FOR THE
IB DIPLOMA

English Literature

Nic Amy
Carolyn P. Henly
Angela Stancar Johnson
Kathleen Clare Waller
Series editor: Carolyn P. Henly

SAMPLE CHAPTER

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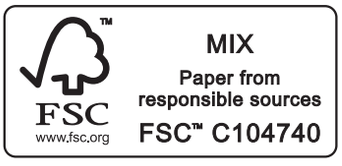


Contents

Readers, writers and texts

1.1 Why and how do we study literature?

OBJECTIVES OF CHAPTER

- To understand the nature of literature
- To understand the relationship of fiction, drama and poetry to truth
- To demonstrate ways to apply course concepts to specific works of literature
- To demonstrate ways to understand specific works of literature in the context of global issues
- To appreciate why we read literature
- To recognize and appreciate how we read literature
- To recognize features of texts which make them literary texts as opposed to non-literary ones
- To provide an overview of *why* we read literature
- To provide an overview of *how* we read literature
- To understand the relationship between the implied author of a text and the implied reader of the text

What is a literary work?

Literature is an art form which conveys ideas through language—and in some cases, such as with graphic novels, images and words. One of the key features of literature is that it conveys ideas indirectly, using characters and, in some forms, narrators or speakers, who think and act and talk. Readers of literature (or viewers of drama) must observe the thoughts, actions and speaking and interpret them. This process of communication is quite different from the way that we communicate with each other face-to-face or on the phone or through letters. In most non-literary texts, communication is more direct: the author addresses him or herself to the reader in an effort to convey an idea or belief or feeling without the intermediaries of characters, speakers, or narrators. Literature, like all other art, is something created by an artist out of his or her experience and world view, and it conveys something—ideas, values, beliefs, and/or emotions to the person who engages with the work of art. Literature gives the reader a window into the mind and heart of the author—at least as much of that mind and heart as can be revealed by any single work of literature.

This is of course a very basic definition of literature. It does not yet capture the richness or variety of the kinds of works that you will encounter which can be called literary. Some of the characteristics commonly associated with literature are the use of literary techniques, such as **metaphor**, **symbolism**, and **allusion**, the use of a particular structure to help convey the meaning, and the idea that in literature there is meaning beyond the surface meaning. The trouble is, however, that while we can try to pin down some features of literature, we will not be able to develop a single, permanent definition into which all literature naturally fits, because there are just too many factors which contribute to 'literariness,' and any single feature can be found in other kinds of works which we would not normally consider to be literary (Culler 20). All of the features we just mentioned can be found in at least some works that we would normally call non-literary texts. Here is an example. Which of the following two extracts seems to you to be more 'literary'?

> 'At last through the broken windows, the pulse of helicopter rotors and airboat propellers set the summer morning throbbing with the promise of rescue.'

> 'In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.'

The first extract is the opening line from *Five Days at Memorial: Life and Death in a Storm-Ravaged Hospital,* by investigative reporter Sheri Fink. The book is an account of an investigation into people who died in a New Orleans hospital in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. This kind of investigative journalism is not the type of work we normally think of when we think of literature. Yet, this work tells us a compelling story of something experienced and observed by the author. That opening sentence relies on sensory imagery and figurative language which seems to describe 'morning' as something alive.

The second extract is the opening sentence from F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, a very famous novel, sometimes suggested to be the greatest American novel ever written. That first sentence, however, is a very straightforward statement without obviously 'literary' elements. When we know the context, of course, we know that Nick Carraway is the narrator, a feature created by Fitzgerald to tell the story, whereas Fink is speaking to us as directly as she can in her work, but when we just look at the opening sentences, we have no way of knowing that. The language of the two sentences does not help us differentiate between literary and non-literary texts.

If the particular kind of language alone cannot determine whether a work is literary or not, then we can begin considering a great many other factors such as style, content, cultural attitudes toward literature, and so on. The question, then, as to what literature is, is one which we will be investigating throughout this book, and which you will be considering throughout your course.

