

## chapter 2

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For English Language Learners

Kneeling in the sand, Paulie shredded dry seaweed and fluffed it into heap between the three black cooking stones, half forgetting that she had no food to cook. She broke palm fronds over the seaweed, then propped two pieces of driftwood with their tips just above the palm. Raking the sand together with her fingers, she built up a ring around the outside of the stones, careful to make room for the air to blow in and give life to the fire, a little and not too much.

Paulie leaned back, still kneeling, circling her upper arms in her hands to warm them. Night had come. The tree frogs stopped singing all at once.

“You got matches, Uncle?”

Paulie’s uncle was washing in seawater from a bucket, pouring it down his back to get off the sweat and the sawdust, rinsing his arms.

“All the matches gone, Paulie.”

“Go see if you can borrow a coal,” her grandmother said. Sitting on the steps of her house, a cloth around her thin shoulders, Grann Adeline leaned toward the fire as if it were already lit. She frowned, slapped at a mosquito on her ankle. “Go on, girl. Ask sweetly and somebody bound to give you an ember.”

Paulie wandered down the sand path. The small houses clustered under the trees were mostly dark. She could hear voices talking softly, a baby crying. A thin dog came out and sniffed at the backs of her knees. Paulie looked for the glow of a cook fire, smelled the breeze for one. She could feel the sea air, and hear the waves coming in, but it seemed like nobody was cooking.

*Source:* From *Tonight, by Sea*, by Frances Temple. Scholastic Inc./Orchard Books. Copyright © 1995 by Frances Temple. Reprinted by permission.

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## The Artistry of Literary Elements

Literature is a miracle. With words on a page, a writer can take readers to a place that never was, let them know people who never lived, and help them share adventures that never happened—and, in spite of the artifice, create something truer than life itself.

It can enhance our appreciation of a work to have a vocabulary and a set of concepts to help us admire its wonders, or note the shortcomings of a less-than-satisfactory work. In this chapter, we describe the literary qualities that critics and teachers most often refer to when they talk about texts, both narrative texts and informational ones. Knowing these characteristics will give us a vocabulary for exploring the elements of texts that move readers, and also for evaluating works for young readers.

The main elements of a literary work we will discuss are genre; setting; characterization; plot; theme; stance of the implied reader; point of view; the author’s style, voice, tone, and mood; and intertextuality. Let’s first take a closer look at each of these literary elements. Later we will consider some special literary features of informational books and poetry.

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## Genre: The “Rules of the Game”

Genres in literature are categories of writing recognized for their patterns of organization, their style, and their effects on readers. Genres matter. Imagine you are passing by a TV on a Saturday afternoon and see a game in progress. Your brain quickly registers what kind of game it is—football, baseball, soccer, tennis—whether it is played by women or men, and so on. Likewise, when you hear a story being told or come across one in a book, you soon decide whether it is truth or fiction, is based in fantasy or reality, is meant to be funny or scary, has human or animal characters, follows a dramatic

plot or has a repeated series of actions, and so on. In your experiences with both sports and literature, you rely upon a set of categories to recognize what you are observing, what the rules are, and what you can expect to happen as well as not happen.

The genres most often treated in children's literature are folktales and other traditional literature, poetry, contemporary realistic fiction, fantasy, historical fiction, biography, and informational books. Genres let readers know what to expect as they read a work, and how to make sense of what happens.

In a work of fiction, the story usually begins with characters in a setting who soon face a problem. The reader implicitly appreciates the problem and begins to wonder about its solution. Like rules in different sports, the range of possible solutions of a literary work is controlled by the genre. If the work is realistic fiction, we expect a solution that would be possible in real life. If the work is a fairy tale, we know that the solution may be magical. If the work is fantasy, we are prepared for the story to take us into a kind of reality removed from our own, and then tell us, indirectly, something about our human nature or the world we live in.

Some works blur the distinction between realistic fiction and fantasy. *Magical realism* is the term used to describe works that mix the real and the magical. While true fantasies like J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* take readers to a fantasy world, works of magical realism stay anchored in the real world but introduce just a touch of magical elements. For example, David Almond's *Skellig* is the story of ten-year-old Michael, whose sister has been born with a defective heart and is not expected to live. While the family fixes up a decrepit house, they are sleepwalking in the dread of impending tragedy. But Michael finds a tramp—a man looking like a dead thing—in a pile of junk in the falling-down garbage, and living, it turns out, on dead animals that the owls bring him. His name is Skellig, and he is an angel. Really.

Works may even keep the reader guessing as to what sort of genre they are reading. *The Magician's Nephew*, the first volume in C. S. Lewis's *Narnia* series, keeps readers wondering what is so peculiar about Uncle Andrew—until the two children slip on a magical ring and are transported to another world. In those early moments before the magical ring works its power, readers' curiosity is aroused as much by the questions of what *kinds of things* can happen (that is, "What genre is this, anyway?") as by the question of what *will* happen.

\*Note that picture books may be written in any of the genres: folktales, realistic fiction, poetry, informational books. Picture books are a kind of format rather than a genre, so they are not included in our list of genres. Figure 2.1 describes the main genres of literature for children.

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## Settings: How Do Authors Create Times and Places?

The setting is the time and place in which the events of a story occur. Because whatever is visualized must be seen in time and space, the setting of the story is part of the reader's invitation into an imaginary experience. If an author is successful in evoking a setting, the reader may subconsciously supply many details herself.

The development of settings varies from genre to genre. In a folktale, the setting may get scant mention, yet it can still have symbolic significance. In realistic fiction, the setting may be described more elaborately to add verisimilitude, or lifelikeness, to the story and make it easier for readers to believe in the events. In a survival story, the setting works against the main character or characters—almost as if it were a character

Genre	Definition	Subtype
Folktales	Works by anonymous authors that were passed on orally from generation to generation	<p><b>fairy tales:</b> tales in which magic is prominent</p> <p><b>legends:</b> larger-than-life tales of famous people</p> <p><b>fables:</b> stories with a moral</p> <p><b>epics:</b> long, rhymed works that relate a hero's exploits</p> <p><b>myths:</b> ancient stories about the gods</p> <p><b>pourquoi stories:</b> stories lighter than myths that explain, often delightfully, about the reasons for things</p>
Realistic Fiction	Fictional stories that <i>might have happened</i> . In realistic fiction, events are plausible, and settings are usually drawn from actual geography.	<p><b>adventure stories:</b> works that tell of a character's struggles against nature or other people</p> <p><b>humorous stories:</b> works that are funny</p> <p><b>relationship stories</b> (or other problem stories): works that focus on relations between people or a character's struggles with her own self-doubts</p> <p><b>historical fiction:</b> works with realistic characters and plots set in a historical time and place</p>
Fantasy	Works with otherworldly or supernatural elements	<p><b>high fantasy:</b> works that create a parallel universe alongside the real world</p> <p><b>low fantasy:</b> works in which a magical element intrudes into life in the real world, and makes possible a series of events which otherwise stay very true to life</p> <p><b>science fiction:</b> works that create a fictionalized setting or set of events based on some projection of scientific knowledge</p>
Poetry	Works in verse	<p><b>narrative poems:</b> works that tell a story in verse</p> <p><b>lyric or expressive poems:</b> verses that convey observations or express feelings</p> <p><b>humorous poems:</b> jokes, funny riddles, or humorous stories in verse</p> <p><b>novels in verse:</b> book-length poems that tell a story</p>

FIGURE 2.1 Genres of Children's Literature

itself. In historical fiction or in stories from other cultures, the setting may share center stage with the characters and events, since readers may be as curious about what life is or was like in that setting as they are about what happens in the story. The same can be said of science fiction or fantasy—genres in which the author is free to make up whole new worlds. Let's look, then, at how settings vary with some of these genres.

