Literary Elements

- Describe the thoughts, words and interactions of characters
- Identify the influence of setting on the selection
- Identify the speaker and recognize the difference between first- and third-person narration
- Identify and explain the defining characteristics of literary forms and genres, including poetry, drama, fables, fantasies, chapter books, fiction and non-fiction
What Students Need to Know:

- characters
  - thoughts
  - words
  - interactions
- setting
- speaker
  - first-person narration
  - third-person narration
- literary forms and genres
  - poetry
  - drama
  - fables
  - fantasies
  - chapter books
  - fiction
  - non-fiction

What Students Need to be Able to Do:

- describe (thoughts, words and interactions of characters)
- identify (influence of setting on selection; speaker; defining characteristics of literary forms and genres)
- recognize (difference between first- and third-person narration)
- explain (defining characteristics of literary forms and genres)

Important Vocabulary

**fable**—a story intended to enforce a useful truth, especially one in which animals speak and act like human beings

**first person narration**—narration in which the point of view is that of the main character

**genre**—an established class or category of artistic composition or literature (e.g., poetry, drama or novel)

**point of view**—the perspective or attitude of a narrator of a piece of literature

**setting**—the time and place of the action of a literary work

**third person narration**—narration in which the point of view is that of someone outside the story who refers to all characters by name or as “he,” “she” and “they.”
Literary Elements in Fiction

The literary elements power standard includes several concepts. First of all, throughout the year, students should be exposed to a variety of genres — fairy tales, folk tales, poetry, fiction and non-fiction. As each is presented to students, discussion about the general characteristics of that genre should be discussed. Perhaps, charts might be made listing the characteristics along with titles of books or selections read which fit into the genre.

One of the characteristics of fiction is the presence of both characters and setting. Special attention should be paid to the characters and setting as pieces of fiction are read. The author’s choice of words greatly influences the reader’s conception of the characters and setting. Take time to call attention to author word choices as you are discussing character traits. Talk about what words the author used to help the reader understand that the character was excited, angry, lonely, etc.

Analyzing the literary elements helps readers see so much more in a text, especially as they reflect and discuss their analyses with others.

We want our students to read beyond the words and literal meaning, to be swept up in inferences that shape and drive their thinking. We want them to become aware of how the writer uses language, symbolism, or other literary devices to foreshadow events and outcomes. High-quality texts offer many levels of meaning. Peeling away the layers helps students think more deeply about issues and relationships. In this way, literary experience adds qualitatively to their life experiences.

In their book *Guiding Readers and Writers 3-6*, Fountas and Pinnell discuss the following elements of fiction. Although all of these are not mentioned in the grade level indicators, many are implied or appear at later grades. Therefore, knowledge of them may be beneficial to the teacher.

- **characters** — people, animals or inanimate objects in a story (WHO)
- **plot** — the interplay of action and tension in the story (WHAT HAPPENS)
- **setting** — time and place in which the story takes place (WHERE and WHEN)
- **theme** — the story message or messages. The big idea — what the story is primarily about (NOTE: This literary element is included in the summarizing power standard)
- **perspective** — the point of view taken by the narrator of the story (NOTE: point of view if first mentioned at 4th grade indicators)
- **style and language** — how the author uses language to convey meaning
- **illustrations** — how meaning is communicated by the art that accompanies the text
- **design** — the entire visual presentation of the text

Two of the indicators (explain how an author’s choice of words appeals to the senses and describe methods authors use to influence readers’ feelings and attitudes) address the issue of style. Style refers to how the author uses language to convey meaning. Style is
now what is not *what* is said, but *how* it is said. The author chooses words and arranges them in phrases, sentences, and paragraphs to tell the story. Authors may incorporate

- **figurative language**
  - simile—a comparison using the words *like* or *as*
  - metaphor—a direct comparison
  - personification—giving animals or inanimate objects human characteristics
- **imagery**—writers use language to appeal to the senses—to help the reader imagine how something looks, smells, sounds or feels
- **symbolism**—writers use symbolism to bring layers of meaning into play. A symbol has significance beyond itself; it has both a literal and a figurative meaning
- **mood**—this is the emotional atmosphere that the writing evokes
- **illustrations**—art or photography may extend the meaning far beyond the words; illustration also helps set the mood.
MINI-LESSONS FOR TEACHING
LITERARY ELEMENTS

Story Elements: Characters
• Characters: major, minor. Do they change? Stay the same? character sketch — describe and analyze
• Brave, funny, lazy — what words does the author use to describe character
• How does the character act?
• What does he do?
• What does the character say? Do a character sketch or web.
• Stories with strong characters

Setting: Time and Place
• Where does the story take place? Use what you know
• When does the story take place? Is it before or after something? Time of day? Year? Past? Present?
• Look for clues to help you figure out where and when the story takes place
• Comparing settings: sometimes settings change within a story
• Does the setting change? Is it integral to the story?