The English Literature IB Diploma course identifies four forms of literary texts:

- prose fiction
- poetry
- drama, and
- some non-fiction.

Note that only the last of these forms is limited in such a way as to suggest that some members of that category are not literary. We can, therefore, assume that all works in each of the other forms are to be considered literary. Each of these four forms, including the literary non-fiction, include some or all of the literary features that we mentioned above—and more. Within those four forms, we will find a great variety of genres and styles, which we will consider in the following sections, and, as we shall see, the four forms, while exhibiting striking differences from each other, will also have much in common.

What is fiction?

Sometimes, when people think of literature, they think of **fiction** – a story about something that didn't really happen. That idea is not very helpful, though, for two reasons: the relationship between literary works and things that really happen or happened in the world is quite complicated, so we can't just easily say that fiction deals solely with things that did not happen. Secondly, as we can see from the list above, some non-fiction is, indeed, literary. We need a better understanding then of what **fiction** is.

We can think of **prose fiction** as being works which are written in prose form and which, at least to some degree, include elements out of the author's imagination, rather than being solely a recounting of events from the real world. There is a whole spectrum, however, of works which incorporate differing degrees of imaginative – fictive – elements.

When we say 'realistic' here, we are talking about realism in the sense of the works being strongly representational – reflecting the real world to a high degree. At the left end of this spectrum, we might put historical fiction, while at the right end, we might put fantasy or science fiction. Even within those genres, however, we would find a variety of differences in the amount of realism or real-world connection we might find.

As an example of one work which we might identify as belonging at the far left end of the spectrum, we can propose *Arthur and George*, by Julian Barnes, which is a fictionalized account of the author, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his efforts (ultimately successful) to clear the name of George Edalji, an English-born son of an Indian father and a Scottish mother. Edalji was wrongfully convicted of mutilating farm animals and served three years in prison for the crime he did not commit. The story is true – that is, Barnes did his research and the facts are historically accurate. The real-life Conan Doyle did in fact establish the truth of Edalji's innocence and restore to him his license to practice as a solicitor. As a result of this effort, in fact, the British court of appeals was established (Rafferty). The reason that *Arthur and George* was published as a novel fiction – rather than as an historical account is that Barnes brought the characters to life, giving us access to words and thoughts and feelings which, although very believable in the context of the historical facts, are not 'facts' to which Barnes had access. He imagined what it must have been like to be Arthur and George and the other people involved in the story. Nevertheless: the novel is highly realistic and richly historically accurate.

On the other end of the spectrum, we might consider a work such as Ursula LeGuin's science fiction novel, *The Left-Hand of Darkness*. This novel takes place in an imaginary time during which interplanetary travel is possible and on an imaginary planet called Winter. The inhabitants of the planet are called Gethenians. The story is told from the perspective of an ambassador from a planet called Terra. The story revolves around the fact that the Gethenians can change gender at will, and so are sometimes male and at other times female. In a bonded couple with children, first one partner and then the other might have borne the babies. The narrator, Genly Hai, struggles to try to understand and accept this fact, which is very different from the way gender exists on his home planet. He finds that when his friend and mentor appears as a woman, after a time as a man, he, Genly, cannot easily cope with the change. Genly's brief is to bring the Gethenians into the interplanetary organization called the Ekumen, but the vast difference in culture makes this a very difficult proposition. All of these events, characters, and places are imaginary, of course.

The Left-Hand of Darkness, then, is highly imaginative science fiction, while *Arthur and George* is highly realistic historical fiction. Much fiction falls in between those two extreme ends of the spectrum. Consider the story 'An Astrologer's Day' by R.K. Narayan, which is set in an unnamed, but realistic setting in India prior to 1957. You can access the text via the QR code on the right. We can determine the time period because the monetary unit mentioned in the story, the anna, was demonetised in 1957 (Republic India Coinage). The story itself was published in 1947 in a collection of the same name, so one might be tempted to think that Narayan was writing from his own experience; however, we know that the story is fiction because it is identified as a short story and not as memoir. (Perhaps more saliently, we know it is fiction from the clever tidiness of the ironic twist in the ending. Real life seldom dishes up such deliciously clever turns of events!)

