

Genre Prompting Guide for Fiction

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SECTION I

Introduction

Literature genres have been developed through centuries of oral storytelling and written language because writers needed ways to make their meaning clear. When you look at aspects of genre, you see the writers' decisions—the essence of their craft. Everything else—the type of language used, the word choice, the use of dialogue, the structure or organization of the text, and all other writers' decisions—rest on the choice of genre. As readers, your students will find that thinking, talking, and writing about a specific genre will help them better understand the text and expand their own thinking.

Organization of Prompts

In this guide, we have organized fiction prompts by genre, and also by literary elements and text structure. You will notice that the organizational categories change somewhat depending upon the genre. Below is a comprehensive list and descriptions of the categories you will see on these pages.

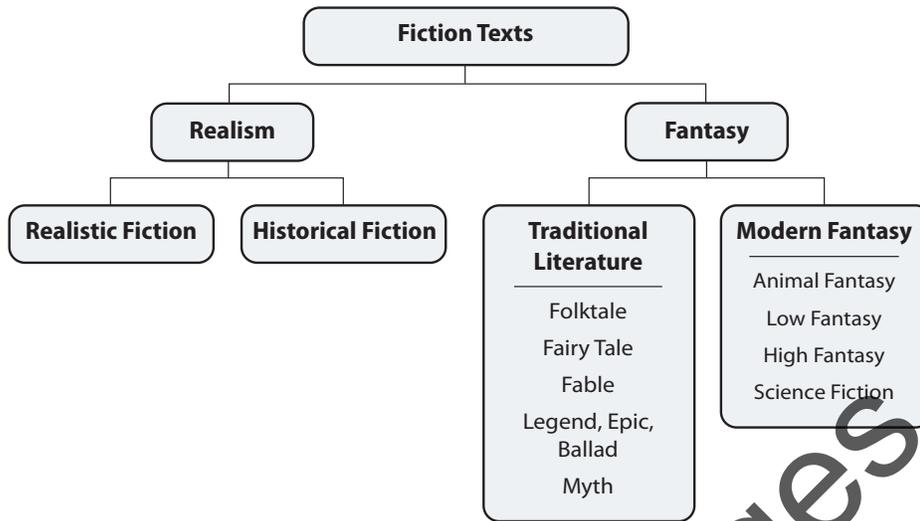
FICTION GENRES

REALISTIC FICTION An imagined story set in the real world that portrays life as it could be lived today, and focuses on the problems and issues of today.

HISTORICAL FICTION An imagined story set in the real world that portrays life as it might have been lived in the past, and focuses on problems and issues of life in the past.

TRADITIONAL LITERATURE Traditional literature is comprised of stories, written or oral, that have been handed down through the years. These tales often served as entertainment and as an oral record of the history and customs of a people.

MODERN FANTASY Unlike traditional literature, modern fantasy does not come from an oral tradition. But like traditional literature, modern fantasy stories describe events, places, and people that could not exist in the real world. Modern fantasy texts can be divided into four more specific genres: animal fantasy, low fantasy, high fantasy, and science fiction.



LITERARY ELEMENTS OF FICTION

CHARACTERS are the people, animals, or objects that appear in the story. Readers learn about characters through the writer's descriptions, what the characters think or say, what the characters do, and what others think or say about them.

PLOT refers to the problem of the story, and the events or actions that flow from it.

SETTING is the time and place in which the action happens. Sometimes the setting is relatively unimportant, while at other times, the setting is all-important to the theme and plot.

THEME is the big idea of the story, the author's attitude toward a significant human concern or issue. A writer may weave several themes into one narrative.

PERSPECTIVE refers to the narrator's point of view. The perspective guides the reader.

ELEMENTS OF CRAFT

STYLE AND LANGUAGE Style refers to how the author uses language to convey meaning. Style is not what is said but how it is said. Writers may use figurative language (including simile, metaphor, and personification), imagery, and symbolism to better communicate meaning.