### *Settings in Folktales and Fairy Tales*

Settings in folktales are presented with few details. They represent everywhere and nowhere, but they often have particular associations. In European tales, *home* is where normal life is lived, securely. The *forest* is where one may be tested by sinister forces. The *country* is where simple but honest folk live, whereas the *town* is the place of sophisticated but possibly treacherous people. A *cottage* is a place one usually wants to rise above (but may have to learn to settle for), and a *palace* is the residence of those who were born privileged or who have had triumphant success.

Because the genre of folk stories tends to use these same settings with the same connotations again and again, the mere mention of them usually cues the reader to make these associations.

### *Settings in Realistic Fiction*

Settings in realistic fiction are usually described in great detail. Just as the genre of a work sets and limits our expectations for what can happen in it, the way a setting is



## TEACHING IDEA 2.1

### EXPLORING FOLKTALE SETTINGS

Have the students think of the settings in folktales they know, such as "Puss 'n Boots," "The Old Lady Who Lived in a Vinegar Bottle," or "Hans Clodhopper." Who lives in each setting? What takes place there? Make a chart like the one in Figure 2.2 in which students record findings about different settings. What generalizations can they draw?

COMMON CORE STANDARD:  
*Key Ideas and Details,*  
STANDARD 3

	<i>Who lives at home in a cottage? What happens at home?</i>	<i>Who lives in the forest? What happens in the forest?</i>	<i>Who lives in a castle? What happens there?</i>
"Puss 'n Boots"			
"Sleeping Beauty"			
"Little Red Riding Hood"			
"The Gunny Wolf"			

FIGURE 2.2 Settings in Folktales and Fairy Tales

## Ask the Editor . . . Richard W. Jackson

*What was the best manuscript you ever received, and what qualities do you look for in an author?*

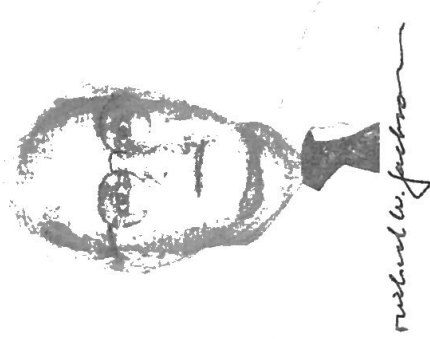
The best manuscript I've received? Ever? You might have asked me to choose between my children! There are several bests. Paula Fox's *Maurice's Room*—she'd written only three chapters at the time I first saw it but I remember reading them aloud to my wife and saying, "This woman will win the Newbery medal someday." And she did. Such vividness in the people, such kindness in the humor. And such a voice. Also a favorite—the text for *The Relatives Came* by Cynthia Rylant, for somewhat the same reasons. I believe we didn't change a word, though "best" for me doesn't mean word perfect. More important than immediate perfection is the breath of life in a piece. Frances Temple's *Taste of Salt* was another revelation—a "breathing" book about modern Haiti, about brave young people whose lives were, at the time, largely unimaginable by Americans (of any age). The book is written in two first-person teenage voices, and there is urgency in every word. For "I" stories, urgency is crucial.

Even "light" books, such as Avi's *S.O.R. Losers* or Judy Blume's *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, depend on urgency for their success. In funny stories as well as serious, you need to sense

the narrator's urge to bend your ear. *Toning the Sweep* by Angela Johnson is another unique example of urgent voice. It began as a collection of quick scenes, poetic impressions, snippets of conversation about a girl witnessing her grandmother's struggle with cancer; it grew into a novel over several years. Thrilling years.

I look for long-term associations with writers or illustrators and rarely take on anyone published by many houses—for snobbish reasons, I suppose. I look for loyalty and for brains. For devotion to hard work and a certain delicacy of touch. I listen for voice. Just this minute the phone rang and—speaking of voice—a cheery one said, "I've figured out how to do it, the whole book. It was our conversation yesterday that helped." The caller was Theresa Nelson, a superb novelist whose first book, *The 25-cent Miracle*, is another best. She's written four beauties since. My response to such calls has remained unchanged since 1962: gratitude and joy.

Richard W. Jackson is editor of Richard Jackson Books, an imprint of Orchard Books, which publishes some thirty new titles a year. His articles have appeared in *The Horn Book Magazine*, *School Library Journal*, and *The New Advocate*.



described in realistic fiction sets up and limits our expectations for what can happen in that work. Aspects of a setting can include:

- the immediate social group (that is, the people immediately surrounding the character),
- the wider social setting (that is, the characters' nationality, race, and social class),
- the geography (including what kinds of activities typically happen there, as well as what has happened there in the past and how people feel about it), and
- the historical period (the current decade or earlier ones).

Rita Garcia-Williams' *One Crazy Summer* illustrates all of these aspects of settings. The immediate social setting is the family of Delphine, age ten, who has been thrust into the role of mothering her younger sisters, Vonetta and Fern. They live with their kind but somewhat aloof father and their conservative, disapproving grandmother in a crowded Brooklyn apartment. The grandmother and father had moved to Brooklyn from the South some years before. As for the wider social settings,

they are African American, and they are keenly aware of their ethnicity whenever they are in the company of white people. The geographical setting shifts to Oakland, California, where the father has sent the children to visit their estranged mother, Cecile. Cecile seems to lack any capacity for kindness, even motherly instincts. The historical moment is the summer of 1968. A progressive young artist, Cecile is a radical women's liberationist, and the Black Panther movement is being born right in Cecile's neighborhood, even in her living room.

### *Settings as Important Features in Themselves*

In some genres—especially realistic fiction, fiction based in history, multicultural fiction, and fantasy—settings can figure so strongly as to share attention with the characters in the story. Eugene Yelchin takes great care to paint a picture of life in the Soviet Union under Stalin's regime in *Breaking Stalin's Nose*:

It's dinnertime, so the kitchen is crowded. Forty-eight hardworking, honest, Soviet citizens share the kitchen and single small toilet in our communal apartment we call *kommunalka* for short. We live here as one large, happy family: We are all equal; we have no secrets. We know who gets up at what time, who eats what for dinner, and who said what in their rooms. The walls are thin; some don't go up to the ceiling. We even have a room cleverly divided with shelves of books about Stalin that two families can share. (Yelchin, 2011, p. 5)

— Sometimes, the setting may become a metaphor for the meaning of the work. In Edward Bloor's *Tangerine*, the artificial gated community, Windsor Downs, was thrown together callously and dangerously over sinkholes and other natural threats in central Florida, a fact the residents try unsuccessfully to ignore. The setting finds a parallel in the life of protagonist Paul Fisher's family, with its veneer of normalcy built over terrible secrets.

In multicultural literature, details of the setting may seem commonplace to some readers but appear striking to others. For example, Alma Flor Ada's *My Name Is Maria Isabel* (1995) begins:

Maria Isabel looked at the cup of coffee with milk and the buttered toast in front of her. But she couldn't bring herself to eat.  
Her mother said, "Maribel, cariño, hurry up."  
Her father added, "You don't want to be late on your first day, do you?" (p. 1)

Children from Latino lineage will find that scene reassuringly familiar. But other readers might be surprised that a young girl would drink coffee for breakfast, moved at the mother's affectionate shortening of the girl's name, and impressed that the mother speaks to her daughter in two languages. In effect, the setting is functioning almost as a character in the story.

— In a historical novel, the details of the setting may also go a long way toward satisfying young readers' curiosity about a place that is far removed in time. The earthiness of English village life early in the fourteenth century is brought home in the first paragraph of Karen Cushman's *The Midwife's Apprentice* (1995):

When animal droppings and garbage and spoiled straw are piled up in a great heap, the rotting and moiling give forth heat. Usually no one gets close enough to notice because of the stench. But the girl noticed and, on that frosty night, burrowed deep into the warm, rotting muck, heedless of the smell. (p. 1)

Here again, although the characters also do much to impress themselves on readers, the setting of this historical novel continually surprises and informs them.

