Cube graphic organizer and much more!
- www.haworth.org/genreflecting.html
Organized by genre, this web site presents a list of recommended books for students in grades 6-8.
- www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1987/2/87.02.04.x.html
This online thematic unit on science fiction and the future is geared toward middle school students and includes a study of over 20 short stories written by a variety of authors.
- Carter, James Bucky. *Building Literacy Connections with Graphic Novels: Page by Page, Panel by Panel*. National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL; 2007.

Novels and Short Stories Featured in Genres of Fiction

- Farmer, Nancy. *The Ear, the Eye, and the Arm*. New York: Scholastic, 1994.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," in *The Prose Romances of Edgar A. Poe*. (Philadelphia: William A. Graham, 1843), 9-40.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Tell-Tale Heart," in *Great Short Works of Edgar Allen Poe*, ed. G.R. Thompson (New York: Harper Perennial, 1970), 384-389.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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TITLES IN THIS SERIES

- ANALYZING & APPRECIATING POETRY
- ANALYZING FICTION
- ANALYZING NONFICTION
- ELEMENTS OF FICTION
- GENRES OF FICTION

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GENRES OF FICTION

Grades 5-9

At the middle school level, students have already been introduced to some basic elements and characteristics of literature. They have been called upon to organize and communicate their understanding of what they read as well as express their own opinions. *Literature for Students* reinforces these skills and challenges students to approach them with a more critical eye. This series journeys through fiction, nonfiction and poetry and explores important elements and characteristics of each. By examining interesting excerpts by a diverse group of authors and sharing one-on-one moments with the hosts as they reflect on their own interests and experiences with literature, students will be challenged to analyze how language is used, how ideas are organized and the many ways in which people connect with and appreciate these different forms of literature.



Program Summary

A genre is simply a group of works that have something in common. Classifying fiction by genre helps libraries, writers and readers organize, think about and compare works of literature. It's easy to identify most fiction genres because the classifications are based on content or theme. Works within a genre can be categorized even further into subgenres. A subgenre — like romance, adventure or humor — can fit into almost any genre. Knowing more about genres can be useful when it comes to exploring and developing a deeper understanding of a text.

Contemporary realistic fiction is a very popular genre in young adult literature. Works within this genre are set in the present and are true to life. The themes of realistic fiction often reflect the concerns of life — growing up, enjoying success, dealing with failure, and experiencing love and loss. Believability is an important element of all fiction genres. Within contemporary realistic fiction, believability is important in that every detail of character, setting and plot must seem like it could actually happen. Popular subgenres include humor, romance, adventure and stories that deal with social issues.

Historical fiction is a genre that contains a real historical setting in which fictional characters — and sometimes actual people in history — interact. Whatever the setting, some common themes that emerge in this genre include a quest for freedom, equality, respect or a better life. Often, the plot is representative of the problems faced by people of that particular time period. Authenticity is crucial to bringing historical fiction to life. Authors often go to great lengths to depict every detail of setting, dialogue, dress and character in a manner that is convincing and true to its period. Some works are inspired by tremendous conflicts, while others span several generations of a family or group.

Fantasy and science fiction are both imaginative genres that use exceptionally vivid, descriptive language to create alternate realities. Both ask readers to suspend disbelief and often explore themes of good versus evil and the search for a higher truth. Works of fantasy are fascinating explorations of sheer “what if?” They can be set in wondrous worlds of fairies and wizards or take place in the real world with a sprinkle of magical details. Science fiction is based on the impact of actual, imagined or potential science and is most often set in the future. This genre offers readers views of strange new realities but can also touch on more serious topics or even critique contemporary society by recasting it in the future. In fact, tales of dystopic societies are often found within this genre. Some readers of fantasy and science fiction enjoy works presented in the form of a graphic novel. The content of graphic novels, however, is not limited to these genres.

