

INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE

Literature is a term used to describe written or spoken material. Broadly speaking, "literature" is used to describe anything from creative writing to more technical or scientific works, but the term is most commonly used to refer to works of the creative imagination, including works of poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction.

Why do we read literature?

Literature represents a language or a people: culture and tradition. But, literature is more important than just a historical or cultural artifact. Literature introduces us to new worlds of experience. We learn about books and literature; we enjoy the comedies and the tragedies of poems, stories, and plays; and we may even grow and evolve through our literary journey with books.

Ultimately, we may discover meaning in literature by looking at what the author says and how he/she says it. We may interpret the author's message. In academic circles, this decoding of the text is often carried out through the use of literary theory, using a mythological, sociological, psychological, historical, or other approach.

Whatever critical paradigm we use to discuss and analyze literature, there is still an artistic quality to the works. Literature is important to us because it speaks to us, it is universal, and it affects us. Even when it is ugly, literature is beautiful.

Fiction is a work of the imagination or invention, which contrasts with non-fiction (which is usually thought to be based on facts). Written works like novels, short stories, plays, and poems are fictional.

A work of fiction is a work of literature, but the term "literature" encompasses far more than just fiction. Literature also refers to non-fiction (memoirs, biography, and other works that are factual in scope).

Gender Roles in Literature

Gender behavior is significantly influenced by the processes of socialization and social forces than by natural or innate differences. Gender roles depend on society, culture, geographic location, politics and more. The society in which one lives determines to a huge extent the patterns of behavior that a person has to be in line with, depending on their sex. For many people it is hard to believe that most of their understanding of gender is a result of outside influence.

Children's preschool books are a key cultural mechanism for teaching children gender roles. But as such they may also be seen as a source of gender stereotypes that a child will later use to organize gendered behavior. Children's books are a microcosm of beliefs and values, including gender ideologies. When a child learns how to read, he or she also learns about culture. Learning to read is an element of the socialization process and is a key mechanism to transmit culture from one generation to the next. Thanks to literature, many masculine and feminine characteristics that are not at all natural become acquired.

In his article *Content Analysis and Gender Stereotypes in Children's Books* from 2009, Frank Taylor cites a number of studies, which prove that there is a huge gap between female and male representation in children's books. At the same time there is a common pattern. A 1972 study of award-winning children's books has shown that women and girls were nearly invisible. Boys were described as active and outdoors-oriented, while girls remained at home and behaved passively. At the same time men were leaders and women were followers. The study proved that there was a common female representation in a book. The female character was usually portrayed as a kind-hearted mother, an obedient housewife, or a traditional young woman whose main concern is finding an appropriate husband.

A similar study was done in 1987. It showed little improvement, but the characters in the books were still portrayed in traditional gender roles. According to the 1987 study, most of the female characters had no particular behavior. Girls in the reviewed books failed to form any career goals and there were no female role models, while male characters were still portrayed as more independent.

Later research, once again based on award-winning children's books, found that women were still portrayed in traditional gender roles and were usually associated with the household and tools used during housework. In contrast males were out of home and associated with production-oriented tools and artifacts.

The common view got a bit shaken in the 1990s. Another research conducted during that time showed that the traditional portrayal of women in children's books was slowly falling apart. Some of the books included a more unbiased depiction for both women and men. In the twenty-first century the results of this process are easily seen. As gender roles as a whole are becoming more flexible, gender roles in literature are also slowly coming out of the box. This, however, does not mean that gender stereotypes are gone. They still exist in literature, in movies and in the media.

Many feminists argue that early upbringing can play a crucial role in imposing assigned gender roles to both boys and girls. From birth children are attacked by gender rules and regulations. Literature, for one, creates the image of the girl as a woman and of the boy as a man, with different roles. The way in which gender is portrayed in children's books shapes the images that a

child develops about his or her own role in society. The presence of gender bias in the content and language of a huge number of children's books has been proven more than once.

The way in which gender is represented in children's books and in literature as a whole is so important because most readers tend to identify themselves with the characters in books of their own sex. Literature's influence is especially strong with children. They often use the gender scripts and ideologies in children's books when role playing and thus gradually they form an impression of femaleness and maleness.

As a result, gender stereotypes in literature deprive boys and girls of the freedom to express themselves the way they are. They are forced to behave in the way the society considers appropriate. Gender stereotypes confine both sexes to traditional duties, ambitions and responsibilities.