

Genre Characteristics

Genre	Definition	Frequently Found Elements	Picture Book Examples
TRADITIONAL LITERATURE AND FOLKTALES	The songs, stories, myths, and proverbs of a people as handed down orally before they were ever written down.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative story handed down within a culture. • Stories were created by adults for the entertainment of other adults. • Stories frequently involve trickery. • “Folktales are a legacy from anonymous artists of the past.” (Arbuthnot) 	<i>The Tales of Uncle Remus: The Adventures of Brer Rabbit</i> as told by Julius Lester, illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. New York: Puffin Books, 1999.
Fairy Tales	Stories with fairies or other magical creatures, usually for children. A modern fairy tale is written in a traditional style with the elements of folklore but with a contemporary twist.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stories include fantasy, make believe, and often magic. • Stories often begin “Once upon a time . . .” or “Long, long ago . . .”. • Characters include royalty or a kingdom setting. • Stories end “. . . happily ever after.” • Incidents may come in threes. • Characters or events may be found in sevens. • Characters are clearly defined as good and evil. • Good conquers evil. • Magical devices such as wands, swords, or horses assist the resolution of the story. • Picture book “fractured” fairy tales are published in abundance. 	<p><i>You Read to Me, I’ll Read to You: Very Short Fairy Tales to Read Together</i> by Mary Ann Hoberman, illustrated by Michael Emberley. New York: Little Brown, 2004.</p> <p><i>Cinderella</i> retold and illustrated by Ruth Sanderson. Boston: Little, Brown, 2002.</p> <p><i>Armadilly Chili</i> by Helen Kettelman, illustrated by Will Terry. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman and Co., 2004.</p>
Tall Tales	Stories with a definite setting in fairly modern times that exaggerate or are based on the traits of a person who may have actually existed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stories are humorous with blatant exaggerations. • Characters are swaggering heroes who do the impossible with nonchalance. • Problems and solutions may involve trickery. 	<p><i>Paul Bunyan: Twentieth Anniversary Edition</i> retold and illustrated by Steven Kellogg. New York: Morrow, reissue 2005.</p> <p><i>Widdermaker</i> by Pattie Schnetzler, pictures by Rick Sealock. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books, 2002.</p>
Legends	Stories, sometimes of a national or folk hero, which have a basis in fact but also include imaginative material.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legends often explain the reason for a natural occurrence. • Native American legends are available in picture book format. • <i>Pour quoi</i> stories explain why natural events occur. 	<i>The Story of Jumping Mouse: A Native American Legend</i> retold and illustrated by John Steptoe. New York: Mulberry Books, 1984, updated 2004.
Myths	Legend or traditional narrative, often based in part on historical events, that reveal human behavior and natural phenomena by its symbolism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation myths depict the struggle to form the earth. • Hero myths describe how people who begin life at a low status are elevated to high status through a good deed. • Myths often pertain to the actions of the gods. 	<i>There’s a Monster in the Alphabet</i> by James Rumford. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002.
Fables	Narration demonstrating a useful truth, especially in which animals speak as humans.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fables are legendary. • Fables are supernatural tales. • Morals or lessons are revealed and stated at the end. • Characters often have generic names such as <i>Dog, Rooster, Boy</i>. • Fable adaptations are now being published. 	<p><i>Aesop’s Fables</i> by Jerry Pinkney. New York: Sea Star Books, 2000.</p> <p><i>The Ant or the Grasshopper?</i> by Toni and Slade Morrison, pictures by Pascal Lemaitre. New York: Scribner, 2003.</p>
Proverbs	A one-sentence utterance that holds the conventional wisdom of the ages.		<i>A Word to the Wise and Other Proverbs</i> selected by Johanna Hurwitz, illustrated by Robert Rayevsky. New York: Morrow Junior Books, 1994.

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Compiled by Marcie Haloin, with input from Gaylynn Jameson, JoAnne Piccolo, and Kari Oosterveen.