ACTIVITY

Discussion

Given what you know about the story, where along that spectrum of highly realistic to highly imaginative would you put the Narayan short story? Is it closer to Arthur and George, or closer to The Left-Hand of Darkness?

R.K.Narayan

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami, known as R.K. Narayan, was an author from South India who wrote many novels and short stories, most prolifically between the 1930s and the 1980s. He was honoured for his work by both the Royal Society of Literature in England and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters (Penguin India). He also won the Sahitya Acadamy Award in India ('R.K. Narayan').

Narayan wrote a number of novels and short stories set in a fictional town of Malgudi, exploring the lives of the characters who lived in that town ('R.K. Narayan'). He has been compared to the American writer William Faulkner, who also wrote many stories set in a fictional place called Yoknapatawpha County.

In contrast to the story by R.K. Narayan, Zitkala-Ša, a Dakota Sioux Native American writer from the early-twentieth century, wrote short stories which were heavily autobiographical. Her work is considered to be fiction rather than straight autobiography because she, too, used her experiences to create art.

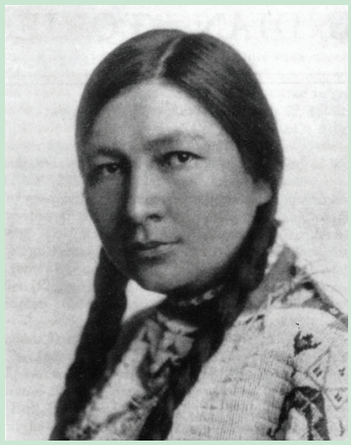
Here is an excerpt from her story 'The Widespread Enigma Concerning Blue-Star Woman':

> It was summer on the western plains. Fields of golden sunflowers facing eastward, greeting the rising sun. Blue-Star Woman, with windshorn braids of white hair over each ear, sat in the shade of her log hut before an open fire. Lonely but unmolested she dwelt here like the ground squirrel that took its abode nearby, – both through the easy tolerance of the land owner. The Indian woman held a skillet over the burning embers. A large round cake, with long slashes in its center, was baking and crowding the capacity of the frying pan.
>
> In deep abstraction Blue-Star Woman prepared her morning meal. 'Who am I?' had become the obsessing riddle of her life. She was no longer a young woman, being in her fifty-third year. In the eyes of the white man's law, it was required of her to give proof of her membership in the Sioux tribe. The unwritten law of heart prompted her naturally to say, 'I am a being. I am Blue-Star Woman. A piece of earth is my birthright.'
>
> It was taught, for reasons now forgot, that an Indian should never pronounce his or her name in answer to any inquiry. It was probably a means of protection in the days of black magic. Be this as it may, Blue-Star Woman lived in times when this teaching was disregarded. It gained her nothing, however, to pronounce her name to the government official to whom she applied for her share of tribal land. His persistent question was always, 'Who were your parents?'
>
> *(Zitkala-Ša 72)*

Zitkala-Ša wrote stories which reflected her knowledge of life in the Sioux tribe on the Yankton Sioux Reservation in South Dakota, and her experience with white American culture from her days at a Quaker boarding school in Indiana and at college in Indiana and Pennsylvania ('Zitkala-Ša Native American Writer'). She wrote from her personal experience, but she also invented characters and events, so we cannot consider her work to be autobiographical.

Zitkala-Ša

Zitkala-Ša, also known as Gertrude Simmons, was born on the Yankton Sioux Reservation in South Dakota. She is the first Native American woman to write stories based on tribal legends which had been conveyed from generation to generation through an oral tradition. She was a talented violinist and earned significant acclaim from white society. Eventually, Zitkala-Ša decided to return to her Native American roots and returned to South Dakota after having lived elsewhere, but found it difficult to fit in with a society who felt that she had lost the traditions of the culture ('Zitkala-Ša Native American Writer'). Much of her work reflects this difficult cultural conflict.



