

Genres

The study of genre is not an exact science. Some texts may belong in more than one genre. For example: *Romeo and Juliet* is a drama, a tragedy, and an Elizabethan play. The idea of genre is open to discussion and there is good reason to discuss genre. **Understanding genre will help you know what to expect from a text based on its genre; it will also help you notice when an author is playing with your expectations.** Wouldn't you like to be *in* on the joke? First, you must learn some basics:

Main Genres and Subgenres

Some consider these to be **the main genres of writing: fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama, and folklore.** Every piece of writing can fall into one of these categories. **Each main genre has a group of subgenres.** Each subgenre has a set of characteristics that you must learn in order to identify them. This list does not contain all of the possible subgenres, but it should give you a pretty thorough overview.

1 **Fiction:** stories that come from the author's imagination.

- **Historical Fiction:** based on a person or event from history.
- **Science Fiction:** dealing with aliens, the distant future, or advanced technology.
- **Fantasy:** containing monsters, magic, or other supernatural elements.
- **Realistic Fiction:** a story that could have happened, but didn't.

2 **Nonfiction:** writing that is true or factual.

- **Informational Writing:** provides information on a topic.
- **Persuasive Writing:** attempts to influence the reader.
- **Autobiography:** the story of one's life told by oneself.
- **Biography:** the story of one's life told by another.

3 **Drama:** writing that is meant to be acted on a stage (a play).

- **Comedy:** has a happy ending.
- **Tragedy:** ends in death and sadness.

4 **Poetry:** writing that is concerned with the beauty of language

5 **Folklore:** stories handed down through speech from generation to generation.

- **Fairy Tale:** a story with magic, monsters, and/or talking animals (like fiction / fantasy, but part of the oral tradition).
- **Fable:** a very short story that has a moral or life lesson; usually has talking animals as main characters.
- **Myth:** has gods or goddesses and often accounts for how something came to be.
- **Legend:** an exaggerated story about something that may have been real at one time.

- **Tall Tale:** stories set in the Wild West; the main character's strengths, skills, or size have been exaggerated and the tone is funny.

Activity: Choose the genre and subgenre in which the story most likely belongs. Then explain how you got your answer.

1. Journey to the Centre of the Earth by Jules Verne

The story of a German professor who believes there are volcanic tubes going toward the center of the Earth. He, his nephew Axel, and their guide Hans climb down a crater and have many wild adventures, encountering dinosaurs and prehistoric man. They eventually return to surface again in southern Italy.

Genre:

Explain your answer:

2. Sleeping Beauty retold by Charles Perrault

A beautiful princess pricks her finger on a sewing needle, after being cursed by a wicked fairy. The princess falls into a deep sleep. One hundred years later, a prince fights his way through the enchanted forest and awakens the beautiful sleeping princess with a kiss.

Genre:

Explain your answer:

3. The Reign of Attila the Hun by Ed Reaves

Attila the Hun was the scourge of both the Eastern and Western Roman Empires in the 440s and 450s. . He invaded and conquered territory in what would now be considered France and Italy, terrorizing the countryside along the way. This text tells the story of Attila's life.

Genre:

Explain your answer

4. The Fox and the Grapes retold by Aesop

One day a fox came upon a grape orchard and found a bunch of beautiful grapes hanging from a high branch. "Boy those sure would be tasty," he thought to himself. He backed up and took a running start, and jumped. He did not get high enough. He went back to his starting spot and tried again. He almost got high enough this time, but he still could not reach the grapes. He tried again and again, but he just couldn't get high enough to reach the grapes. Finally, he gave up. As he walked away, he put his nose in the air and said: "I am sure those grapes are sour anyway." It is easy to hate what you cannot have.

Genre:

Explain your answer

5. The Silver Cross by Steve Stark

This novel tells the story of a fictional American teenager named Henry Cross. Against his mother's wishes, Cross enlists in the fight against the Germans in World War II. At first he is frightened and ineffective in battle, but after making friends with an elite sniper, Cross learns to overcome his fear in battle and become a better soldier. Soon Cross is a war machine, but sometimes soldiers have to make difficult decisions concerning the lives of others. Will Cross make the right decision when he runs into just such a situation? Is there a right choice for Cross to make?

Genre:

Explain your answer

6. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight by unknown

Sir Gawain is King Arthur's nephew, and this is the story of how Gawain met a challenge from a giant knight dressed in all green armor. The story is very serious and is told as though it was true; many people believe that King Arthur was a real person, but this story is probably not true. If it were true, it has been greatly exaggerated.

Genre:

Explain your answer

7. The Reading Times published by the Mortini Group

This periodical contains strategies for teachers and students to improve reading comprehension skills.

Genre:

Explain your answer

8. From Athena to Zeus: The Greek Gods and Goddesses retold by Chris Reed

This book retells the epic stories of the gods, goddesses, and heroes in Ancient Greece. All of the classic stories are in this text: the adventures of Perseus, the battles of Heracles, Odysseus and the Trojan wars, and the voyage of Jason and the Argonauts.

Genre:

Explain your answer