WHAT IS LITERATURE?
WHAT STUDENTS SAY

GENERAL TRAITS

◦ anything written
  • (or published – published = approved)
◦ holds interest, gives pleasure
◦ fictional, non-fictional
  • imaginative, biographical
◦ makes readers see, feel, hear, love,…
◦ has structure, form
STRUCTURE & FORM

GENRE
- Tragedy, Comedy, Tragi-Comedy
- sonnet, lyric, ode
- Shakespearean, Petrarchan sonnets
- Short Story, Play, Poem
- myth, legend, fairy tale, allegory

Movement
- Neo-Classical, Romantic, Post-Modern

Elements
- Plot, Theme, Characterization, Symbolism
- conventions
STRUCTURE & FORM

FORM
- any length
- any form
- lack of form
  - blank verse
  - Theatre of the Absurd
  - stream-of-consciousness
STORY

- PLOT
  - Plot = #1 to Aristotle
  - narrative
  - tells a story
  - beginning, middle, end
    - even the lack of a plot is significant
CHARACTERIZATION

CHARACTER
- has someone in the plot
  - human, animal, other
- persona
- narrator
- protagonist, antagonist
WHAT AUTHORS SAY

- **Ezra Pound:**
  - “Literature is *news that stays news.*”

- **Robert Frost:**
  - “*a performance in words.*”
  - not just “meaning”

- **Lady Murasaki**
  - has a significance, something that the author thinks is invaluable, “*so important that one cannot bear to let it pass into oblivion.*”
GREATNESS

- allows us to
  - appreciate excellence
  - admire achievement

- so, not only do the authors demonstrate a usage or skill with the aforementioned “Structure & Form”

- but they also exhibit a mastery of it
  - and we admire it as we would a virtuoso’s performance
    - athletic, musical, technological, mechanical, pedagogical
GREATNESS

**ANALOGY:**
- Many people play sports.
  - Many even play sports professionally.
- **BUT**
- **What separates the average players from the Greats?**
  - Hobey Baker, Wayne Gretsky
  - Jim Thorpe, Babe Didrikson
  - Wilt Chamberlain, Bill Russell
  - Emmett Smith, Walter Peyton
  - Babe Ruth, Ted Williams
DISTINGUISHED

Literature with a Capital “L”

- distinguished from *mere versification*
  - just b/c it rhymes doesn’t make it Literature
  - greeting card, lyrics to pop song
- distinguished from *mere information*
  - just b/c it relays some data doesn’t make it Literature
  - the months poem (“30 days hath…”)
THOUGHT-PROVOKING

- makes readers *think, discuss, argue, disagree*
  - communication
    - with ourselves
    - with each other
- allows us to see some issue from a different, perhaps unique, perspective
  - expands our viewpoints
  - beyond our personal experiences
MEANING

- makes sense
- even nonsense makes sense
- morals
- themes
- literary work teaches
  - edifying, instructional, historical, cultural
  - learn @ their culture, our culture
  - life lessons
MEANING

- literary work has significance
- universality
  - beyond fads, “flash-in-the-pans”
  - long “shelf life”
  - crosses many boundaries
    - time, space, culture, religion,…
  - not myopic, but far-sighted view

MEANING OF LIFE
MEANING

**MEANING OF LIFE**

- insight into the **human condition**
  - this existence
  - after-life
  - the forces at work for/against us
  - the lack thereof
- **positive or negative**
  - even if there is no meaning to life
DEFINITION

LITERATURE

• demonstrates a level of excellence
• with note to structure, form, conventions
• while conveying a story
• that teaches us about us
• about the human condition
  • (a combination of all of the above)
WHAT IS LITERATURE?
LITERATURE IS LIFE