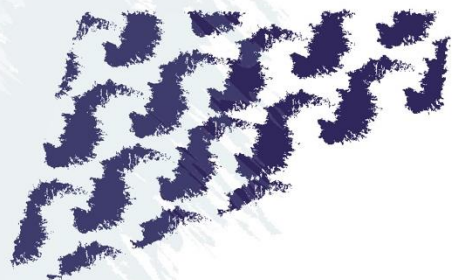


CULTURE is YOU



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## Content Unit 7: Culture in Words



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## 7 Culture in Words

### 7.1 Introduction

The art of words is one of the most fascinating cultural forms. Immerse yourself in the fascinating world of literature. Learn about different literary forms and genres, how they have been used for different purposes over the millennia, and how to interpret and critically reflect on what has been written.

Can you think of a book that made a big impression on you, or perhaps even shaped you? For many people, reading is much more than a leisure activity; books can be guides or companions in many different situations in life.

You are probably familiar with the following saying: "**Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body**" (by Joseph Addison).

Enjoy the following unit, be inspired and maybe it will inspire you to take a look at one of the most famous works of literature.

**In this module you will learn about:**

- the concept of literature
- Non-fiction and literary texts
- Epic, poetry and drama
- the different genres of books
- famous poems/historical texts
- famous traditional poems/historical texts
- text interpretations
- the importance of critical reflection of text

## 7.2 Literature – Art in words

Literature can be traced back to the 16th century. Documents, written works and letters were called "litterae". The term literature is therefore derived from the Latin word "litteratura", which means letter writing.

### Definition

Literature is broadly defined as **anything written**, and more narrowly as poetry or "fine literature", also known as fiction.

Although in principle everything that is written can be considered literature, today literature, also called writing, usually refers to **poetry**, i.e. drama, novels and poems. In contrast, there are non-literary or non-fictional works, known as **non-fiction texts**.

Basically, literature is characterised by the following three main features:

- **Determining the sequence** (saving the text in a book, on a hard drive, etc.)
- **Artistic use of language** (unconventional choice of words, embellished language, free sentence structure, language as a sound effect and written image, metaphors, rhymes etc.)
- **Fictionality** (the text is invented or fictionalised)

There is a separate science of literature, **literary studies**. It deals with the **analysis and interpretation of texts, as well as** with the theory, criticism, history and creation of literature. Modern as well as historical written texts and even oral traditions are analysed.

You may have wondered why it is **important to study literature**. Literature has the power to touch us emotionally through the beauty of its language and to put us in different contexts and situations, be it misery or happiness, through its transcendence.

But it is not only reading and understanding texts and writing down thoughts that are essential. The content of the work itself is of great cultural importance. Aristotle said that **literature can move people**, not only their feelings but also their actions and decisions. They can be moved to read for hours, listen intensely, buy a book, recommend a work or publish a text. Imagine if the stories of Romeo and Juliet, or Robinson Crusoe had never been published. The world we live in, the stories we tell and the myths we perpetuate would not be the same.

### Hint

Literature transcends the lives and intentions of individuals. Literature has a life of its own, i.e. often unforeseen effects, numerous interpretations, adaptations, rewrites and film adaptations take place, whether or not intended by the author.

**In this way, literature enables a cultural process.**

They can actively participate in the cultural and literary process in libraries, reading clubs, literary education and training, author readings and cultural education institutions.

Literary works are **defined and categorised**. The first level is the distinction between fictional and non-fictional texts. Fictional texts are also called literary texts.

- **Non-fictional** texts provide facts and information. These works are widely used in everyday life, such as in textbooks, instruction manuals, newspaper articles, reports, laws, non-fiction books or guidebooks. This makes it clear that these texts are always based on reality.
- **Fictional works** create their own reality, i.e. a story. They have therefore invented texts, often mixing reality and fiction. Fiction means nothing other than invention or made-up. Examples are detective stories, fantasy stories, love stories and thrillers.

### Important

Non-fiction literature is often used to impart knowledge to the reader, such as through non-fiction books or guidebooks.

A literary text, on the other hand, such as a poem or a novel, is used to tell a story.

After the classification into fictional and non-fictional texts, there is a further categorisation of literary works. The three main literary genres of fictional texts are:

- Epic
- Drama
- Poetry

Where do you think fairy tales, sagas, hymns and comedies belong?

- **Epic** is also called narrative literature and consists of stories told by the narrator that are invented by the author. Some examples of epic works are: Fairy tales, legends, fables, anecdotes, short stories, novellas, narratives, novels, epic, etc.

- Texts consisting of stanzas and verses with the use of artistic and figurative language are classified as **lyric**. The endings of lines are deliberate, and metre and rhyme are characteristic of this genre. The best-known lyric works are songs, poems and ballads.
- **Drama** refers to texts in dialogue form, which are usually written for the theatre. This is why drama is also called stage poetry. Dramatic texts are divided into scenes and acts, give stage directions and generally distinguish between stories with happy endings (comedies) and stories with unhappy endings (tragedies).