## TOP SHELF 2.1

### BOOKS WITH MEMORABLE SETTINGS

- Bloor, Edward (1997). *Tangerine*. Harcourt.  
Ellis, Deborah (2000). *The Breadwinner*. Yearling.  
Farmer, Nancy (2007). *Land of the Silver Apples*. Atheneum/Richard Jackson.  
Fox, Paula (1993). *Monkey Island*. Yearling.  
Gaiman, Neil (2008). *The Graveyard Book*. HarperCollins.  
Soto, Gary (2000). *Baseball in April and Other Stories*. Harcourt.

ILLUSTRATION 2.1 In *One Crazy Summer*, three sisters seek to reunite with their mother during the tumultuous 1960s in Oakland, California. (Used by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.)



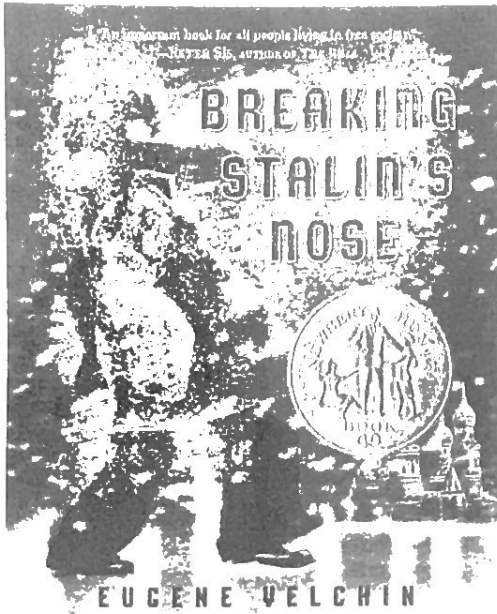


ILLUSTRATION 2.2 In *Breaking Stalin's Nose*, a young boy devoted to Stalin and Communism discovers chilling truths about the Soviet Union under Stalin's rule. (Book cover of "Breaking Stalin's Nose" by Eugene Yelchin. Henry Holt and Company, LCC. All rights reserved. 2011. (ISBN: 0805092161).)

## Characterization: How Do People Emerge from the Page?

Characterization is the art of creating people out of words on the page. When a writer has done a good job of characterization, readers feel as if they have gotten to know another person. How does a writer achieve that effect? Writers typically introduce characters to us in the same ways people become known to us in real life: by showing us what they do, by sharing their relationships with others, by revealing their inner thoughts and their general outlook, and by letting us hear them talk. Writers also give characters roles to play—protagonist, antagonist, helper, etc.—and this colors the way we feel about them. And, of course, writers come right out and describe characters. Let's look at each of these dimensions of characterization.

### *Characters: What They Do*

- Skillful writers show us, and don't tell us. In *The Breadwinner*, instead of telling us that Parvana's older sister is mean and insensitive, Deborah Ellis shows the sister badgering Parvana with cruel insults, even when Parvana cuts her hair, puts on boy's clothes, and risks her life to get provisions for her family in Taliban-controlled Kabul, Afghanistan. It is left to the reader to interpret these actions and decide what kind of character we are dealing with—just as it is with the people we meet in real life.

### *Characters: How They Relate to Others*

Characters are also brought to life when readers see who "their people" are—and how they relate to those people. Marty in *Shiloh* (Naylor, 1991) is a member of a hard-working and frugal family in rural Appalachia. Bud, in *Bud, Not Buddy* (Curtis, 1999), is a member of the African American culture that conducts its affairs largely out of sight of the dominant white culture. But, as it turns out, his real people are a troupe of jazz musicians.

Often, book characters are portrayed as being out of harmony with their own group. Seventh grader Doug Swieteck in Gary Schmidt's *OK for Now* (2011) is not only more honest and peaceable than his delinquent older brother and his abusive and barely employable father, but he struggles not to be tarred by the low opinion people have of his family in their newly adopted town of Marysville, New York.

### *Characters: What They Think and Feel*

- Characters are revealed to us through their inner thoughts. Pause for a moment and note how rare that is. In real life, you can only know your own thoughts, not anyone else's, no matter how close you are to another person. But literature gives you the unique opportunity to go inside another person's head. And when you experience another's thoughts displayed in well-chosen words, you are likely to gain language for your own inner experiences, too. You become more self-reflective.

Doug Swieteck, just mentioned, has been learning to take a perspective on art and life by studying prints of birds by John James Audubon. As a disabled reader with an abusive father and a thug for a brother, Doug has enormous challenges in

his life, just like the heron in a drawing that is about to intersect with the path of a hunter's shot. Doug says:

Maybe the Snowy Heron is going to come off pretty badly when the planes come together. Maybe. But he's still proud and beautiful. His head is high, and he's got this sharp beak that's facing out to the world. He's OK for now. (Schmidt, 2011).

### *Characters: What They Say and How They Say It*

Literature lets us hear what characters say and how they say it, and we can infer how they think and feel from those utterances. Listen to the words we hear from Caitlin, a child with Asperger Syndrome, in Kathryn Erskine's *Mockingbird* (2011), who is being visited by her classroom teacher after her brother Devon has died:

She doesn't move. This means she is waiting for me to say something. I hate that. It makes my underarms prickle and get wet. I almost start sucking my sleeve like I do at recess but then I remember. *You're welcome*, I say.

She moves away.

I got it right! I go to the refrigerator and put a smiley face sticker on my chart under YOUR MANNERS. Seven more and I get to watch a video. (Erskine, 2010, pp. 7–8).

With no description at all supplied by the author, we know that even simple social interactions are to Caitlin like advanced calculus is to many of us. We know that Caitlin has been trained in procedures for simple conversations, and we also know that she wants to do the right thing.

### \* *Characters: The Roles They Play in the Plot*

If a character in a story is cast in the role of the protagonist, or the hero, readers are inclined to be sympathetic toward him or her. If the character is cast as the antagonist (the villain or the hero's rival), readers are disposed to "fill in the blanks" of that character's personality with *bad* qualities. (This happens in real life, too: Just listen to what emotional sports fans say about players on the opposing team!)

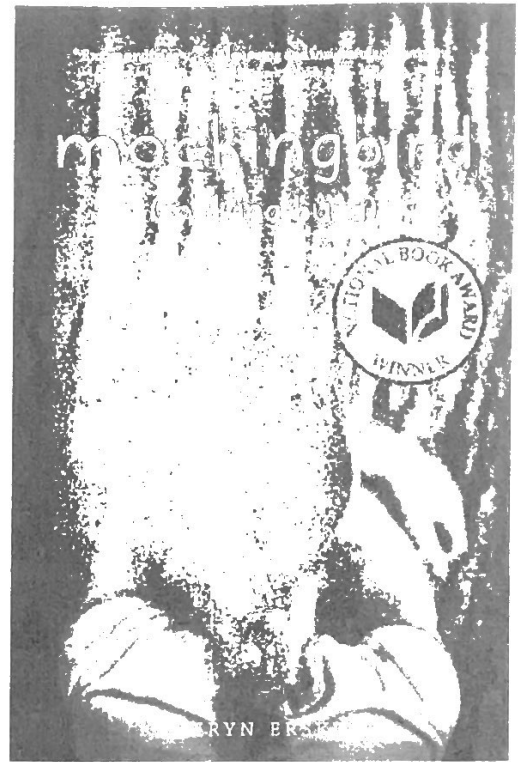
In Gary Schmidt's *The Wednesday Wars* (2007), Holling Hoodhood's teacher Mrs. Baker is described at first as his enemy. He says, "She hates my guts" (and she really seems to!), but later she becomes his larger-than-life advocate.