GLOBAL ISSUES

CHOOSING FROM MULTIPLE POSSIBILITIES

Even in this short excerpt, we can see that global issues related to two different fields of inquiry could be developed for this story. The relevant fields of inquiry are **culture**, **identity and community**, and **power**, **politics** and **justice**.

Blue-Star Woman asks herself directly 'Who am I?' in line 7, and that is followed by a discussion of the significance of her name. The end of the extract raises the question of the rights of Blue-Star Woman in the context of the government officials to whom she must apply for the title to 'her share of the tribal land' (lines 11–15). Seeing the connection to those broad global issues will not be enough when the time comes to prepare for your individual oral, however. You would need to read the rest of the story in order to be able to identify the point that Zitkala-Ša makes about those issues. In this case, the whole story moves from the particular situation of Blue-Star Woman to the men in Washington who will settle her fate. The story shows that the interference of the white man in traditional Native American culture has destroyed the values and, therefore, the identity of the Native American people. It also shows an old idea: that power corrupts. The story shows how some Native American men have figured out a way to make a lot of money by 'helping' other Native Americans get their rights to the land – in exchange for half of everything they get.

A possible global issue which could be discussed in relation to this text would be the idea that culture clash leads to the destruction of one culture, which would relate to the culture, identity, and community field of inquiry.

Another possible global issue would be the idea that power corrupts those who wield it; that global issue would relate to the field of inquiry power, politics, and justice.

ACTIVITY

Read the following extract from Alice Munro's short story, 'Queenie', and write a short explanation of how one of the fields of inquiry discussed above: **culture, identity and community** or **power, politics and justice** might relate to this story.

See if you can develop a global issue from the field of inquiry you choose. After you have made your own interpretation, you can read and compare it to the commentary at the end of the book (page 357).

Both Queenie and Mr Vorguilla had to go out to work in the evenings. Mr Vorguilla played the piano in a restaurant. He wore a tuxedo. And Queenie had a job selling tickets in a movie theatre. The theatre was just a few blocks away, so I walked there with her. And when I saw her sitting in the ticket-booth I understood that the make-up and the dyed puffed hair and the hoop earrings were not so strange after all.

Queenie looked like some of the girls passing on the street or going in to see the movie with their boyfriends. And she looked very much like some of the girls portrayed in the posters that surrounded her. She looked to be connected to the world of drama, of heated love affairs and dangers, that was being depicted inside on the screen.

She looked – in my father's words – as if she didn't have to take a back seat to anybody.

'Why don't you just wander around for a while?' she had said to me. But I felt conspicuous. I couldn't imagine sitting in a café drinking coffee and advertising to the world that I had nothing to do and no place to go. Or going into a store and trying on clothes that I had no hope of buying. I climbed the hill again. I waved hello to the Greek woman calling out her window. I let myself in with Queenie's key.

I sat on the cot in the sun porch. There was nowhere to hang up the clothes I had brought and I thought it might not be such a good idea to unpack, anyway. Mr Vorguilla might not like to see any sign that I was staying.

I thought that Mr Vorguilla's looks had changed, just as Queenie's had. But his had not changed, as hers had, in the direction of what seemed to me a hard foreign glamour and sophistication. His hair, which had been reddish-grey, was now quite grey, and the expression of his face – always ready to flash with outrage at the possibility of disrespect or an inadequate performance or just at the fact of something in his house not being where it was supposed to be – seemed now to be one of more permanent grievance, as if some insult was being offered or bad behaviour going unpunished, all the time in front of his eyes.

I got up and walked around the apartment. You can never get a good look at the places people live in while they are there.

Alice Munro

Canadian author Alice Munro was the winner of the 2013 Nobel Prize for Literature. Her **fiction** draws on the history of her family, including their emigration from Scotland and settlement in Ontario three generations ago. She lived most of her life in Huron County, and much of her work has been significantly shaped by the culture and geography of that area (Thacker). Munro has led a quiet life, staying away from the spotlight, but has worked publicly against the censorship of books in high schools. She has won a long list of prizes for her work – almost exclusively short stories. Her stories explore a variety of problems – relationships, moral failings, and the question of how well memory reflects reality (Thacker).

