

Characteristics of Good Realistic Fiction

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Mirroring life as some people experience it, realistic fiction deals with many complex problems and situations from understanding sexual orientation to dealing with family problems. At its core, a good realistic fiction novel is about people, their problems, and their challenges. The characters in the novel should be believable and their language and actions should be appropriate for the setting of the story and reflective of the culture and social class in which they live. An author writing about a gang in an urban setting has a responsibility to use appropriate words, slang, phrases, and dialects. However, while realism prevails, people are still considered with sensitivity; a good author is always aware of the fine line between stereotyping and realistic, objective writing. Although readers learn a lesson or a value such as being accountable for one's actions, or accepting the cultural, physical, or sexual differences of other people, good realistic fiction novels do not dictate specific moral and ethical beliefs. Rather, they challenge readers to learn the importance of moral and ethical behavior by drawing their own conclusions after they consider the events and facts from their personal perspectives using their own moral and ethical judgments. Some realistic fiction is expected to include violence; in fact, the genre would be failing in its mission if some novels did not mirror the violence that many young people experience. However, violence should be used appropriately and to make a point—never just for sensationalism. To Aronson (2001), a good book “recognize[s] the depth of darkness within teenagers and yet also assume[s] that readers have the intelligence and the imagination to deal with ambiguity” (p. 120).

Realistic Fiction: Definition

A classification of literature containing stories that *could* happen in the real world, in a time and setting that is possible, and with characters that are true to life, yet drawn from the writer's imagination. It is categorized as historical or contemporary based upon the time period of publication (Contemporary begins at 1960). Experts define categories of realistic fiction using aspects of *theme* (e.g., survival, friendship, diversity, tolerance, environmental preservation, courage, freedom, justice).

Purposes:

- To entertain or enlighten
 - To help understand problems and issues that might be encountered in their own lives
 - To empathize with characters engaged in resolving problems
 - To recognize the complexity of human relationships
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Characteristics:

- Narrative elements: characters, setting, a plot involving conflict or tension revolving around a problem, and a resolution providing the conclusion
- Can be humorous, adventurous, romantic and/or imaginative

Themes:

- Reflect realistic human and life experiences

Characters:

- True to life, vivid, imaginary characters seem real and behave in realistic ways
- Fictional characters (animals, people) that are confronted with challenges
- Protagonist (main character's problem causes tension)
- Often includes antagonists, who are the opposing force in the main character's conflict
- Vivid, detailed descriptions and dialogue help the reader understand the thoughts, feelings, values and personalities of characters

Setting:

- Usually takes place in the present
- Location, season, weather, and time period are important to the plot, characters, problem, and theme
- Vivid, detailed descriptions help the reader envision the places encountered

Plot:

- Engages the reader in understanding universal human problems
- Reflects the character's problem
- Various forms of conflict (person vs. person, etc.)
- True to life, vivid, imaginary events seem real
- Variations of plot include foreshadowing and flashback