### *Characters: As the Author Describes Them*

Authors sometimes give readers descriptions of their characters. J.K. Rowling introduces Dudley Dursley, the spoiled and overstuffed son of Harry Potter's guardians, this way:

Dudley looked a lot like Uncle Vernon. He had a large pink face, not much neck, small, water blue eyes, and thick blond hair that lay smoothly on his thick, fat head. Aunt Petunia often said that Dudley looked like a baby angel—Harry often said that Dudley looked like a pig in a wig. (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, p. 21)

In case the reader needs more clues to Dudley's personality, he is immediately shown counting his Christmas presents—and finding that he's come up two short from last year. Then his fawning mother slips more presents into the pile—so we see his relationship to this overindulgent woman, as well.



**ILLUSTRATION 2.3** The young protagonist of *Mockingbird* has Asperger Syndrome, and since the death of her brother, she feels there is no one to help her deal with the world around her. ("Mockingbird" by Kathryn Erskine. Used by permission of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. All rights reserved.)

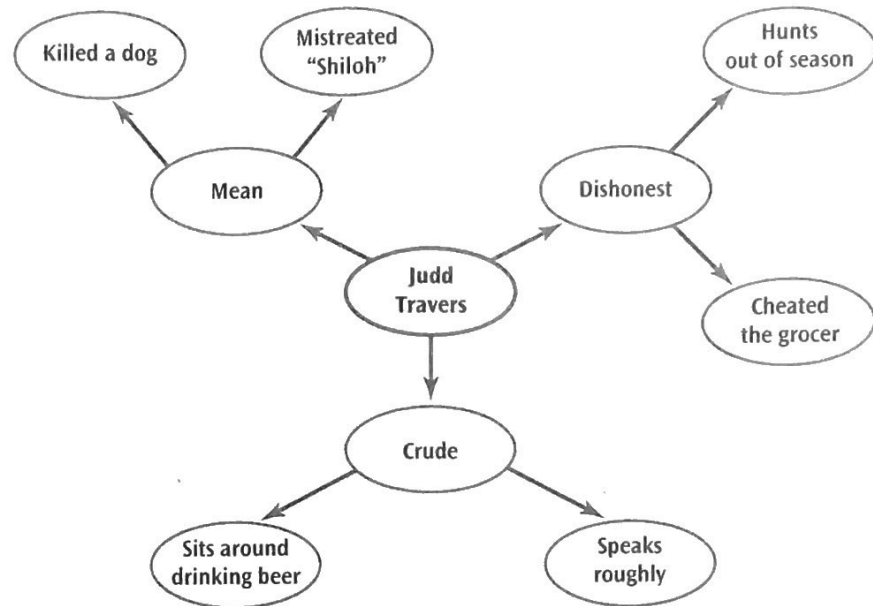


FIGURE 2.3 Character Map for Judd Travers from Phyllis Reynolds Naylor's *Shiloh*.

### Round Characters and Flat Characters

**ILLUSTRATION 2.4** In *Rules*, a young girl learns that the way to cope with her brother's autism is to expand her own capacity to relate to people who are different. (Scholastic, Inc.)



• *Round characters* in a story are actors whom we really get to know, along with their pasts, their relationships, their motives, their inner thoughts, and the changes they go through during the story. *Flat characters* are the opposite: They are introduced in a story and then they act predictably, as if they are needed as foils for the more prominent characters to play off. We learn little about them, except for their effects on other characters. For example, in Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (2001), the Wallace boys are mean and violent racists who prey on black people, and who hide behind the privileges of being white. The Wallaces are flat characters. The author, Mildred Taylor, doesn't show us why the Wallaces are racist. They are described only enough to show what the other characters in the story are up against.

Contrasted with flat characters are round characters, whose motives are explained, who are seen from many points of view, and who usually develop and change as the story progresses. In *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, Cassie Logan is the protagonist of the story. We are let in on her thoughts. We see what she does, why she does it, and what she thinks about her actions. Cassie's awareness of herself and others expands as she goes through the story, so that she is wiser by the end. She is a round character.

### Round Characters Undergo Changes

The protagonists in many books undergo changes as their stories progress. For example, in Kate DiCamillo's *Because of Winn-Dixie* (2010), Opal learns to move past her feelings of abandonment and become a provider of comfort to others. In Cynthia Lord's *Rules* (2006), Catherine learns that the way to cope with her brother's autism is to expand her own capacity to relate to people who are different, to become their ally.

Often, a story demonstrates how events helped a main character to change. This is one of the main ways that stories teach, even when they do not appear to be didactic. The German term

*bildungsroman* is used by literary scholars as the name for a work that chronicles a young character's growth from immaturity and naiveté to maturity and wisdom, and the lessons learned along the way. The term literally means "educational novel."

• In some books, flat characters can suddenly become round. The series of quirky strangers in *Because of Winn-Dixie* all undergo transformations from flat characters to people with histories and personalities—and indeed, much of the power of the book is in the message that everyone "has a life." In Rebecca Stead's *When You Reach Me* (2009), the anonymous street bully who slugs Miranda's best friend Sal eventually gets a name, a history, and a set of motives, and he even becomes a pivotal character in the work.

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## Plots: How Do Stories Happen?

A plot is a meaningful ordering of events with their consequences, a "who did what, and why." A plot is the conveyor belt that pulls readers through the text, helping them get to know characters and scenes along the way, before arriving at a cumulative insight.

In this section, we look at plots in several ways. We look first at the conflicts that give rise to plots; then we examine the structure of plots. Common plot types will be the next topic, followed by a consideration of some of the twists and turns of plots that authors have at their disposal—techniques such as episodes within plots and surface stories with underlying plots.

### *Plots and Conflicts*

- Plots unfold when a character is drawn toward a significant goal but faces some kind of conflict in reaching it. Conflicts in fiction usually take one of four different forms: between the character and some rival person, between the character and himself or herself, between the character and the environment, or between the character and society.

**Conflict between Characters.** In J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (1998), the ultimate conflict is between Harry Potter and Voldemort, the wicked sorcerer who killed Harry's parents and who is intent on doing further evil in the world. Along the way, there are other conflicts: between Harry and his stepfamily, the Dursleys, and between Harry and his friends and the residents of Slytherin Hall, a rival dormitory within Hogwarts School.

Roald Dahl's books often introduce conflicts between characters: between Danny and his father and Victor Hazlett, the wealthy landowner, in *Danny the Champion of the World* (1978) or between Matilda and her ghastly parents in *Matilda* (1988). As we note below, Dahl's willingness to portray really awful characters that children love to hate makes some parents and teachers uneasy—and by comparison makes us realize how many contemporary children's books portray antagonists with at least some redeeming characteristics.

**Conflict within a Character.** In Pam Muñoz Ryan's *Esperanza Rising* (2002), the heroine struggles with overcoming her social class prejudice and her sense of entitlement and accepting her lot as a field hand. She resolves the conflict when she realizes she can move on with her life but keep the core strengths and traditions her loved ones have always shared.

**Conflict between a Character and Nature.** Books with survival themes pit their protagonists against nature. Gary Paulsen's books do this brilliantly, as in *Hatchet*, (1987) in which a boy learns to survive in the woods after an airplane crash, and

*The Voyage of the Frog* (1990), in which a boy survives an ocean crossing on a sailboat. In Jean Craighead George's *Julie of the Wolves* (1972), the heroine survives in the Arctic tundra by adopting the ways of the wolves. In Theodore Taylor's *The Cay* (2002), eleven-year-old Phillip survives on a desert island in the Caribbean with the help of Timothy, an older islander. And in Margi Preus's *Heart of a Samurai* (2010), in the mid-1800s Manjiro survives being shipwrecked on an island, only to be rescued and carried to America, where the challenge is to understand and thrive in a new land.