A final important point about **fiction** is that all fiction, no matter how much or how little it relies on imaginary times, places, characters, and actions, has some basis in truth. There is something we can recognize in the feelings of the characters or their reactions to the events to which they are subjected, or there is something we can recognize in their motivations or their interactions.

In LeGuin's book, *The Left-Hand of Darkness*, for example, we might not be able to relate to traveling to a distant planet to encounter a species greatly unlike our own, but we can recognize and relate to the difficulty of trying to understand a culture which is very different from ours

and to the struggle to empathize with and appreciate people for whom that culture is completely normal. Even in highly fantastic fiction, in other words, the opportunity is there for the reader to connect to the mind and the outlook of the author whose world view shaped the text. This opportunity is an important feature of literary works: as with all art, literature gives us access to a view of human experience through other people's eyes.

Fiction is not a literary form; however, **prose** fiction is. The term 'fiction' can be applied to other literary forms, especially drama, but some poetry is also clearly fiction. The term 'prose' differentiates novels, novellas, and short stories from other kinds of literature. 'Prose' is language which does not feature **meter**, **rhyme** or rhythm strongly. We speak in prose. **Prose** fiction almost always appears in the form of complete sentences and paragraphs, though some authors break that convention to create a particular effect.

Within the literary form of **prose** fiction, we can identify several different genres. A genre is a particular category, in this case a category of fiction, whose members exhibit various characteristics which make them similar to each other and different from works of other genres.

Genre	Description	Example
Historical fiction	Fiction which is set in an identifiable place and period in time and which can include, in the plot, actual events which occurred in that time and place.	The novels of Jane Austen can be classified as historical fiction, set, as they are, in Regency England at the beginning of the 19th century.
Romantic fiction	Fiction which focuses on a love story between or among characters.	Colleen McCullough wrote *The Thorn Birds,* a dramatic story spanning several generations trying to make a living in the outback of Australia. At the center of the story is the passionate and tragic love between a young girl and a priest.
Westerns	Fiction which is set in the American west (usually this means the United States, but it could mean Canada or South America) and features as characters native Americans and/or cowboys or ranchers.	*The Whistling Season* by Ivan Doig is the story of a family trying to make a living ranching in Montana in the early 20th century in an area where little rain falls.
Thrillers	Thrillers feature conflict among or between large entities like government agencies or major companies and focus on crime and/or espionage.	Some people would classify Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose* as a thriller, as it is a mystery involving encoded secrets which must be solved before the truth can be known about who committed a series of murders.
Mystery	In a mystery story, someone has committed a crime (often a murder). Someone, a professional or amateur detective, tries to solve the mystery of who did it.	Writing under the pen name of Robert Galbraith, J.K. Rowling has published a series of mystery novels featuring detective Cormoran Strike. The first of the series is *The Cuckoo's Calling*.
Fantasy	A fantasy story features fantastical elements—that is, magical creatures and/or people with magical abilities or superpowers which do not exist in the real world.	J.R.R. Tolkein's series *The Lord of the Rings* is a classic fantasy series set in the fictional universe of Middle-Earth. It features a magical ring, hobbits, dwarves, elves, dragons, and a creature called Gollum, among other fantastic elements.
Science fiction	Fiction set in an imaginary time, and often place, and in which the story relies in an essential way on some scientific element—often technology which does not exist in our time.	*The Martian* by Andy Weir. This novel, which later became a movie, gives us an astronaut who is stranded on Mars after an accident to his ship. He must figure out how to use the equipment left behind to survive and to travel to a place where a rescue ship can come and get him.
Post-apocalyptic or dystopian fiction	Post-apocalyptic stories are also generally set in an imaginary time, though less often in an imaginary place. Instead, post-apocalyptic stories take place in a time in which some natural or man-made disaster has destroyed civilization as we know it, and we see the survivors trying to rebuild society, or existing in the society that has arisen following the destruction. Post-apocalyptic tales are very often also dystopian. Dystopian stories are the opposite of utopian stories; in a utopia, everyone is happy. In a dystopia, at least some people suffer greatly due to great injustice built into the societal system.	*The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood is a dystopian story set in a time when humankind has suffered a crisis due to widespread infertility. The few fertile women have been conscripted into a kind of slavery in a strongly patriarchal society, in which the women, the handmaids, can be sold to wealthy men who use them to bear children for their infertile wives.

