

Lecture Six

Realism in Children's Literature Literary Elements of Children's Literature

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Realism in Children's Literature

The Realistic Genre

Literary realism focuses on fidelity to everyday life.

A realistic work depicts the world as it is, not as it could be.

Authors present ordinary people living their everyday lives.

Fantasy, magic, and supernatural events are absent from the realistic story.

The protagonist is ordinary rather than heroic, and the events are commonplace rather than extraordinary.

All fiction is based on artifice but writers of realistic works hide this artifice.

The concept of realism has evolved over the past century.

Earlier realistic novels for children differ from later ones, the latter fall under the category of "new realism."

Prior to the 1970s, realistic novels such as *Anne of Green Gables* and *The Secret Garden* focused on the typical problems of growing up.

This pre-1970 form of realism is also called "social realism." Sometimes the stories are also classified as "family novels" since they typically focus on family issues such as conflict with parents or sibling rivalry.

Protagonists in all forms of realistic stories gain greater self-awareness and maturity by facing challenges and overcoming them.



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“New realism”

- Many post-1970 realistic novels equate realism with the darker, harsher side of life.
- Realism in these stories is often associated with suffering and unhappiness
- New realism has introduced subjects that were previously thought unsuitable for children.
- These books are sometimes called “social problem novels” because they focus on problems such as divorce, abuse, parental neglect, violence, and gangs.
- In many of these novels, adults – and especially parents – let children down.
- Children must learn to cope without a loving parental figure in many of these stories.



Literary Elements of Children's Literature

- **Characters:** In children's literature, character is used to mean a person or personified animal or object.
- ☐ Character Development: collection of features that bring the character to life, inner and outer qualities
- ☐ Revelation of Character occurs through the character's thoughts, conversations, actions and behaviors; the author's narration; or the thoughts of other characters
- ☐ **Types of Characters:**
 - Round Characters: Fully developed in the story—central characters and protagonists
 - Flat Characters: Less important characters, but essential to the action
 - Dynamic Characters: Changes in the course of the action
 - Static Characters: No change in the course of the story—flat characters, stereotypes and foils (a minor character whose traits are in direct contrast to the main character)
- **Good Picture Books for Character Study:**
 - *Amazing Grace*—Hoffman
 - *My Great Aunt Arizona*—Gloria Huston
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Setting: the time and place where the story occurs.

☐ **Characteristics of Setting:**

- o Time identified as past, present or future
- o Setting is developed through text or illustrations
- o Setting provides details which reinforce the plot and characterization

☐ **Types of Settings:**

- o Time and place influence action, character and/or theme. Characters behave in a given way because of time and place.

☐ **Good Picture Books for Setting:**

- o *Gleam and Glow*—Eve Bunting
- o *Grandfather's Journey*—Allen Say
- o *The Relatives Came*—Cynthia Rylant



Plot: Sequence of events showing characters in action. Sequence is chosen by the author as the best way of telling the story.

☐ **Three Elements of Plot**

- o **Narrative Order:** the way or the order in which the writer chooses to unfold the story to the reader
- ☐ **Chronological:** Events are related in the order of their happening
- ☐ **Flashbacks:** Writer disrupts normal time sequence to recount some past event
- o **Conflict:** the struggles the protagonist of the story faces
- ☐ Person-against-self: Character typically faces an internal conflict which pulls her/him toward two courses of action
- ☐ Person-against-person: involves a struggle between two or more characters
- ☐ Person-against-society: involves a struggle between a character, or characters and either social mores, cultural values or sometimes the law
- ☐ Person-against-nature: involves a conflict between a character and some force or forces of nature
- ☐ **Climax:** peak and turning point of conflict, point at which the reader knows the outcome of the action
- ☐ **Denouement:** resolution or tying together of the plot that gives the reader a sense of completeness at the end.

☐ **Good Picture Books for Plot**

- o *The Ugly Duckling*
- o *Harriet and the Promised Land*



Point of View: The side of the story the reader sees as revealed by the author through the characters. Point of view is seen through the eyes and minds of characters as the plot unfolds.

Types of Point of View

o First Person

- ☐ Story told through first-person narrator "I" whose actions and feelings influence story
- ☐ This character is limited in perspective because she/he cannot tell what another character thinks unless told by the other character

o Objective Point of View

- ☐ Author lets actions speak for themselves
- ☐ Author describes only the characters' actions; the reader is left to infer characters' thoughts and feelings

o Omniscient Point of View

- ☐ Story is told in the third person with author talking about "they, he, or she"
- ☐ Author is not restricted to the knowledge, experience and feelings of one character
- ☐ Feelings, thoughts and even motives of any or all characters can be revealed to give the reader helpful information

o Limited Omniscient Point of View

- ☐ Combination of first-person and omniscient
- ☐ Story is told through the eyes of a single character, usually the protagonist, but is not told in first-person
- ☐ Good Picture Books for Point of View:

Three Stories You Can Read to Your Dog—Sara Miller



Theme: The idea that holds the story together or the author's message to the reader. It is the main idea or the central meaning of the story

- ☐ Themes often deal with society, human nature, the human condition, social issues, and good versus evil
- ☐ Authors reveal theme explicitly as well as implicitly
- ☐ Stories usually have a cluster of themes which are often related

o Primary theme—central theme which is of more importance than the rest

o Secondary theme—themes which seem of lesser importance than the primary one

- ☐ "Themes are the underlying ideas, morals, and lessons that give the story its texture, depth, and meaning....We infer themes."
- ☐ "A plot relates to a single story, whereas a theme is applicable to hundreds of stories."
- ☐ A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.
- ☐ A friend in need is a friend indeed.
- ☐ Absence makes the heart grow fonder.
- ☐ Beauty is only skin deep.
- ☐ Better late than never.
- ☐ Don't count your chickens before they're hatched.
- ☐ Don't judge a book by its cover.
- ☐ Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.
- ☐ He who laughs last laughs longest.



- = Necessity is the mother of invention.
- ☐ Out of sight, out of mind.
 - ☐ The best way to a man's heart is through his stomach.
 - ☐ The end justifies the means.
 - ☐ Too many cooks spoil the broth.
 - ☐ Two heads are better than one.
 - ☐ When in Rome, do as the Romans do.