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<p>PERSONAL NARRATIVES</p> <p>Memoirs</p>	<p>A record of events based on the writer's own observation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memoirs may cover only one event or aspect of the author's life. • Memoir is a retrospective account of a memorable event. • Memoirs for children can be fictionalized. 	<p><i>Waiting to Waltz, a Childhood: Poems</i> by Cynthia Rylant, drawings by Stephen Gammell. New York: Atheneum, 2001.</p> <p><i>Don't You Know There's a War On?</i> by James Stevenson. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1992.</p>
<p>Journals and Diaries</p>	<p>A log written by an author at regular intervals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entries are usually dated. • Diaries and journals in series have been published as a way of sharing historical fiction. • Fictional diaries can be animal fantasies when animals write them. 	<p><i>Only Opal: The Diary of a Young Girl</i> by Opal Whiteley, selected [and adapted] by Jane Boulton, illustrations by Barbara Cooney. New York: Paperstar, 1997.</p> <p><i>Diary of a Worm</i> by Doreen Cronin, pictures by Harry Bliss. New York: Joanna Cotler Books, 2003.</p>
<p>Letters, Postcards, Personal Correspondence</p>	<p>Personal written communications.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters provide authentic ways for communication. • Letters, postcards, and emails are all personal written communications with different conventions and elements. • Postcards are abbreviated forms of letters and have abbreviated elements. • Emails have become even more abbreviated forms of communication and have developed an extensive short-cut and very informal style. 	<p><i>The Jolly Postman, or Other People's Letters</i> by Janet and Allan Ahlberg. Boston: Little, Brown, 1986.</p> <p><i>Toot and Puddle</i> by Hollie Hobbie. New York: Scholastic, printing 2001.</p>
<p>Autobiographies</p>	<p>A story of a person's life written by that person.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First-person account. • Often highly personalized. • May be supported by authentic pictures and newspaper articles. 	<p><i>Through My Eyes: [the Autobiography of] Ruby Bridges</i>. New York: Scholastic Press, 1999.</p>
<p>Individual Biographies</p>	<p>A story of a person's life written by an individual with exceptional knowledge of the subject.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accurate history of a person's life. • Reflection of the time and place in which a person lived. • Usually chronological. • Carefully researched and authentic. • Fictionalized biographies may include invention, supposition, or inference. Many historical fiction books are biographical fiction. • Subject may be an historical or contemporary figure. 	<p><i>When Marian Sang: The True Recital of Marian Anderson, the Voice of a Century</i>, libretto by Pam Muñoz Ryan, staging by Brian Selznick. New York: Scholastic Press, 2002.</p>
<p>Collective Biographies</p>	<p>Biographies of many individuals in the same book.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually grouped for author's purpose. • May include a standard format for each person. 	<p><i>Lives of Extraordinary Women – Rulers, Rebels (and What the Neighbors Thought)</i> by Kathleen Krull, illustrated by Kathryn Hewitt. Scholastic, 2001 (series).</p>
<p>INFORMATIONAL BOOKS</p>	<p>Factual presentations of documented knowledge.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonfiction text dealing with an actual, real-life subject. • Major types include chapter books, picture books, photographic essays, and informational books with a narrative blend. • Elements of expository writing are description, time sequence, enumeration, cause and effect, and comparison/contrast. • Nonfiction picture books can serve as models for student content reports. 	<p><i>Ice-cream Cones for Sale!</i> by Elaine Greenstein. New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 2003.</p> <p><i>What Do You Do with a Tail Like This?</i> by Steve Jenkins and Robin Page. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.</p> <p><i>Pig</i> by Jules Older, illustrated by Lyn Severance. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge, 2004.</p>