This list is not intended to be a complete catalogue of all the different genres of fiction. Additionally, some works of fiction do not fit easily into any of these genres. Anne Patchett's novel, *Bel Canto,* for example, is the story of a terrorist group which enacts an elaborate plot to kidnap the president of the country (the country is unnamed in the novel). The plot goes wrong when the president doesn't attend the dinner party where the attack was launched, and so the terrorists find themselves, instead, with a large group of visitors to the country, including a world-famous opera star and a Japanese businessman, for whom the party was given, and his translator. The vice-president is among the group, as well as two priests. Eventually a negotiator is found to try to be the go-between for the terrorists and the government, carrying demands back and forth. The novel is not history, but not science fiction. There is no one hero/spy, so it's not a typical thriller. It's not dystopian or a mystery. It's rather difficult to say just what genre the novel is.

Genres can also, of course, overlap. The Harry Potter series, for example, is fantasy, but it can also be seen as a thriller, in which Harry Potter and his friends have to face and defeat Voldemort in order to save the integrity of the magical world. *Arthur and George* is historical fiction, but it is also a mystery in that we don't know who did the actual crime for which George Edalji was convicted. We listed Jane Austen's novels above as historical fiction, but they might also be classed as romantic fiction, as each one explores the romantic relationship of the main character.

ACTIVITY

Discussion

Think of three or four books which you have read. Into what genre or genres would you classify them and why? **Describe** what it means to say that a work is fiction. Name at least five of the main genres of prose fiction

Drama

Drama, like prose fiction, is a literary form. Drama is meant to be acted out on stage and the playwright tells his or her story through dialogue. Instead of our trying to understand the implications of the story by reading about the characters, as presented by narration or narrative, we observe the events directly and must draw whatever conclusions we can about the characters' thoughts, feelings, and actions from our observations. The fact that plays are ideally experienced in performance means that the audience will not only hear the words spoken but will also see the actions. Setting, lighting, props, and music and other sound effects are also elements that contribute to an audience's understanding of a play and which will be explored as part of the literary nature of drama.

You can think of the relationship of drama to real-world events in just the same way as you can think of the relationship of prose fiction to real-life events. Plays run the gamut from the very realistic, historically accurate to the very fantastic. One example of an historically accurate play is William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar.* The play tells the story of the general Julius Caesar who ruled Rome in the last century BC and the conflict which ensued when he set out to be crowned as dictator for life. People who wished to preserve the Roman Republic opposed this move, and Caesar was brutally murdered. The murder set off a civil war. Shakespeare took his historical facts from a translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives,* an historical work written in the 2nd century CE. The facts of the story are, to the best of our knowledge true; however, Shakespeare had necessarily to invent the speeches that the characters make, including **soliloquys**, which reveal a character's inner thoughts.

An example of a play which might best be situated at the other end of the spectrum is the 1920 play *R.U.R.*, written by Czech playwright Karel Čapek. The title, in English, stands for 'Rossum's

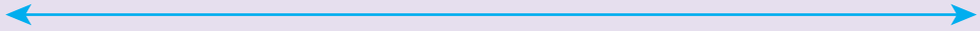
Universal Robots', and Čapek invented the word 'robot' for his play. In the play, the robots are invented to serve essentially as slave labour, but, eventually, as scientists add more and more technological developments so that the robots become more and more like humans, the robots rebel and then become the masters, rather than the servants (Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica). Perhaps in the 21st century, this play seems to be not too far-fetched, as we are accustomed to the reality of advanced robotics, but you might imagine that 100 years ago, the story was quite fantastic.

