

# 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...”)

# PROVOCATIVE

## ▶ 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

## ▶ MEANING

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

# MEANING

## ▶ 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**

