



#9938

WHAT IS A GENRE? INTRODUCTION TO GENRES

CLASSROOM VIDEO, 2001

Grade Level: 9-13+

17 mins.

1 Instructional Graphic Enclosed

DESCRIPTION

What is a genre? What are some genres, and what are the differences between them? What are some tools used to identify a genre? How does identifying a genre aid in understanding text and characters? Helpful examples illuminate the concept of genres.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Subject Area: Language Art–Reading

- Standard: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of literary texts
 - ♦ Benchmark: Knows the defining characteristics of a variety of literary forms and genres (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, myths, poems, biographies, autobiographies, science fiction, supernatural tales, satires, parodies, plays, drama, American literature, British literature, world and ancient literature, the Bible) (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 1 and 2.)
 - ♦ Benchmark: Understands how themes are used across literary works and genres (e.g., universal themes in literature of different cultures, such as death and rebirth, initiation, love and duty; major themes in American literature; authors associated with major themes of specific eras) (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 2.)

Subject Area: Language Arts–Viewing

- Standard: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media
 - ♦ Benchmark: Understands that the rules and expectations about genres can be manipulated for particular effects or purposes (e.g., combining or altering conventions of different genres, such as presenting news as entertainment; blurring of genres, such as drama-documentaries) (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 2.)

INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

1. To explain the idea of *genre* and provide examples of common genres.
2. To explain how genres are defined, how they work, and how they cross over to create sub-genres.
3. To improve students' abilities to apply the idea of genre to their own projects.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A genre is a family or group of "texts" which are all working with a specific set of rules or conventions. A horror story belongs to the horror genre because it makes use of the same conventions as other texts belonging to the same genre. Everybody knows that if you wander off alone in the dark, the monster is sure to get you! While critics might recognize this as a "convention of the horror genre," anybody who watches horror films or reads horror stories has an intuitive grasp of this rule or convention. Conventions set up expectations in the audience or reader. The filmmaker, musician, or author can manipulate this expectation, usually with an eye to doing something slightly new or surprising, though generally without doing too much damage to the genre. Genre is thus a concept that is routinely employed by anybody viewing, reading, or listening to "texts."

Genres driven by props and settings (genres of style) include science fiction, fantasy, western, horror, period drama, war, and realism. You can recognize these genres by the fact that almost any story can be told in that setting and with those props and practically any sort of characters can appear there. Genres driven by plot and character (genres of content) include romance, detective, fiction, tragedy, comedy, and epic. These can be recognized in that the sorts of stories and characters that appear in those genres can be made to appear in almost any setting and with almost any props.

VOCABULARY

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. comedy | 11. period fiction |
| 2. convention (rule) | 12. realism |
| 3. documentary | 13. romance |
| 4. epic | 14. science fiction |
| 5. fairy tale | 15. structure |
| 6. genre | 16. stylistic elements |
| 7. horror fiction | 17. subgenres |
| 8. media/medium | 18. tragedy |
| 9. organizing principle | 19. texts |
| 10. parody | |

BEFORE SHOWING

1. Introduce the concept of genres.
 - a. In small groups, using the library as a resource, create a list of five or six book titles that are of one type. Or create lists of movies that are of the same kind.

C a p t i o n e d M e d i a P r o g r a m

- b. Each group then discusses, comes to agreement on, and writes down why the books/movies are of the same kind.
- c. A spokesperson from each group then shares the book/movie choices and explains the reasons that they are of the same kind.
2. Start a list on the board or overhead that includes *horror*, *romance*, *western*, and *science fiction*. Brainstorm more headings.
 - a. In pairs, discuss what the words have in common.
 - b. Individually, write in 25 words or less, "What these words have in common."
 - c. In small groups, share and discuss what was written. Summarize the findings into a single sentence beginning with, "These words are . . ."
 - d. Each group shares their sentence with the class. Record all of the sentences on the board or overhead. Discuss and save for further discussion after the video.