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Essays	A short literary composition that reflects the author’s outlook or point of view.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often of a persuasive nature. • May be found in collections. • Frequently found in magazines and periodicals. 	<p><i>Vote!</i> by Eileen Christelow. New York: Clarion Books, 2003.</p> <p><i>Linda Brown, You Are Not Alone: The Brown v. Board of Education Decision</i>, a collection edited by Joyce Carol Thomas, illustrated by Curtis James. New York: Hyperion, 2003.</p>
Process Explanations	An essay that explains how to do something.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written in sequential order. • Steps usually are enumerated. • Explains the procedures for accomplishing a task. 	<p><i>Follow the Money!</i> written and illustrated by Loreen Leedy. New York: Holiday House, 2002.</p>
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FICTION	Stories from an author’s imagination usually with an emphasis on character development. May be realistic or not (see various categories following).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually located in libraries in separate areas for picture books and “chapter books” and novels. • Libraries may place genre stickers on the spines to make selection easier. • Some can be classified into multiple genres (e.g., combination of fiction, information, poetry, narratives, etc.). • Multi-genre books and multi-genre research is encouraged as a way to allow students to write and use a variety of learning styles. 	<p><i>Home at Last</i> by Susan Middleton Elya, illustrated by Felipe Davalos. New York: Lee and Low Books, 2002.</p> <p><i>Visiting Day</i> by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by James Ransome. New York: Scholastic Press, 2002.</p>
Picture Books	Books with many pictures where the story depends upon the pictures. There can be picture books of almost any genre.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alphabet and counting books are presented in alphabetical or numeric order often linked by an identifying theme. These make excellent participation stories and patterns for writing. They may be located in the nonfiction area of a library. • Concept books attempt to define an abstract idea. • Mother Goose, nursery rhymes, and books written in rhyme present traditional rhymes as well as modern short rhymes. Most are located in the nonfiction area of a library. • Wordless picture books contain few or no words as the pictures tell the story. Many teachers have students write narratives for these models. • Predictable books are designed to help children learn to read by use of repetition of language, story patterns, or sequences. They often are excellent models for writing patterns. • Cumulative Stories are imaginative narratives that have a series of additions. After each addition the previous phrases are then repeated in reverse order. 	<p><i>The Skull Alphabet Book</i> by Jerry Pallotta, illustrated by Ralph Masiello. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge; 2002.</p> <p><i>Dogs, Dogs, Dogs</i> by Leslea Newmann, illustrated by Erika Oller. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002.</p> <p><i>Here Comes Mother Goose</i> edited by Iona Opie, illustrated by Rosemary Wells. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 1999.</p> <p><i>Home</i> by Jeannie Baker. New York: Greenwillow Books, 2004.</p> <p><i>Bark, George</i> by Jules Feiffer. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999.</p> <p><i>My Little Sister Ate One Hare</i> by Bill Grossman, illustrated by Kevin Hawkes. New York: Scholastic, 1997.</p>
Historical Fiction	Imaginative stories with fictional characters and events in a historical setting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be based upon dates, people, or events that really happened. • Major historical event may be an essential. • Accuracy of the historical detail is evident. • May include author notes on research. • Categories of historical fiction are based upon the time period or historical era. • Characters and time periods are lifelike. • Conflict allows children to compare the past with the present in order to better understand our world. 	<p><i>White Socks Only</i> by Evelyn Coleman, illustrated by Tyrone Geter. Morton Grove, IL: A. Whitman, 1996.</p> <p><i>The Cello of Mr. O</i> by Jane Cutler, illustrated by Greg Couch. New York: Dutton Children’s Books, 1999.</p>

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Adventure Stories	Stories of survival or life in the great outdoors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characters succeed without adult assistance. • Characters, often children, encounter situations that require quick thinking, problem solving, and inner strength. 	<i>Beardream</i> by Will Hobbs, illustrated by Jill Kastner. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 1997.
Sports Stories	Events and activities within the story deal with the characters' participation in sports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characters struggle with issues related to sports. • Team sports are usually emphasized. • Plot and characterization often emphasize these such as team play and sportsmanship. 	<i>The Captain Contest</i> by Matt Christopher, illustrated by Daniel Vasconcellos. Boston: Little, Brown, 1999.
Animal Realism	An imaginative story in which an animal is a central character that behaves in a manner true to the breed; usually realistic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realistic animal stories may be difficult to write because the author must have extensive knowledge of the species. • The central character behaves in a manner true to the breed. • Problems are realistic for an animal. 	<p><i>Dogteam</i> by Gary Paulsen, illustrated by Ruth Wright Paulsen. New York: Delacorte Press, [1993].</p> <p><i>A Day in the Life of Murphy</i> by Alice Provensen. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2003.</p>
FANTASY	Fiction with strange or otherworldly settings or characters; fiction that invites suspension of reality; fiction that depends on magic or the impossible or inexplicable.	Divided into low fantasy (world governed by the laws of this world but inexplicable things occur) and high fantasy (set in a secondary world of magic and inhabited by supernatural beings or creatures).	<i>The Great Redwall Feast</i> by Brian Jacques, illustrated by Christopher Denise. New York: Philomel Books, 1996 (series).
Animal Fantasy	Form of fantasy in which the main characters are animals. Animal stories are characterized by the extent to which the animals take on human characteristics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In one type the animal behaves like its species, but thinks and talks like a human. • In another type the animal acts both like its species but also like a human. • In a third type the animal behaves, speaks, and dresses totally like a human. This is very common in family stories, stories of everyday experiences, and friendship stories. 	<p><i>Bertie Was a Watchdog</i> by Rick Walton, illustrated by Arthur Robins. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press, 2002.</p> <p><i>Dear Mrs. Larue: Letters from Obedience School</i> written and illustrated by Mark Teague. New York: Scholastic Press, 2002.</p> <p><i>The Pigeon Finds a Hot Dog!</i> by Mo Willems. New York: Hyperion Books for Children, 2004.</p>
Science Fiction	Set in a future that scientific or technological advance could or might make possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In one approach the story usually takes place in outer space where the technology of the future is predicted. • In the other approach future societies are portrayed, usually on earth, with or without the presence of aliens. • Themes frequently deal with good or evil, often involving technology. • Science Fantasy uses science "to explain the existence of the world and magic is used thereafter." 	<p><i>Zathura: A Space Adventure</i> by Chris Van Allsburg. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002.</p> <p><i>Commander Toad and the Voyage Home</i> by Jane Yolen, pictures by Bruce Degen. New York: Putnam's, 1998 (series).</p>
REALISTIC FICTION	A story that can actually happen and is true to life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realistic characters with possible problems. • Outcomes are reasonable and plausible. • Settings can be contemporary or historical. • Family stories, school stories, animal stories, mysteries, could all be included in this genre. 	<p><i>John Philip Duck</i> by Patricia Polacco. New York: Philomel, 2004.</p> <p><i>Gettin' through Thursday</i> by Melrose Cooper, illustrated by Nneka Bennett. New York: Lee & Low Books, 1998.</p>