**Conflict between a Character and Society.** Characters in books are often at odds with society. Sometimes society embraces some evil or prejudice against which the character must struggle. Such is the case in Afghanistan under the rule of the Taliban in *The Breadwinner*. In other books, the struggle with society comes about not because society is particularly evil, but just because it is what it is. In Vera Williams' *A Chair for My Mother* (1982), a young girl mobilizes her neighbors to raise enough nickels and dimes to buy a chair, so her mother can sit down comfortably at the end of a long day working as a waitress. While poverty is never mentioned, the plot would make no sense without the family's abject shortage of funds. What rises from the pages is a spirit of community, of the strength of people looking out for each other against a background of need.

### Plot Structures

Plots have universal features, which literary scholars tend to describe this way. A plot begins with an *exposition* or *introduction*, which provides the information necessary to understand the story. Then comes the *complication*, in which some conflict is introduced and the character or characters begin their attempts to resolve it. The *rising action* follows from the complication, as the characters work their way through the situation in which they find themselves and pursue their goal. Most of the way through the book comes the *climax*, the point of maximum tension, when the character tries to resolve the conflict and things seem to be most at stake. After the climax comes a rapid series of events that can be called the *falling action*, which culminate in the *dénouement* (French for "untying," because finally the tensions introduced in the story are relaxed). The *dénouement* can also be called the *resolution*. Either way, here is where the problem is solved and the conflict resolved (see Figure 2.4).

In Alma Flor Ada's *The Gold Coin* (1991), the *exposition* is the part where Juan approaches a hut he plans to rob and spies an old woman inside holding a gold coin and saying, "I must be the richest person in the world." The *complication* comes when Juan breaks into the hut after the woman leaves and finds no gold coin. Now, in order to



FIGURE 2.4 Typical Plot Structure

meet his goal of stealing her riches (or so he thinks), he must follow the old woman. Tensions mount (the *rising action*) throughout the story as Juan follows the old woman, Doña Josefa, to one farm after another—where he is told of a generous and helpful act she has just performed and is given work to do to pass the time before the farmers can take him to his next destination. The *climax* is the surprising events that befall Juan when he catches up with Doña Josefa alone on the road. And the *falling action* follows when Juan realizes that he has been transformed. The *dénouement* or *resolution* is tactfully left for the reader to imagine. How will Juan lead his life, now that he has learned the value of being trusted by others, of being generous?

### Recurring Plots

Some plot forms are used again and again in stories. To lump them together by their common forms is to take nothing away from them; on the contrary, it may point out their larger psychic meaning and their contribution to our understanding of the human drama.

**The Initiation Story.** Children’s literature is full of *initiation stories*, in which a young character is given some challenge to get through; having successfully met the challenge, she or he is recognized as being more mature or more worthy—and the reader learns lessons about growing up. “Jack and the Beanstalk” and “Hansel and Gretel” are initiation stories.

Becoming initiated sometimes implies trade-offs: The protagonist must trade innocence for experience. Hansel and Gretel lost their childhood and experienced horror before they could be reunited with their father, in what must have been an uneasy relationship. Growing up requires pain and struggle, embracing some things and giving up others—scary steps for a child. Initiation stories point the way, not by revealing the particular path a child will take, because that is necessarily unique to each person, but by offering the hope and assurance that there is sunlight above the clouds.

**The Journey.** Another metaphor for arduous progress and change is the journey. People all over the world have been motivated by deep urges to uproot themselves and travel long distances. As hunter-gatherers, humans ranged widely over the landscape, following animals or seeking greener habitats. Since ancient times, different cultures have had the custom of making pilgrimages to religious places—to Canterbury, Mecca, Santiago de Compostela—a practice that survives today. Voyages of discovery, for trade, to make war or bring comfort to the suffering—all seem to follow some deep-seated human urge to go, to see, and to be changed along the way.

Frances Temple’s *The Ramsay Scallop* (1994b) goes to the roots of the tradition, as it recounts a young betrothed couple’s pilgrimage from England to Spain in the year 1299. Rodman Philbrick’s *The Mostly True Adventures of Homer P. Figg* (2009) chronicles the namesake character’s journey from his cruel uncle’s farm in Pine Swamp, Maine, south to Gettysburg to find his brother, who was illegally conscripted into the Union Army in 1863. Christopher Paul Curtis won a Newbery Award in 1999 for



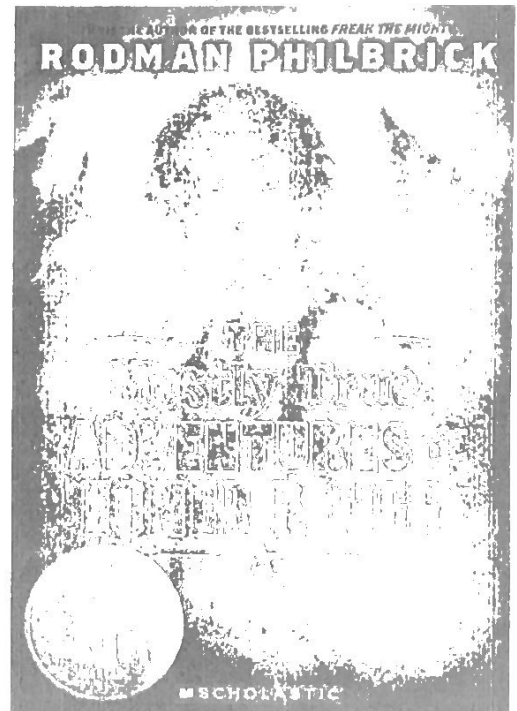
## TEACHING IDEA 2.2

### PLOTTING THE STORY JOURNEY

Students can make a kind of graph to plot a story journey. Drawing a line from left to right across a chart, they can make the line go up for events when morale is high and down for events when morale is low. Above the line, they can write in what happened. Below the line, they can write in how a character felt or what she or he learned.

COMMON CORE STANDARD  
Reading: Ideas and Details  
STANDARD 3

**ILLUSTRATION 2.5** *The Mostly True Adventures of Homer P. Figg* chronicles a boy’s journey to find his brother who was illegally conscripted into the Union Army in 1863. (Scholastic, Inc.)



*Bud, Not Buddy*, the story of an orphaned African American boy's odyssey across Michigan in the 1930s to find some remnants of his family. In *Parvana's Journey* (2003), the sequel to *The Breadwinner* (2001) by Deborah Ellis, the children's travel across war-torn Afghanistan is fraught with land mines below, bombs raining from above, and uneasy relations among the children themselves. In all of these stories, with every challenge they meet along the way, the characters grow in their awareness of other people, the circumstances that surround them, and themselves.

### *Episodes: Stories within Stories*

Many books, especially those for older children, give us patterns of episodes within larger plots. Francisco Jiménez's *The Circuit* (1999) is a series of small stories all framed by the reality of a childhood in an undocumented migrant worker family in California. In fact, two episodes from this book have been made into stand-alone picture books.

Jennifer Holm's *Turtle in Paradise* is a series of episodes—about a business of taking care of inconsolable babies, curing bumpy rash, relating to an eccentric and dyspeptic old bed-ridden relative, riding out a hurricane on a mangrove island, and finding pirate's treasure—all tied together by the fact that eleven-year-old Turtle is plunked down with relatives who weren't expecting her in Depression-era Key West.

### *Layered Stories: Surface Plots and Underlying Stories*

Some stories have characters proceed through a series of events and then discover clues that lead to another series of events that happened at a different time. Detective fiction in adult literature regularly works on two levels. On one level, the detective is given a set of clues. By following the good clues and rejecting the misleading ones, the detective constructs another story, the story of the crime, and solves the mystery.

In children's literature, one of the best examples of a story with two layers of plot is Louis Sachar's *Holes* (2000), in which Stanley Yelnats, the young prisoner at Camp Green Lake, digs a series of holes that literally unearths an older story from a hundred years before.