Plot: Action of story
• What is the problem?
• What caused it to happen?
• Resolution?
• Types of problems:
  • Man against man
  • Man against self
  • Man against nature

Comparing Characters (Venn diagrams)
• How are they alike?
• How are they different?

Biographies and Autobiographies
• stories about people

Plot
• What is the central problem in the story?
• What caused it to happen?
• What is the resolution?
• How does the story end? This may be the resolution
Author’s Point of View
• Look for how the author feels (implicit or explicit)

Poetry and Poetic Language
• Format of poem
• Some rhyme, some don’t
• Compact verses convey strong images and meaning

Plays
• Have the children point out how a play is different from a story — talk about the meaning of the terms character, scene, narrator, stage directions, cues, script

BIBLIOGRAPHY - LITERARY ELEMENTS

Books with strong characters
Akerman, Karen. *Song and Dance Man*
Cooney, Barbara. *Miss Rumphius*
MacLachlan, Patricia. *Through Grandpa’s Eyes*

Books with a strong sense of place:
Locker, Thomas. *Where the River Begins*
Steptoe, Jon. *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughter*
Yolen, Jane. *Owl Moon*

Books with plot examples:
Martin, Bill, Jr. *Ghost Eye Tree* (all three types)
Martin, Bill, Jr. *Knots on a Counting Rope* (man against self, nature)
Sharmat, Marjorie Weinman. *Gila Monsters Meet you at the Airport* (man against self)

Book with characters with very different traits
Osborn, Mary Pope. *Dinosaurs Before Dinner*

Point of view
Scieszka, Jon. *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*
Cooney, Barbara. *Miss Rumphius*
Elste, Joan. *True Blue.  
Sharmat, Marjorie Weinman. *Gila Monsters Meet You at the Airport*
Books for teaching about point of view:

**First Person**
- *The Polar Express* by Chris Van Allsburg
- *Owl Moon* by Jane Yolen

**Third Person Limited**
- *Golem* by David Wisniewski
- *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak

**Third Person Omniscient**
- *The Three Little Pigs* by David Wiesner
- *Jumanji* by Chris Van Allsburg
### Questions from Past Tests

"Well, Fluffy," she said to her cat, "Mr. Lee isn’t the only one who can do a bit of outdoor spring cleaning."

**Who is speaking?**
- a. Rachel
- b. Mr. Lee
- c. Fluffy
- d. Mrs. Polansky

**Who is the speaker in the poem?**
- a. grandma
- b. mother
- c. father
- d. a child

**Why does Rachel sing on the way home?**
- a. She feels good about her neighborhood.
- b. A woman gives her some flowers.
- c. Mr. Lee gives her a candy bar to eat.
- d. Mr. Lee thanks her for her help.

**How does the narrator make sure that her results are correct?**
- a. She does not count all of the tail wags the first time.
- b. She uses different names the second time she counts.
- c. She changes the order in which she calls the names.
- d. She makes sure Ginger is seated for the experiment.
Suggested Strategies for Teaching Literary Elements
QUESTIONS TO USE IN DISCUSSING CHARACTERS

The following questions might be helpful to use while discussing characters with your students:

• Who are the main characters? Other characters?
• Does a character in this story remind you of anyone else you have read about? If so, how are they alike?
• Choose one character and tell why he/she is important to the story.
• If you could be any character in the story, who would you be? Why?
• Suppose you had a chance to meet one of the characters. What would you say to him/her?

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Talk about the main character from a story you’re reading. Have students describe the character, encouraging them to use colorful descriptive words and not the usual mad, glad, happy and sad. Ask for information from the text that backs up why they would describe the character in that way. Information can be recorded on a character web similar to the one on the next page.