AFTER SHOWING

Discussion Items and Questions

1. What is a *genre*? List several common genres.
2. Identify different mediums that texts can be created in.
3. Discuss if it is really true that an artist decides on what genre he or she is going to use before he or she makes any other decision.
4. How can people tell one genre from another?
5. Which comes first, the genre or the conventions?
6. Which genres are recognizable because of the props and settings they use? Which are recognizable because of the types of stories and characters they use?
7. How do genres come into existence? Is it the same way that subgenres come into existence?
8. How can a genre die out?
9. Do genres really exist?
10. Discuss whether or not it is possible to understand a book or a movie or a piece of music without first understanding the conventions of the genre it belongs to.
11. Does understanding the conventions of the genre that a text belongs to improve our understanding of the text?
12. What use is the idea of genre?

Applications and Activities

1. Complete the "Genre Mixing Matrix" to identify "texts" that fit in subgenres created by mixing two standard genres. (See INSTRUCTIONAL GRAPHIC.)
 - a. Work in pairs to list five genres that are defined by style (props and settings) and five genres that are defined by content (character types, plots, or messages).
 - b. Write the five style genres in the first column of vertical boxes on the grid. Write the five content genres in the five boxes along the top row. (See BACKGROUND INFORMATION for assistance.)
 - c. Still working in pairs, write the titles of books, movies, or TV shows in the empty grid boxes that fit the mix of the two types of genres, i.e. science fiction romances.

C a p t i o n e d M e d i a P r o g r a m

- d. Share and discuss the results.
- e. Discuss the fact that genre mixing also occurs with genres of the same type, i.e. science fiction and horror can mix though both are genres of style.
2. Choose a genre that is familiar. Make a list of the conventions that apply to that genre. Write a short story that intentionally breaks some of the conventions. Share the stories.
3. Working in small groups, produce a play that parodies a particular text or genre. Consider using fairy tales for the parodies since everyone is familiar with their conventions.
4. Write a critical essay on a book, movie, play, or other suitable text using the idea of genre as a concept tool.
5. Debate topics related to genres. Consider:
 - a. Romance is superior to science fiction.
 - b. Violent genres should be banned.
 - c. Realism is not a genre.
 - d. Great art ignores genre.
6. Research a medium, i.e. print, music, movies, TV, the Internet, or stage plays.
 - a. Report on the genres that feature in that medium.
 - b. Explain the differences between the genres that occupy that medium.
7. Give a short presentation or write a short report on one of the following:
 - a. Homeric epic.
 - b. Ancient Greek tragedy.
 - c. The comedy of Aristophanes.
 - d. Comedy and tragedy in the age of Shakespeare.
 - e. The origin of the modern soap opera.
 - f. The genres of American literature.

CMP RELATED RESOURCES

- [Mythology in Literary Culture #9315](#)
- [Narrative Writing 1: Structures--What is a Narrative? #9939](#)
- [Universal Themes in Literature #9467](#)

World Wide Web



The following Web sites complement the contents of this guide; they were selected by professionals who have experience in teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. Every effort was made to select accurate, educationally relevant, and "kid safe" sites. However, teachers should preview them before use. The U.S. Department of Education, the National Association of the Deaf, and the Captioned Media Program do not endorse the sites and are not responsible for their content.

- **FILM GENRES INTRODUCTION**

<http://www.filmsite.org/genres.html>

Select an icon or film genre category, read about the development and history of the genre, and view chronological lists of selected, representative greatest films for each one. Also view various nongenre film categories. Includes a guide to discussing films by genre.

- **GENRE-CREATIVE WRITING FOR TEENS ARCHIVE**

http://teenwriting.about.com/b/a/2004_04_15.htm

Sometimes the differences between genres are confusing, so here are a few online sources to help you out: "Jay Lake's Handy Guide to Genre Distinctions," "Definitions of Science Fiction," "Fiction Genre Definitions or Literary Definitions: The Genres."

- **GENRE AND THE VIDEO GAME**

<http://www.robinlionheart.com/gamedev/genres.xhtml>

From a book entitled *The Medium of the Video Game*, this Web site takes a look at video games and how to categorize them. It compares iconography with interactive games and lists in alphabetical order genres for grouping video games.

INSTRUCTIONAL GRAPHIC

- GENRE MIXING MATRIX

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GENRE MIXING MATRIX

Directions:

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2. Write the five style genres in the first column of vertical boxes on the grid. Write the five content genres in the five boxes along the top row.
3. Write the titles of books, movies, or TV shows in the empty grid boxes that fit the mix of the two types of genres, i.e. science fiction romances.

Genres of Styles		Genres of Content				
		1	2	3	4	5
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						

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