## TECHNOLOGY in PRACTICE 2.1

### PLOT GENERATORS

Getting started is the hardest part. Many writers are fully advised about plot structures—they know that they need protagonists and antagonists, problems and attempts, resolutions and consequences—but they still have trouble getting a story started. Several years ago, writing teachers Anne Bernays and Pamela Painter in *Writing What If? Exercises for Fiction Writers* (1991) came up with the idea of a story generator, where writers are invited to mix and match striking characters with imaginative actions, until they find a combination that gets them going. Now there are several online story generators that randomly produce characters and situations to inspire story writers. Once students have the basics of plotting, using a story generator can be a fun way to inspire story writing, and help students learn to appreciate the creativity that is possible even within the constraints of a story structure. Some recommended sites are:

(For younger writers)

*Story Maker*—<<http://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org>>

*Seussville Story Maker*—<<http://www.seussville.com>>

(For older writers)

*Writers' Plot Generator*—<<http://funstuff.pantomimepony.co.uk>>

again—presumably to symbolize the life cycle and the sad consequences of stepping off it. In Cynthia Lord's *Rules*, the rules themselves come to stand for the girl protagonist's attempts to impose boundaries on her autistic brother; finally she realizes that it is she who has been too hemmed in by an overly ordered view of what behavior is acceptable, who is a friend, and in what form joy may come.

### *Reading against the Grain*

The explicit and implicit themes described above were the sort many authors might have agreed were present in their work. But if we define a theme, as the critic Rebecca Lukens does, as a source of "insight into people and how they think and feel" (Lukens, 1990), then there are other layers of themes that we must take into account. Some of these may be insights that the authors did not intend.

Almost every work of literature takes some stance toward the social order—toward the relative roles and attributes of males and females, old and young, rich and poor, and so on. Of course, those stances are not always explicit. A work of literature may overtly argue for the status quo, may implicitly take the status quo for granted, or may argue for a different social order. Reading against the grain is a way to examine the unexamined, question the unquestioned, and hold up to scrutiny the unspoken assertions the text is making about the way lives are lived in society. Reading against the grain means asking, "Is this book a true portrait of how people behave? Is it a portrait of how they ought to behave?"

**"Suppose This Happened to Someone Else?"** A useful way to examine the unexamined is to ask, "What would have been different if these events had happened to another character?" For example, in Phyllis Reynolds Naylor's *Shiloh*, what if Marty's little sister, Dara Lynn, had found the dog instead of Marty? Would her parents have taken her devotion to the dog as seriously? Would she have had the freedom to keep it secretly and arrange to give it food? What does this tell the reader about the range of activity boys and girls are permitted? What if Marty's upper middle class friend David Howard had found Shiloh, instead of Marty, whose family shares a cramped cottage on the edge of the woods? Would David have gone to so much trouble not to confront Judd Travers with his mistreatment of animals—or would he simply have called the authorities? Would he and his family have been so careful not to make an enemy of Judd? What does this tell us about the range of options open to people from different social classes?

Readers can ask how any story would play out if one or more key characters were changed, in terms of the following:

- Switching males and females,
- Old people and young people,
- People of different social classes,
- People of different races,
- Americans and residents of developing countries, and
- People who are differently abled.

**"What Did They Do? What Did They Get?"** Another way to read against the grain is to list the actions taken by different classes of characters in the story (male and female, black and white, young and old) and then to match those actions with the rewards the characters receive. Looking at the story "Beauty and the Beast" in this way, we see that males were rewarded for going after what they wanted—although they had to learn the hard way to be respectful of all sorts of people. Women, though, were rewarded for *not* going after what they wanted—for focusing on serving others and being pure. Is that always the way women should behave?

## Themes: How Do Stories Convey Meaning?

Beyond the question “What happened to whom and why?” readers sometimes ask, “What is this work really about?” “What does it mean?” or even “Why did the author write this work?” Answers to those questions are usually statements of theme. Here is Rebecca Lukens’s definition: “Theme in literature is the idea that holds the story together, such as a comment about society, human nature, or the human condition. It is the main idea or central meaning of a piece of writing” (Lukens, 2003, p. 129).

### — *Explicit and Implicit Themes*

Themes may be stated explicitly or suggested implicitly by the text. Explicit themes were once far more common than they are now. In the 1700s Madame Le Prince de Beaumont closed *La Belle et La Bête*, an early and popular version of *Beauty and the Beast*, with a lavish statement of what she took to be the moral of the story, namely that Beauty was of such a sterling and obedient character that she deserved the happily-ever-after life she went on to enjoy with her handsome and well-off partner.

“Cendrillon,” a version of “Cinderella” by Charles Perrault that is a close source of the versions known in the United States, ends with not one stated moral but two: first, it’s better to be virtuous than beautiful; and second, that even if you are virtuous and beautiful it helps to have a fairy godmother.

Most modern readers don’t like to have the morals of stories dictated to them, and explicit themes have largely fallen out of favor.

An *implicit theme* is an idea that is strongly suggested but not explicitly stated. In Harriet Ziefert’s *A New Coat for Anna* (1988), a reader can infer a theme that doing something for the good of a child pulls war-weary citizens out of their doldrums and creates a community. But there is also the theme that the mother must trade away sad memories of the past and go forward to build a new life, for the benefit of her daughter, her neighbors, and herself. These themes are suggested as much by Anita Lobel’s brilliant illustrations as they are by the text.

Especially in contemporary literature, stating what themes are is not always an easy or foolproof matter. Good writers rarely start with explicit themes in mind. Author Frances Temple (1994a) explained her approach to themes this way: “At first, I’m just getting out the story. Once it’s written down, I can go through and see what the story is adding up to—and then as I rewrite I can make sure that what stays in the book pulls more or less in the same direction.”

Many authors express surprise, however, at the themes others find in their works. For instance, author Charles Temple was surprised to read in a review of his *Shanty Boat* (illustrated by Melanie Hall) that the work was about the importance of respecting differences. Temple had thought it was just a rhyme about a quirky old guy who lived on a boat; he had created it as an exaggerated portrait of his own brother.

Themes are sometimes represented or symbolized by an image in a story. In Natalie Babbitt’s *Tuck Everlasting* (1975), the image of the wheel is used again and

## ISSUE to CONSIDER

### *Are Themes Really There?*

As we have just said, the theme of a contemporary literary work is more often implied than explicitly stated. Not surprisingly, the identification and interpretation of themes that are not explicitly stated give rise to lively debates. Critics argue not only about what the theme of a specific work really is, but also about whether it is possible to say definitively what a book’s theme is. While some critics claim that skilled readers are adept at discovering themes that less skilled readers will miss, others (known as “deconstructionists” or “transactionalists” in the field of literary theory) insist that what a book means—its theme—lies to a large degree in the experience, background, and personality of each reader who encounters it.

These differing opinions certainly do not prevent literary critics, authors, and book lovers from discussing themes. Readers often have different ideas about the theme of a particular book. And authors sometimes even disagree with what the critics identify as the themes of their books!

Can ten readers agree on what the theme of a book is? Can we ask children to say what a particular book’s theme is?

**What do you think?**



**TOP  
SHELF  
2.2**

### **BOOKS WITH MEMORABLE THEMES**

Amado, Elisa (2007).

*Tricycle*. Illustrated by Alfonso Ruano. Groundwood Books.

Browne, Anthony (2001).  
*Voices in the Park*. DK Children’s Books.

Howe, James (2003). *Horace and Boris but Mostly Dolores*. Illustrated by Amy Walrod. Aladdin.

Yumoto, Kazumi (1998).  
*The Friends*. Translated by Cathy Hirano. Dell.

A text is a piece of virtual experience that can be held up and examined from many angles. As the questions above make clear, readers can find interesting meanings to talk about in almost any text, regardless of whether an author intended to stress those meanings.