The genres of mystery and horror grab and hold readers through the exciting element of suspense. These genres are sometimes viewed as subgenres, since

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they can be realistic or incorporate elements of fantasy, as well as be set in any time period. Mysteries involve the search for answers surrounding an unexplained event. They often feature a sleuth who is searching for clues, making deductions and avoiding red herrings. The horror genre uses suspense to stir up terror and dread in readers. While some works in this genre feature supernatural beings, others have a terror that is purely psychological.

While there are many works that clearly fit into one genre or another, others are not quite as easy to categorize. A science fiction novel may also contain elements of horror, or a mystery may be set in the past, making it historical fiction. Many authors blur traditional lines between genres by weaving in elements of multiple genres.

Vocabulary

genre — A term used to classify literature. Literature in a particular genre share common qualities.

subgenre — A smaller category within a particular genre. It is a way of further categorizing written works. Some subgenres are specific only to a certain genre. Other subgenres easily fit into several genres.

contemporary realistic fiction — A genre of fiction that is set in the present with human characters. It is based on the premise that the story's plot could actually happen in the real world.

social issues — A subgenre that is often linked with contemporary realistic fiction. Works within this subgenre include themes of dealing with violence, peer pressure or bullying.

adventure — A popular subgenre that often consists of incredible journeys or the struggle to survive.

romance — A popular subgenre that is centered on relationships — falling in love, losing love, or sometimes both.

humor — A popular subgenre that often looks at the lighter side of life and strives to make you laugh.

historical fiction — A genre of fiction that is set in the past. Fictional characters, and sometimes actual people from history, interact.

fantasy — A genre of fiction that is characterized by magical elements, such as nonexistent worlds, talking animals and other beings, and objects with superpowers.

quest tales — Stories in which the protagonist is on a long journey and must face external and internal conflicts.

science fiction — A genre of fiction that is based on the impact of actual, imagined or potential science and is most often set in the future.

utopia — An imaginary society of ideal perfection, especially in terms of government and social conditions.

dystopia — An imaginary society in which people often live in fear due to factors such as a totalitarian form of government or strict societal controls.

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graphic novel — A long-form comic book, usually with lengthy and complex storylines.

suspense — The build-up of events until the outcome is revealed.

mystery — A genre of fiction that involves the search for answers surrounding an unexplained event.

sleuth — An investigator, detective or curious protagonist.

deductions — Possible conclusions based on gathered facts.

red herring — A false lead, often used to throw a sleuth off-track.

horror — A genre of fiction that evokes some combination of fear, terror or dread upon its readers.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Get students to think about how they choose books by asking questions such as: What “types” of fiction do you enjoy reading? What are your criteria for selecting a fiction book? Generate a class list of criteria for choosing fiction books.
- When you are preparing to read a book that you know little about, how do you make predictions about what might happen? What types of information is helpful to know when previewing a fiction novel?

Follow-up Discussion & Activities

- Realistic fiction includes both contemporary and historical works. Whether the setting is in the present or in the past, what is important is that the details of all story elements are realistic. Interestingly, works that are published as contemporary realistic fiction will, over time, become historical fiction. For example, while readers today would consider Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* to be historical fiction, in 1868 (when the novel was published), the novel was contemporary. Have students generate a list of historical fiction that was contemporary when it was first published. As an extension, students can make a reading list of historical fiction for middle school students in 2050. Include favorite historical fiction titles as well as some fiction works that will be considered historical by then.
- Believability is an important aspect of all genres of fiction. However, the way an author makes historical fiction believable is very different from how an author would make a work of fantasy believable. For example, in Brian Jacques' *Redwall* (Penguin Young Readers Group, 1987), the mice and rats act and speak enough like real people that we can identify with them. They deal with realistic issues such as meeting basic needs and caring for the young and old and wounded. All of these connections to our own world help us to enter into the fantasy world. Select a few familiar works of fiction from different genres. Discuss the ways in which each author makes their text believable. Why do authors of science fiction and fantasy encourage readers to “suspend disbelief”? What does that mean?

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