#### Note

**Examples of epic poetry:** fairy tales, novels, and legends

**Examples of poetry:** ballads, poems, songs, and hymns

**Examples of drama:** comedy, tragedy, and epic theatre

### 7.3 Reading – adventures in the mind

You will have noticed in the library, in the bookshop or in the online bookshop that there are different categories into which books are divided. **Book genres** are a kind of **organising principle with** certain readership expectations and genre conventions associated with them.

#### Hint

Did you know that the word "genre" comes from the French language and means "kind"? Accordingly, a book's genre can also be called its kind.

The main plot, the main characters and the setting determine which genre a work belongs to.

#### Practical relevance

Why is it important to know book genres?

- They help in the search for books.
- They enable better placement and marketing of books.
- You avoid disappointed expectations and bad purchases.

While **crime fiction** is about classic detective stories in which crimes are solved, books in the **fantasy** genre are about mythical creatures, time travel and magic. **Science fiction books** also have invented elements, but more in robots, spaceships, and artificial intelligence. If you like reading about romantic relationships and love stories, then a **romance novel** is the right choice for you. The **thriller** is all about goosebumps and suspense. The **historical novel** **immerses** you in a story from a bygone era but without any claim to the scientific accuracy of the data. Other types of novels, such as **travel novels**, **family novels**, **social novels** or **developmental** are also fictional works, but each revolves around a specific theme.

In fictional literature, therefore, there are the following best-known genres:

- Thriller
- Romance novel
- Science fiction
- Fantasy
- Horror
- Historical Novel
- Social novel
- Development novel
- Travel novel

- Family novel



On the other hand, **non-fictional books** do not tell fictional stories but give you interesting facts about certain topics. For example, there are **non-fiction books** about certain countries and historical topics. Also popular are **guides to** healthy eating, wealth, parenting and relationships, cookbooks, travel guides and craft books. **Reference books** include scientific textbooks and school and university textbooks. **Biographies of** public figures, i.e. famous people in politics, sport, business or spirituality are also very popular. In these books, either the life story is told by an outside person or the biography is written by the person, which is then called an autobiography.

Genres of non-fictional literature include:

- Non-fiction
- Reference book
- Guidebook
- Biography
- Reference works

**In the following, you will learn about some examples of famous historical texts.**

**Historical texts** talk about significant people, places, times and events from the past. The historical text is thus an information-based work in which readers learn about historical events.

Historical sources include surviving original texts from different eras, such as diaries, documents, and letters.

Hint

Did you know that ancient texts have been found on a wide variety of materials, including paper, wood, wax, stone, papyrus or parchment?

- The Diamond Sutra, preserved for centuries in the Mogao Grottoes in China, is considered by experts to be the oldest and most valuable book in the world. At around 1145 years old, it is even older than the Gutenberg Bible. The Bible, the most widely read and best-known book in the world, was the first book to be produced by the modern printing press in the form of the Gutenberg Bible.



- The oldest surviving book in Europe is the **Gospel of St Cuthbert**. Handwritten in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, it contains the Gospel of John in Latin.
- The Rothschild Prayer Book, one of Europe's most valuable historical manuscripts, is a manuscript book of hours from Flanders, illustrated with pictures. Created around 1500, the book was in German and then Austrian possession before being sold at a high price to Australia in 2014.
- The oldest Polish document is the **Regest Dagome** from the 11th century. The **Chronicle of Gallus Anonymus** is also one of the most important Polish works. The events of King Bolesław III are described in detail. The **Yearbook of the Holy Cross**, the **Privileges of the Nobility** and the religious texts of the **Holy Cross Sermons** and the **Bible of Queen Zofia** also achieved literary significance in Poland.



- In Spain, the **Alba Bible** was illuminated by Christian illuminations. A mammoth work of reconciliation between Christians and Jews, this icon of tolerance is on display in the Palace of Liria, in Madrid. The value of the Bible has been estimated at 2.5 million euros.
- The **Codex Albeldense** is one of Spain's most important historical sources and an illustrated chronicle of world history. Created in the 10th century as the first European text with Hindu-Arabic numerals, it presents a Christian narrative of the life of Muhammad.
- The **Wenceslas Bible** was produced almost 150 years before Martin Luther published his translation of the Bible. This mammoth work in the history of biblical texts was initiated by King Wenceslas IV in Prague and produced by the best bookmakers in Europe. It is also interesting to note that 607 calves had to be skinned for a total of 2400 pages of the work. However, due to the deposition of King Wenceslas IV prevented the completion of the Bible.
- The historical work **Liber Vetustissimus** from the Czech Republic details the activities of the city council, the guilds and the citizens. Originally written in Latin, the work is increasingly written in German and Czech.

Have you ever read a book of poetry or been moved or inspired by a poem? Here are some examples of famous poems from history.

Poetry, i.e. the lyrical genre of literature, is a wonderful way of expressing oneself, revealing one's own state of mind and coming to terms with reality. Like music, poetry can touch your soul and evoke emotions.

Even if you don't encounter famous historical poems in your everyday life, you are bound to come across them in one way or another, whether it's your children's school performance, at a birthday party or on Mother's Day.