## The Stance of the Implied Reader

The stance of the implied reader is one more device written into a work besides the plot, the setting, the characters, and the theme (Booth, 1961; Iser, 1974). The implied reader is the ideal interpreter of a work, as imagined by the author. The implied reader is not usually mentioned in the text, but his or her activity is essential if the text is to “work.” If events or characters in a text are exciting, funny, sad, suspenseful, heroic, blameworthy, or even understandable, those events or characters must be perceived in those ways *by some reader*. Those qualities do not exist except as responses of a reader to a work. Therefore, in constructing a piece of literature, the writer must consciously or unconsciously keep an ideal reader in mind and arrange the details of the work in such a way as to evoke the desired responses from that reader.

As they begin to read a work, actual readers implicitly take the perspective of the implied reader and begin to have emotional and intellectual reactions to the work in ways the author has scripted for them. Or else they don’t: If a book is too silly, too “hard,” or too far outside their usual way of seeing things, the actual readers might not be willing or able to take the stance of the implied reader, and the book will not work for them.

There are at least three ways in which an actual reader can take the stance of the implied reader. The first is by identifying with characters. The second is by taking a moral perspective on the story. The third is by filling in gaps to make the story “work.”

### *Identifying with Characters*

Identification with one or more characters in a text is an important function of the implied reader. When actual readers step into the shoes of a character, they suffer what that character suffers, face the dilemmas that character faces, and feel the consequences of the choices they (the character and, vicariously, the readers) have made. For example, the reader of Jack Gantos’s *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* identifies with Joey because of his first-person narrative (see pages 40–41), but then may react in horror as Joey, his impulse control severely limited by his Attention Deficit Disorder, goes from disaster to disaster, including injuring a classmate while running with open scissors. The reader who stays with Joey will gain understanding and sympathy for a boy who struggles with challenges most of us don’t.

### *Taking the Intended Moral Stance*

Another way in which the text influences readers is by inviting them to take a moral stance on the story—a stance the author has staked out as part of the construction of the work. As we noted above, for a story to work, the author has to be able to count on readers to believe that some goals are worthwhile, that some events are exciting, that some things people say are funny or sad or shocking. If readers adopt these views—if only for the duration of the reading—the book will come together for them. If they don’t, it won’t. So far, so good.

But no readers hold precisely the orientations asked of them by all books. They occasionally have to stretch to accept a certain point of view for the time during which they participate in a certain book. This stretching has consequences. We have all had the experience of being told a joke that was so sexist, racist, or otherwise mean-spirited that we had to decide whether to keep listening, scold the teller, or walk away. It's the times we didn't quite muster the energy to do either of the latter two that are most bothersome. If, for the sake of the humor, we temporarily agree to take the stance the joke requires of us, we may give a polite laugh, but feel compromised. That is because we have just agreed to live the life of a bigot, if only for two minutes.

Many of Roald Dahl's perennially popular books, such as *Danny the Champion of the World*, *Matilda*, *George's Marvelous Medicine*, and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, present truly awful characters with no redeeming features as antagonists to the main character. Sometimes they are other children, sometimes teachers, sometimes relatives, sometimes parents. Each of these characters harms the main character in some way, and each of them receives a bad outcome of one sort or another. In the meantime, we readers are invited to hate these characters and to delight in the terrible if quirky things that befall them. For many readers, though—especially those who try to respond to people who annoy us not with hatred but with understanding—Dahl's books raise moral challenges. The challenge is not in what Dahl says explicitly, but in the emotional stance he sets out for readers to take. Some readers are unwilling to adopt this stance.

### *Filling in the Gaps*

The implied reader functions in one last way. A writer friend of ours says, "You have to trust your readers to figure some things out for themselves. They'll feel more like they're with you if you let them have the fun of figuring things out. Telling them too much spoils the fun." Writers leave gaps in their work to be filled in by the reader's realizations. In Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, for example, a visual clue is given early in the book as to where the Wild Things came from. (Can you find it?)

In Harry Allard and James Marshall's *Miss Nelson Is Missing!*, readers are never told where Miss Viola Swamp, the no-nonsense substitute teacher, came from—or, for that matter, where she went. But at the end of the story the reader sees Miss Nelson reading in bed, next to a closet with an ugly black dress hanging in it—just like the one Viola Swamp wore. And there's a box on the shelf marked in upside-down letters that spell "WIG."

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## Point of View

Point of view is the perspective from which the events in a story are perceived and narrated. The choices of point of view are *first person* (in which one of the characters in the work narrates the story, using the first-person pronoun "I"), *second person* (addressed to "you"), and *third person* (in which a narrator outside the story relates events that happened to those in it, using the third-person pronouns "she," "he" and "they"). When the author's knowledge of events shifts freely between different characters' points of view and the author describes events no one character could have known, he or she is writing from the point of view known as *third-person omniscient* ("all-knowing").

### *Stories in the First Person*

Stories in the first person, such as Clare Vanderpool's *Moon Over Manifest* (2010) and Gary Schmidt's *OK for Now* (2011) tell the tale through a character's voice.

Narration in the first person lends immediacy to the action and lets readers know what the character is feeling. But it also limits readers to that character's perspective.

### ★ *Stories in the Second Person*

The least commonly used voice is the second person, "you." Judy Allen and Tudor Humphreys use the second person both delightfully and informingly in *Are You a Spider?* (2003).

"Are you a spider? If you are, your mother looks like this [picture of a spider] and spins webs."

The book goes on to share information about spiders, while titillating its young audience with the suggestions that they might have eight hairy legs, eat flies, and so on.

### *Stories in the Third Person*

Most of the time, authors describe the action as happening to someone else. This point of view is called narration in the *third person*. Deborah Ellis narrated *I Am a Taxi* in the third person. She did not narrate the story using the voice of Diego (the taxi) in the first person, but she did stick strictly to his point of view. The author never tells us anything that Diego himself did not know.

*Third-person omniscient* narration occurs when authors tell stories from the point of view of a narrator who knows more than any one character could. Louis Sachar narrated *Holes* in the third-person omniscient voice, as he was able to tell different stories from different time periods that only later came together in an explanatory whole.

♦ Writing in the third person gives the author a broad range of choices of what to show the reader. Nonetheless, skilled writers usually narrate events as if from one character's point of view at a time. When an author changes the perspective of the narration from one character to another, the results can radically change the meaning. Philip Pullman's *I Was a Rat!* (2002) reminds us that even a bit player in a story—like a coachman Cinderella's fairy godmother left in human form—may have an entirely different take on events. Jon Scieszka's *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs (By A. Wolf)* (1989) and Rachel Mortimer's *Three Billy Goats Fluff* (2011) tell familiar tales from the antagonist's point of view, with humorous results.

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## Style

- Style is not *what* is said, but *how* it is said. When a book makes you hear a distinct voice in your head or when you find a passage so good you want to read it out loud to a friend, chances are you're responding to style. Style is not the same thing as talent. A talented author may write in different styles and may have a gift for matching a style with the content of each book she or he writes.

Some of the elements of style are words, images, metaphors, sounds, and voice. Let's look at each.

### *Words*

The poet William Carlos Williams wrote, "Each object in nature and each idea has an exact name." Good writers behave as if that were true, and they strive to name experiences exactly. Mark Twain wrote, "The difference between the right word, and almost the right word, is the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning."

But what makes a word “right”? Good word choices are concrete and vivid—they show, rather than sum up and judge. Or if they sum up and judge, they do so exactly. Good words create fresh images. Good writing crackles with insight.

Writing can be sparse or rich, as writers use few words or many to create impressions. Rich writing was more common in the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth. Note this passage from Kenneth Grahame’s immortal *The Wind in the Willows*:

Never in his life had he seen a river before—this sleek, sinuous, full-bodied animal, chasing and chuckling, gripping things with a gurgle and leaving them with a laugh, to fling itself on fresh playmates that shook themselves free, and were caught and held again. All was a-shake and a-shiver—glints and gleams and sparkles, rustle and swirl, chatter and bubble. (pp. 3–4)

Grahame’s language consists of long sentences awash with colorful adjectives, images, and metaphors.

