

Genres of Literature

The two main categories separating the different genres of literature are fiction and nonfiction. The category of **fiction** can be defined as containing narrative literary works whose content is produced by the imagination and is not necessarily based on fact. So in fiction, the ideas are invented or imagined, or “made-up,” and told as a story. **Nonfiction** sits in direct opposition to fiction. Thus, instead of being imaginary, nonfiction writing is factual. Both fiction and nonfiction genres of literature are explained in detail below.

Remember that a genre is a specific type of artistic composition, either musical or literary, in which all pieces share certain common characteristics.

Types of Nonfiction that are Commonly Studied

A **biography** is a written account of another person’s life written in the form of a narrative, or story.

An **autobiography** is the story of a person’s life, written or told by that person, himself or herself. Autobiographies are, like biographies, written in narrative form, as if telling a story, not organized in a purely informational way.

A **memoir** is like an autobiography, but instead of covering his or her whole life, the author tends to focus on a specific theme or part of his or her life. Also memoirs tend to emphasize thoughts and emotions more than an autobiography, which emphasizes events.

Essays are a short literary composition that reflects the author’s outlook or a point he or she hopes to make. Essays analyze, speculate on, or interpret a single subject or theme.

Fitzgerald

LA8

A **speech** is a planned piece of oral communication. The writer conveys not only thoughts but also emotions using speech and gesture. Speeches are generally delivered to a group of people specifically gathered to hear the ideas of the person speaking on a particular topic.

Narrative nonfiction is information based on fact that is presented in a format which tells a story.

Finally there is the general nonfiction genre of **informational nonfiction**. This is text that simply provides information on a subject. This genre of literature offers opinions or hypotheses on facts and reality. Examples of informational nonfiction topics might be an historical event, like the Civil War or a single battle in the war, a type of animal, like kangaroos or raptors, or a branch of science, like biology or thermo-dynamics.

Genres of Fiction

Realistic fiction is a story that can actually happen and has characters, setting, and a plot that are true to real life.

Historical fiction is realistic fiction in a historic setting. Characters may be both fictional and real historical figures.

Science fiction is a story based on the potential impact of an advance in science, either actual or imagined. Science fiction is usually set in the future, when what is now a theoretical science has been realized.

Dystopian fiction explores social and political problems, such as overpopulation, violence, or the loss of civil liberties, in a world that is imaginary but has many realistic characteristics. Dystopian stories are dark and are meant to convey a warning about the problem in the real world.

Works of **fantasy** have strange or other worldly settings and characters, which invite the reader to suspend their sense of reality.

Fairy tales are stories that are usually written for children that contain fairies or other magical creatures and are often represent the dangers of the adult world that children will have to navigate.

A **fable** is a very short story that demonstrates a useful truth, called a moral, that is often directly stated at the end. In Fables, main characters are often animals that speak and represent a certain aspect of being human, such as a methodical, steady person being represented as a tortoise.

Mythology is a type of legend or traditional narrative that reveals truths of human behavior or explains natural phenomena by its symbolism. It often also contains the actions of gods and can be based, in part, on historical events.

Folklore are songs, stories, myths, and proverbs that were handed down by word of mouth before ever being written. They do not have an author but are the creation of the “folk” or many people over centuries. Folklore is often widely believed to be true but is actually based on unsubstantiated beliefs. And is often false.

A **tall tale** is a humorous story with blatant exaggerations and swaggering heroes who do the impossible with an air of nonchalance, meaning they act like their amazing feats are perfectly normal.

Legends are stories of a national or folk hero. Legends are based on fact but also include imaginative material.

Mystery is a genre of fiction that deals with the solution of a crime or the unraveling of secrets.

Horror is literature that is frightful, shocking, terrifying, or revolting. The events evoke a feeling of dread in both the characters and the reader.

Fitzgerald

LA8

Humor reveals aspects of life that are amusing or comical in a way that is meant to entertain. This genre of literature can actually be seen and contained within all genres.

Drama is the writing of stories meant to be performed on stage in a theater for an audience. The conflicts and emotions in the story are expressed through dialogue and action. The action is often divided into acts and the acts divided into scenes, to allow for the changing of setting pieces on the stage and a sense of passing through space and time.

Poetry seeks to convey imaginative or elevated thoughts and evoke an emotional response. Poems contain very purposefully chosen words grouped in lines with very purposeful endings. These lines are often grouped into stanzas, or sets of lines developing a single point. Poems may or maynot use rhyme and rhythm.

Short stories, novels, and novellas are all terms that describe the length and development of a piece of fiction. Each can be used in any fiction genre.

A short story is fiction that is so short that is not able to support any subplots.

Novels are fictional writings of a length that can support more characters with development and subplots. Novels have steps of action that are usually divided into chapters.

Novellas are very short novels, thus the number of developed characters and subplots is limited.