Immerse yourself in an exemplary poem by Rainer Maria Rilke from Austria:

### The Panther

His vision, from the constantly passing bars,  
has grown so weary that it cannot hold  
anything else. It seems to him there are  
a thousand bars; and behind the bars, no world.

As he paces in cramped circles, over and over,  
the movement of his powerful soft strides  
is like a ritual dance around a center  
in which a mighty will stands paralyzed.

Only at times, the curtain of the pupils  
lifts, quietly--. An image enters in,  
rushes down through the tensed, arrested muscles,  
plunges into the heart and is gone.

Rainer Maria Rilke    translated by Stephen Mitchell

There are many famous poems in the world. They are grouped into **literary periods**, which are time periods in literary history. Epochs before the 20th century include Baroque, Enlightenment, Sturm und Drang and Realism. Periods from the 20th century onwards include Modernism, Expressionism and Postmodernism.

Some of the best-known works of historical poetry and award-winning poets and poetesses from different periods include:

**Example**

"Don Quixote" by Miguel de Cervantes (Spain)

"Faust" by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (Germany)

"Ode to My Suit" by Pablo Neruda (Spain)

"Because I could not stop for Death-" by Emily Dickinson (USA)

"A Song on the End of the World" by Czesław Miłosz (Poland)

"Sonnet 18" by William Shakespeare (England)

"All the Beauties of the World" by Jaroslav Seifert (Czech Republic)

## 7.4 Paper is patient (Paper doesn't blush)

Have you ever read a text, be it a novel, a poem or a fairy tale, whose words touched you deeply or made you think?

Because literature is not just a meaningless text made up of symbols. Studying written intensively and trying to find out what they mean can be extremely exciting and instructive.

At this point, you may be asking yourself: **What is a textual interpretation?**

Textual interpretation is the process by which texts are interpreted. This means working out the **core meaning of the text**, as well as its effect and possible intention. Literary interpretation teaches you to think about the content of a text and to form your own opinion about it.

### Note

The aim of textual interpretation is to interpret the content comprehensively.

But interpreting is never the beginning of the process. Only after **extensive study** and creative and personal engagement with literature is it possible **to engage with the text** in a holistic way. In the process, you make a connection with what you have read, think about it deeply and find meaning in the story.

As you engage with the text, ask yourself questions such as:

- What did the author mean by this text?
- Why was the text written?
- What is the meaning or significance of the text?
- What does the text say?

### Hint

This is where interpretation differs from analysis:

**Text analysis** also examines content and language. Consequently, analysis is often the basis for interpretation.

**Interpretation**, however, goes deeper by trying to decipher what the text is saying and revealing the meaning and intention of the text.

It becomes clear that it is not the text itself, but you as an interpreter who is responsible for the meaning of a work.

Above all, **critical reflection on a reading text** is of great importance.

#### Hint

The word **reflection** comes from the Latin term "reflexio", which means to reflect, bend back or throwback.

Critical reflection is used to engage with read texts and their content. Reflection leads to a better understanding and valuable insights. In critical reflection, you can ask yourself questions such as:

- What did I particularly like about the text, and what not so much?
- What insights can I draw from the text?
- What have I learnt?

#### Definition

Reflection is an intensive thinking (reflecting) about a certain thing.

In this age of increasing digitalisation of many aspects of life, it is also necessary to be able to **think critically about online content**. **Media literacy** is therefore important alongside reading skills and critical thinking. You have probably experienced the emergence of false information, so-called fake news. Since texts in the digital space are often not subject to closer scrutiny, the spread of false content is encouraged.

Critical media reflection helps you to distinguish between serious and dubious information from the wealth of information available on the internet. But how can you

Always analyse texts with **critical questions** such as:

- Who is behind this information or text? Who is the editor? Who wrote the text?
- How was it written, objectively or subjectively?
- With what intention was the text written or published?
- Are there sources and can you check them?

## 7.5 Summary

Could you get a good idea of culture in words, and the **importance of literature** in evoking emotions through the beauty of its language, and taking us into the world of different contexts and situations through its transcendence? Of course, literature also has a great cultural significance.

Literature, as basically everything that is written, has been divided into **non-fictional** and **fictional (literary) works** and is defined by its main characteristics of a fixed order, artistic use of language and fictionality. You also learned about the **three main literary genres**: epic, i.e. narrative literature with its fairy tales, novels and legends; dramatic such as poetry and ballads; and comedy and tragedy from poetry.

In the presentation **of book genres** as an organising principle, you have been introduced to novels, mysteries, thrillers, fantasy and many more. Now you know that if you prefer pure goosebumps and suspense, the thriller genre is the best for you.

The Wenceslas Bible, the Gutenberg Bible, the Rothschild Prayer Book, the Alba Bible, the Diamond Sutra and Regest Dagome were exemplified as **significant historical works**. In getting to know European poetry, "Ode to My Suit", "A Song on the End of the World", "Autobiography" and "The Panther" were mentioned.

Furthermore, in dealing with literature, you could not only increase your reading, interpretation, and reflection skills by asking critical questions and interpreting content but also improve your **reflective work** with online texts. This equips you for a first literary and cultural exchange.

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