As with **prose** fiction, plays can fit anywhere along the continuum between these two examples – and possibly even beyond them at the extreme ends.

ACTIVITY

Determining the role of fiction in plays

Directions: Read the short descriptions of each of the following plays and decide which genre or genres you would use to classify the play. Try ordering them along the continuum below:



Relates a story from real-life events

Relates a highly imaginative story about events which have not happened in the real world

The Miracle Worker by William Gibson	This is a biographical play about Helen Keller, who became blind and deaf at a few months of age after being ill with scarlet fever, and Annie Sullivan, who came to teach Helen how to communicate. Helen Keller and Annie Sullivan were real people, and the events of the story are factually quite accurate.
Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare	This is a play based on an English poem based on an Italian novella. It tells of a pair of feuding families, the Capulets and the Montagues. The Capulet's daughter, Juliet and the Montague's son, Romeo, fall deeply in love with each other, and their brief, tragic relationship brings an end to the feud.
Cyrano de Bergerac by Edmond Rostand	This is the story of a soldier with an abnormally huge nose which makes him a target of ridicule. He falls in love with his beautiful distant cousin Roxane, but he cannot declare himself because he fears her rejection due to his ugliness. Cyrano has, however, become a heroic soldier who fears nothing else. In one scene, he is attacked by 100 villains sent to kill him, and he beats them all. He has also developed a mastery over words which makes him eloquent and witty. Roxane is herself in love with a handsome young soldier in Rostand's company, Christian de Neuvillette, who, unfortunately, lacks all of Cyrano's abilities. Cyrano sees a chance to speak, through Christian, all of his love for Roxane, and the pair strike up a deal: Cyrano will write all the words that Christian will then say to Roxane to make her love him. There was a real-life Cyrano, and the story is loosely based on some events from his life.
Copenhagen by Michael Frayn	This is the story of a meeting in Copenhagen in 1941 between Danish Physicist Nihls Bohr and German Physicist Werner von Heisenberg. The meeting took place during the height of the race to nuclear weapons, and people have long wondered what took place at that meeting. Later accounts from the two men contradicted each other, so little is known. Frayn gives us the meeting as he imagined it happened.
Long Day's Journey Into Night by Eugene O'Neill	This is the story of the Tyrone family on one day in their lives. The family lives in Connecticut and is coming apart at the seams due to the mother's addiction to opiates and the addiction of the three men, the father and two sons, to alcohol. The younger son has just been diagnosed with tuberculosis. The day starts out with the family feeling hopeful that this time the mother, just back from a rehabilitation center, will be off drugs for good, but it ends in tragedy. The characters are based on O'Neill's family, and he left instructions that it was not to be published until 25 years after his death.

As we saw with the fictionalized story of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his assistance to George Edalji, historical plays, like historical novels, are necessarily going to be partly fictionalized—if only because the playwright has to put words in the mouths of characters, and it is virtually never possible to have access to the actual words that a number of people said to each other over some period of their lives. Playwrights, like novelists, are artists. They write plays to create an aesthetic response; hence, they often distort, exaggerate or change facts. At the very minimum, they choose what to include and what to leave out, and they give us the words and thoughts of the characters.

Athol Fugard's play *"Master Harold"… and the boys* is an example of a highly realistic play, and one which is often seen to be in large part autobiographical. It is set in South Africa during Apartheid, and it recreates to a large degree events from Fugard's own life. Fugard's family did have a Basuto servant named Sam Semela who worked for Fugard's mother at the Jubilee Boarding House and, later, in a tea shop in Port Elizabeth, and, until the afternoon of the events shown in the play, Sam and Fugard were friends.