ILLUSTRATIONS/ART meaning is also communicated by the illustrations in a text. Art or photography may extend the meaning far beyond the words. Illustrations also help set the mood and communicate the theme.

DESIGN Closely related to the illustrations is the entire visual presentation of the book—the design. It may contain elements such as size and shape; type of print, font, and layout; integration of illustrations and text; quality of paper and binding; cover design; and end papers.

BELIEVABILITY If anything in a fictional text suddenly reminds you that the story or characters are not real, the story loses credibility and the power to move you.

QUALITY The quality of a text is related to the ways in which the elements work together. A compelling plot, well-developed characters, effective style and language, good use of illustrations, and believability are all related to the quality of a book.

Using Genre Prompting Guide for Fiction

The prompts in this guide can be used in any instructional reading context that involves your students in thinking, talking, and writing about reading. Some of the questions will be useful for assigned writing to a prompt or short writes before or after reading (see *Teaching for Comprehending and Fluency: Thinking, Talking, and Writing about Reading, K–8*, Fountas and Pinnell, 2006).

*Note this important caution: the prompts are meant to provide you with lines of inquiry or aspects of texts worthy of discussion. They are not designed for you to pose question after question to your students. You may use some as statements to show readers new ways to think about a text, and later invite them to apply that thinking to a new text. Or you may tell your students that you noticed that they were thinking about an important aspect of text. Many of the prompts are expressed with academic language and fairly sophisticated vocabulary. You can teach your students this language over time. Rephrase the prompts if students do not understand the prompts at first.

INTERACTIVE READ-ALoud: In this whole group context, you and your students think together about a text you read aloud. Stop in a few places to invite thinking or to have students turn and talk about their thinking to a partner or in threes.

SHARED READING: Usually refers to students reading from a common enlarged text, either a large-print book, a chart, or a projected text. Students may have their own copies. The teacher leads the group, pointing to words or phrases. Reading is usually in unison, although there are adaptations, such as groups alternating lines or individuals reading some lines.

BOOK CLUBS OR LITERATURE DISCUSSION GROUPS: In a small group book discussion, invite students' thinking so they can build a richer meaning than any one reader could construct from the text.

GUIDED READING; INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXT, DISCUSSION OF THE TEXT, REVISITING THE TEXT: In this small group context, use prompts to get students thinking in the introduction to the text and build a deeper meaning in the discussion after reading the text. You may choose to revisit a page, paragraph, or sentence for close reading. Close reading involves thinking together about the text to explore interpretations of the author's meaning.

READING CONFERENCES: In individual conferences with readers, you can use these prompts to prompt students to share their thinking about books they are reading independently.

WRITING ABOUT READING (responses in readers' notebooks, test writing): When you read your students' writing about reading, refer to the prompts to use in conferring or extending thinking in your written response.

Realistic Fiction

REALISTIC FICTION is an imagined story set in the real world that portrays life as it could be lived today, and focuses on the problems and issues of today.

Characteristics of the Genre

What is the genre? How do you know?

What kind of realistic fiction is this book (humor, animal story, sports, school, or mystery)?

How is this book like other books in this genre?

What characteristics in the story made you classify it as realistic fiction?

Is this story a good (or poor) example of realistic fiction?

How does this story compare to another realistic fiction novel on the same topic or theme?

How does the structure of the text help to convey the meaning of the story?

How is this story different from a historical fiction text?

How is this story different from a nonfiction text?

How is this story different from a fantasy or science fiction text?

What are some of the challenges of reading books in this genre?

Characters

Who are the characters? Are they portrayed accurately in light of your knowledge of cultures and issues?

How does the author reveal the characters?

How has the author made these characters seem real?

How does the author portray the characters (good, evil, a combination)?

Do any of the characters change? Is that change consistent with your knowledge of the issues or events in the book? Is the change believable?

What connections do you share with any of the characters?