Spare writing can also be powerful. Frances Temple told *Grab Hands and Run* in the voice of twelve-year-old Felipe, and so the words she chose are simple and direct. Here is a scene from a parsonage in Guatemala, where refugees from the civil war in El Salvador find momentary protection:

Another little girl comes in, a child with big dark eyes, younger than Romy. Father Ramon opens his arms to her and speaks gently, but at the sight of him she begins to scream and fastens herself around the leg of a table. Her screams are terrible, and no one can stop them.

Father Ramon looks so upset that I follow him into the courtyard.

“Why does she scream, Padre?” I ask him. “Can I help?”

“Ask the soldiers why she screams, son,” says Father Ramon. I have never heard anyone sound so sad. (p. 62)

Word choice doesn’t depend on a fancy vocabulary—just on exact descriptions.

## Images

Imagery is the art of making readers experience details as if through their own five senses. Alexander Carmichael had a good phrase for it: “bringing the different characters before the mind as clearly as the sculptor brings the figure before the eye” (quoted in Briggs, 1977, p. 10). The writer mentions, however offhandedly, how things smelled, felt, tasted, sounded, and looked. But the effect is of living the moments described, rather than hearing a summary of them. Here is a moment from *Tuck Everlasting*:

Shifting his position, he turned his attention to a little pile of pebbles next to him. As Winnie watched, scarcely breathing, he moved the pile carefully to one side, pebble by pebble. Beneath the pile, the ground was shiny wet. The boy lifted a final stone and Winnie saw a low spurt of water, arching up and returning, like a fountain, into the ground. He bent and put his lips to the spurt, drinking noiselessly, and then he sat up again and drew his shirt sleeve across his mouth. As he did this, he turned his face in her direction—and their eyes met. (p. 26)

Read that passage again, and see how many senses it appeals to.

## Metaphors

To use a metaphor is to describe one thing in terms of something else. Technically, there is a distinction between a *simile*, which is an overt comparison that says, “X is like Y”; a true *metaphor*, which talks about X as if it were Y; and *personification*, which ascribes human features, actions, or motives to something that isn’t human.

Here is *Tuck Everlasting* again:

The road that led to Tregap had been trod out long before by a herd of cows who were, to say the least, relaxed. It wandered along in curves and easy angles, swayed off and up in a pleasant tangent to the top of a small hill, ambled down again between fringes of bee-hung clover, and then cut sideways across a meadow. (p. 5)

This isn't quite personification: The road is described as if it were not a person, but a cow—wandering, swaying, and ambling. To describe the road this way is to enliven the writing with unobtrusive magic.

### *Voice, Tone, and Mood*

The author's *voice* in a literary work corresponds to the way an author would sound if she were speaking aloud. Daniel Pinkwater's voice in *Fat Camp Commandoes* (2001) is funny and sarcastic. Adam Rapp's voice in *The Buffalo Tree* (1997), set in a juvenile detention facility, is "wired," pushed to the limit.

The author's *tone* refers to the author's apparent attitude toward the contents of the work, and also toward the audience. Joanna Galdone's tone in the African American ghost story *The Tailypo* (1984) is somber (although her voice is folksy). Lemony Snickett's tone in the *Series of Unfortunate Events* is also somber—but we would also call it ironic, too, because he has a tacit agreement with the readers that these works are spoofs on older melodramas (a *melodrama* is an overly suspenseful adventure with exaggerated good and evil)—he is writing with his tongue in his cheek. Margaret Wise Brown's tone in *Little Fur Family* is protective and maternal.

The *mood* refers to the emotional state the work is likely to evoke in the reader. *Little Fur Family* evokes a mood that is cozy and safe, which makes it a favorite bedtime read. The mood of Cornelia Funke's *The Thief Lord* is enchanting and romantic (in the sense of being emotionally engaging), as it takes us through the canals and streets, backstage in a grand abandoned theater, and behind the ornate doors of aristocratic townhouses.

### ✱ *Intertextuality*

*Intertextuality* is a literary term for the tendency of writers and illustrators to relate aspects of one work to aspects of another. Sometimes the references are *allusions*: the text or the picture refers explicitly to other works. There is an allusion in Gary Schmidt's *The Wednesday Wars* when seventh grader Holling Hoodhood is asked to diagram a much harder sentence than his classmates. He reads, "For it so falls out That what we have we prize not to the worth whiles we enjoy it, but being lack'd and lost, why, then we rack the value, then we find the virtue that possession would not show us whiles it was ours," which comes from Act IV, Scene 1 of *Much Ado About Nothing*, although the author doesn't say so. It figures in the book, though, because the overly demanding teacher, Mrs. Baker, turns out to be a fan of Shakespeare. There are many visual allusions in Anthony Browne's *Voices in the Park*, as images of King Kong, the *Mona Lisa*, and le Jardin des Tuileries pass through the book's illustrations.

Other kinds of intertextuality can be more subtle. David Almond was influenced not only by the style of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's magical realism when he created *Skellig*, but also, as Don Lehman (2011) suggests, by a short story by Marquez. There is nothing wrong with this; on the contrary, intertextuality is a way writers reward readers by helping them to develop a fabric of literary understanding, and also pay homage to other writers and artists.

## Visual Literacy

Picture books have another set of features of their own. In Chapter 3 we will explore the visual language of picture books—or, to put it more properly, the verbal-and-visual language of picture books. The pictures have visual dynamics that communicate to readers: the colors that are used, the kinds of lines that are drawn, the placement of characters and objects on the page, the flow from page to page, the title page, the back cover, and the end papers—all are used by skillful illustrators and bookmakers to create a pleasing whole. Add to that the interaction of text and illustration; for example, often things are shown in the illustrations that complement or even contradict what is said in print—and there is a kind of language of expression used in picture books that needs to be explored in its own right.

- American and European stories typically feature deserving characters who strive against adversity through a logical and predictable series of events, actions, and consequences, and are eventually rewarded. In stories from other cultures, though, characters may strive against adversity and not be rewarded at all. Characters may break even, at best, or perish; or the stories may be simply a string of imaginative and unpredictable events rather than problems and solutions. English language learners who are newcomers to Western stories may find them hard to follow. Invite English language learners to tell stories from their own cultures—or to invite family members or neighbors to come to class and do so. Engage the class in discussing similarities and differences between stories read in America and stories from elsewhere.
- American children's books include many works of realistic fiction—stories set in contemporary times with true-to-life characters. But realistic fiction for children is rare outside the more developed countries, and newcomers to the United States from many countries may be puzzled by stories about characters who seem like real people, but

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aren't. Works of realistic fiction often reveal characters' inner thoughts and motives, but traditional tales rarely do—and traditional tales are what most children in the world know when it comes to fiction. Teachers will need to take extra care with English language

learners who have difficulty talking about characters' inner lives.

- American children's books often celebrate individuality and competition: The youngest child is the hero, or the unlikely character turns out to be the winner. In many parts of the world, though, individuality and competition are discouraged and the stories focus on the successes of the group, or on an individual's contribution to the group's success. Similarly, American children's books give children strong roles as agents and problem solvers, but in many cultures children are expected to follow adult direction, and it is considered inappropriate for children to take initiative.
- Teachers should take opportunities to have English language learners talk about stories that are popular in their own cultures, and discuss how they differ from stories read in America.

## EXPERIENCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

1. Make three columns on a piece of paper. In the left-hand column, list three male and three female characters in *Shiloh*. In the middle column, write two or three major actions these people took in the book. In the right-hand

column, list the rewards or punishments they received at the end. Discuss these results. Can you formulate a statement that explains the pattern of who is rewarded and who is not in the story?