There was, however, an encounter one afternoon between Fugard and Sam which ended with Fugard spitting in Sam's face (Jordan 462). So far, these facts which appear in the play do refer to real events in Fugard's life. One thing that Fugard did which fictionalizes the play is that he enhanced the symbolic significance of many of the actions and events in the play. For one thing, the events take place during a terrible storm, and the storm takes on the symbolic function of representing the trouble which is arising in the relationships between the characters. Other events are no longer just events; events and actions also take on a greater symbolic significance than we might be likely to notice in real life. Literary critic John O. Jordan gives this example:

> If standing is the posture of servitude for Sam and Willie, we can better appreciate the significance of ballroom dancing in their lives. Since they are not permitted to sit down on the job, dancing and dance practice are a way not only of providing a welcome relief from the tedium of their work but also of transforming the enforced posture of subordination into a mode of creative and liberating movement. Hence the importance of the play's first significant action, when Willie rises from his knees, thinks for a moment, and then begins awkwardly to practice the quickstep. In a sense, the thematic pattern of the entire play is contained in this single non-verbal moment, not the least important aspect of which is Willie's short pause to reflect. (466)

In real life, we do sometimes see standing and kneeling as having some symbolic significance. We might stand to show respect to someone entering a room. Many people kneel in church to show their devotion and humility. In 2016, American football player Colin Kaepernick created a sensation by kneeling during the playing of the National Anthem before football games as a means of drawing attention to the problem of racial injustice. Although kneeling is usually, like the kneeling in church, a sign of humility, many people took Kaepernick's kneeling, because it was a form of silent protest, as an insult, and a national debate ensued.

Nevertheless, standing and kneeling do not always have powerful symbolic significance. Often they are just actions we take in order to accomplish tasks that we want to accomplish, rather than actions we take in order to demonstrate a particular attitude. Standing up is not a widespread traditional symbol in literature of the type which has a fixed meaning, such as the Christian symbol of the tree of knowledge (we will explore the meaning and role of symbols in much greater detail throughout this section of the book and especially in Chapter 1.5). In this play, however, the act of kneeling and standing has taken on a powerful significance which is directly

related to the situation in which the characters are presented. Fugard took a personal experience as the starting point of his play, but one way in which he then turned that experience into art was to highlight the symbolic significance of an action—standing up to practice dancing--which many people might not even have noticed in real life.

Another way in which the play differs from real life and so is fictionalized to some degree is that Fugard manipulated the ending of his play so that it does not simply recount the facts of his personal experience. He ends the play with a moment of great suspense, leaving the viewers or readers to try to decide for themselves what the main character, Hally, has learned from his encounter on that afternoon, and whether it has changed him. We are left with the image of Hally going out into the storm, alone, and we do not know what he will do next. Fugard used his experience to serve purposes quite different from simple autobiography.

CONCEPT CONNECTION

REPRESENTATION

As we mentioned earlier, plays are generally written to be performed and to be experienced in performance. How does the fact that actors must perform the roles contribute to the ability of the play to accurately represent the real world? Does it make the play more representational, or less? Does a character in a novel contribute to or reduce the degree of representation? Why do we call the 'people' in literature 'characters' instead of people? In what sense do the characters represent the author's meaning?

Genres of plays

We categorize plays into different genres from the ones we use for prose fiction. Some of the most common genres of plays are:

- tragedy
- comedy
- historical plays
- musical theatre, and
- the theatre of the absurd.

If you have studied Shakespeare, you are probably familiar with the first three categories, as his plays were organized into those categories when they were first published in the First Folio in 1623. Historically, a **tragedy** is a play in which the main character comes to a terrible fate, often due to a problem of his own making. Traditionally, a tragedy involved aristocratic people such as kings and princes, and the disaster that is suffered by the main character usually has far-reaching effects involving many other people ('Theatre Genres'). *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are examples of classic tragedies. In modern days, the nature of tragedy has broadened. We tend to use the more general term 'drama' when talking about plays which have bad endings. Drama does not tend to involve people of high rank, and the tragedy is often more personal.

Whereas nowadays we think of books or plays or movies which are funny when we talk of 'comedy,' the traditional definition of a **comedy** is a play with a happy ending. Often comedies involved more ordinary people, in contrast to tragedies. Oscar Wilde's play, *The Importance of Being Ernest,* is a comedy in both senses – it has a happy ending, and it is funny.