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Contemporary Realistic Fiction	Accurately depicts life as it could be lived today.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Themes are contemporary and may tend to be controversial. • Current political and social issues and kids' problems may be explored. • "Contemporary" means that by its nature the genre is always changing. 	<p><i>Raymond's Perfect Present</i> by Therese On Louie; illustrated by Suling Wang. New York: Lee & Low Books, 2002.</p> <p><i>The Recess Queen</i> by Alexis O'Neill, illustrated by Laura Huliska-Beith. New York: Scholastic, 2002.</p>
Mysteries	Imaginative stories dealing with the solution of a secret, problem, or crime, and involving suspense or intrigue.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suspense. • Cliffhangers. • Foreshadowing. • Detective stories and spy novels. • Often are available in series. 	<p><i>The Mystery of the Monkey's Maze</i>, story and pictures by Doug Cushman. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999.</p>
POETRY	Although difficult to define, poetry is brief, intense, and patterned when compared with prose. "Poetry is a type of literature in which the sound and meaning of language are compiled to create ideas and feelings." (Arbutnot)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates an emotional intensity. • Varieties include rhyme, ballads, lyrics, narrative poems, free verse, haiku, limericks, concrete poems, cinquain, and diamante. • Uses rhythmic or figurative language: alliteration, metaphor, simile, symbolism, personification, assonance, consonance, allusion, onomatopoeia, internal rhyme, and rhyme scheme. • Uses imagery, compactness, shape. • Anthologies. 	<p><i>The Random House Book of Poetry for Children</i> selected and introduced by Jack Prelutsky, illustrated by Arnold Lobel. New York: Random House, 1983. (Excellent subject index.)</p> <p><i>Leap Into Poetry: More ABCs of Poetry</i> by Arvis Harley. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press, 2001.</p> <p><i>Kids' Poems: Teaching First Graders to Love Writing Poetry</i> by Regie Routman. New York: Scholastic, 2000 (series).</p>
SPEECH, DRAMA, AND READER'S THEATRE	Public address or discourse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Script written to be read orally or performed. • Reader's Theatre can be performed with scripts written specifically for that purpose. • Teachers have written many stories into Reader's Theatre scripts. 	<p><i>Fifty Fabulous Fables: Beginning Readers Theatre</i> by Suzanne I. Barchers. Englewood, CO: Teacher Ideas Press, 1997.</p> <p><i>Readers Theatre for American History</i> by Anthony D. Fredericks. Englewood, CO: Teacher Ideas Press, 2001.</p>

Arbutnot, May Hill. *The Arbutnot Anthology of Children's Literature*, New York: Scott Foresman and Company, 1961. Hancock, Marjorie R. *A Celebration of Literature and Response: Children, Books, and Teachers in K-8 Classrooms, Second Edition*, New Jersey: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall, 2004. Hillman, Judith. *Discovering Children's Literature 3rd Edition*. New Jersey. Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall, 2003. Larsen, Karen, *Handy Dandy List of Genres*, Compiled by Karen Larsen. Adams Twelve School District, Westminster, CO: August 2003. Lukens, Rebecca J. *A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003. Nixon, Norma *The New Children's Literature Guide K-6*. Cherry Creek School District. Aurora, Colorado, 1991.