Teach your students that there are four ways we learn about characters — by what they say, what they are thinking, how they feel, and what they do. Use the following visual clues to help them remember to think about all four of these:
GET TO KNOW THE CHARACTERS

There are a variety of activities to use with students to help them get to know the characters in a selection. Students can complete one of the attached worksheets on characters:

- Wanted
- Police Report Form
- Character Self-Portrait
- Character Map (2 versions)

3-COLUMN NOTES

Another way of thinking more deeply about characters is to think about what they say or think, what they do, and what other characters say or think about them in the selection. Create a three-column chart and label the columns as follows:

- What the character says or thinks
- What the character does
- What other characters say or think about the character

While reading, model how you look information about the characters that help you know more about them. Decide which heading describes each bit of information and write it in the appropriate column. Try to find some information to use in each of the columns. After this process is modeled multiple times, have students attempt to complete a similar chart on their own.

A variation might involve the following headings:

- character trait
- evidence
- how trait is revealed
Suspect’s Name

Crime

Description of Suspect

Distinguishing Features

Description of Crime
CHARACTER
SELF-PORTRAIT

I am:

I live:

I eat:

I have:

I like:

I hate:

I wish:
Character Map

Directions

1. Write or draw in the central square a character you wish to study.
2. In the rectangles, list adjectives or qualities that describe that character.
3. In the ovals, write examples that support the adjectives or qualities.
Character Map

Name: _______________________

Title: ________________________

Author: ______________________

Description

PROVE IT!

Character’s Name

PROVE IT!

Personality
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>What the character says/thinks</th>
<th>What others say/think about the character</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Trait</td>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>How Trait Is Revealed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Before reading a story, gather a list of quotes from one of the characters in the story. Divide students into groups, and give each group one of the quotes. Students should examine the quote, then make a list of character traits they think would be associated with a person who would say what’s included in the quote. Have them list as many traits as possible, being sure they can provide support for the traits on their list. Have groups share by reading their quote then the list of character traits they have created. List these traits on a chart. Then tell students that each of these quotes was from the same character. Help students make some generalizations about the character whose quotes they’ve been analyzing. Groups should work together to write a character sketch of this person.

Finally, have students read the selection. After reading, discuss how their opinions about the character may have changed or been confirmed from the text.

I is never having a chance to go to school. I is full of mistake. They is not my fault. I do my best.

Every human bean is diddly and different. Some is scrumdiddlyumptious and some is uckyslush.

EXTENDI-CHARACTER STRATEGY

Have students take information about a character from a selection and project the character into another situation. Their responses should rely heavily on information about the character they have obtained from the selection. Possible scenarios might include:

- Your character’s older sister is leaving to go to college. What will your character do to adjust to this situation?
- Your character has been involved in a minor traffic accident for which he or she received a traffic ticket. What kinds of statements will he or she make to the police?
- Your character has met a person who said that he or she will lend the character some much-needed money for a high rate of interest. What will your character do?
- A blizzard has spoiled your character’s plan for an important business trip out of town. How will your character cope with this change of plans?
- Your character has received a letter saying that a cousin he or she does not like will be spending the summer. How will your character react to this news?
- Your character’s father has died suddenly. How will your character adjust to this change in his or her life?
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSING SETTING

Use these questions to draw students’ attention to the setting of a story:
- Where does the story take place?
- Tell me what the place was like.
- Have you ever been to a place like this? If so, tell about it.
- Did the story take place a long time ago?
- Is it about the future?
- Is it happening now?
- How would it be different if it had taken place today instead of a long time ago?
- How would it be different if it had taken place in Columbus, Ohio instead of . . .?

RELATE SETTING TO THEIR LIVES

Students who have difficulty determining the setting of a story might benefit from relating the idea of setting to something with which they are more familiar. Talk about another story, TV show or movie and where and when they take place. Have them describe the setting of one of their favorite movies or television shows. Talking about movies and TV shows that take place at a different time (Little House on the Prairie) will help them understand that setting applies to not only the physical location but also the time period in which the story takes place.

Extend the concept of setting by asking students to think about what would happen if a story had a different setting. Would it change the story? If so, what parts would be affected? Why?
FOCUS ON SETTING

Try some of these ideas when working on setting with your students:

- Draw a map following the action of the story. Label each place on the map, relating it to information in the story.
- Draw a time line of events in the story. Focus on important parts of the story rather than insignificant details.
- List aspects of the story related to time and setting that differ from their equivalents in the students’ own lives and the aspects that are most similar to students’ lives. List only the most important. Making a chart might facilitate thinking. (See “Time and Place Comparison” chart.)

SETTING CHANGE

Draw students’ attention to the fact that the setting of a story often changes several times — the action moves from one place to another and time usually passes from the beginning to the end of a story. Use the “Setting the Scene” organizer (included in this handbook) to help students understand these changes in time and place.