

MSD of Wayne Township

Glossary of Language Arts Terms



The purpose of this document is to define commonly used E/LA terms to promote greater alignment of instruction across the MSD of Wayne Township. For definition and information about specific instructional approaches, refer to the Guiding Practices documents, found on the MSD of Wayne Township website.

General Language Arts and Literary Terms

alliteration – the repetition of identical or similar initial consonant sounds in consecutive or nearby words or syllables

allusion – an implied or indirect reference to something assumed to be familiar

analytic – noting relationships, reasoning from the interrelations of a subject

argument – Toulmin’s basic conception of an argument (as explained by Hillocks) includes a *claim* that is based on some sort of *evidence*, a *warrant* that explains how the evidence supports the claim, *backing* to support the warrants, and *rebuttals* or *counter arguments* that refute competing claims

audience – the readers of the text. Often a writer crafts a text with a particular audience (with specific characteristics such as age or level of understanding) in mind. Readers can sharpen their appreciation and understanding of a text by identifying the writer’s intended audience.

author’s purpose – a writer’s overall intention in creating a text

central idea – a significant concept or idea that is important to a text. Additional details or ideas can be cited to support the centrality of the concept or idea. In literary text, *central idea* is similar to theme, and may be more appropriate for younger elementary students. Informational text may have several central ideas.

central message – an idea the author is trying to convey to the reader through a text

citation – the act of citing or quoting a reference in writing

cite – to quote a passage, book, or author in order to provide evidence

claim – an arguable position statement that is based on evidence

cohesive – consistent, tending to unify

cold read – to read a text independently without any prior discussion or scaffolding from a teacher or other person

context clues – textual information that helps identify a word or group of words. Sources of information include words, phrases, sentences, syntax, and illustrations.

credible – worthy of belief because of precision: valid, convincing, true

cueing system – sources that contribute to understanding. Individuals may use their knowledge of language, such as (1) sound-symbol relationships (graphophonics), (2) word meaning (semantics), and (3) sentence structure (syntax). Prior knowledge and context also serve as sources that contribute to understanding.

domain-specific words and phrases – vocabulary specific to a particular field of study (domain), such as the human body; may also be analogous to ‘tier three’ words.

editing – an activity involving the reading of text to identify and correct errors in sentence construction, mechanics, usage, and spelling

evaluation – the act of examining or making judgment at a particular moment in time based on a set criteria that has a numerical and/or descriptive value. An evaluation may include an appraisal of growth, products, processes, or changes in these, using both formal and informal techniques.

evidence – facts, figures, details, quotations, or other sources of data and information that provide support for claims or an analysis and that can be evaluated by others; should be derived from a source widely accepted as appropriate to a particular discipline

figurative language – language that compares two objects or ideas to allow the reader to see something more clearly or understand something in a new way. An element of a writer’s style, figurative language changes or goes beyond literal meaning

idiom – expressions of language that do not mean what they literally say

illustration – graphic representation of important content (for example, art, photos, maps, graphs, charts) in a fiction or nonfiction text

infer – to draw a defensible conclusion based on textual evidence and prior knowledge or experience

interpretive – serving to explain, explanatory

irony – The use of words to express the opposite of the literal meaning. Irony is an important device in many genres of fiction and nonfiction texts, and it is crucial to works of satire.

literary criticism – the analysis of literary works according to one of several formal principles or theories of criticism reflecting philosophical, political, and cultural perspectives

main idea - the most important thought or overall position; the main idea or thesis of a piece, written in sentence form, is supported by details and explanation

mentor text – a book or other text that serves as an example of excellent writing. Mentor texts provide models of specific genres for literature discussion and student writing

metacognition – awareness and monitoring of one’s own thinking processes and strategies: knowledge of what one knows and how one knows it

metaphor – a comparison or figure of speech in which something is used to represent something else

mini-lesson – a focused lesson of up to fifteen minutes long that addresses a specific strategy, skill, or technique needed by students to complete a task

mood – The emotional atmosphere communicated by an author in his or her work, or how a text makes readers feel. An element of a writer’s style, mood is established by details, imagery, figurative language, and setting.

motif – A characteristic feature of a text, such as a recurring theme, idea, or subject

narrative structure – A method of organizing a text. A simple narrative structure follows a traditional sequence that includes a beginning, a problem, a series of events, a resolution of the problem, and an ending. Alternative narrative structures may include devices, such as flashback or flash-forward, to change the sequence of events or have multiple narrators.

narrator – The teller of the story of a text

non-narrative structure – A method of organizing a text. Non-narrative structures are used especially in three genres of nonfiction – expository texts, procedural texts, and persuasive texts. In non-narrative nonfiction texts, structural patterns include argumentative, categorical, descriptive, chronological, temporal, compare and contrast, cause and effect, problem and solution, and question and answer.

onomatopoeia – the representation of sound with words

paraphrase – to restate a text or passage in another form or words

perspective – view, outlook; could be referred to as the perspective from which a story is told, including first or third person (see *point of view* below).

point of view – the angle from which a story is told, usually the first person or the third person

first person – the narrator is a character in the story

third person – the unnamed narrator is not a character in the story

primary sources/texts – original materials, such as *The Declaration of Independence*, *Martin Luther King’s Letter from Birmingham Jail*, or *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*

propaganda devices – use of visual and verbal techniques intended to persuade an audience to accept a particular point of view, either good or bad, depending upon the propagandist’s intent. These techniques include manipulated visual images, connotative and slanted language, half-truths, testimonials, guilt by association, and glittering generalities

reader’s purpose - A reader’s overall intention in reading a text. To be entertained is one example of a reader’s purpose.

reading level – refers to an approximate difficulty level of books for an individual student. Generally categorized into independent, instructional, frustration, and stretch level texts, indicating the amount of support a student may need to successfully read and comprehend the text.

revising – the act of making changes in the text. Writers read the text, monitoring whether the written words accurately express their ideas and identifying whether they need to rewrite, reorganize, add to, or delete portions of the text.

rhetorical devices – verbal techniques and patterns used to create a certain effect. Rhetorical devices may be deliberate or accidental, facilitating or deliberately confusing or misleading (such as logical fallacy).

running record – an assessment practice that teachers use to sample a student’s reading, including accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Teachers can analyze students’ reading behaviors for instructional implications.

schema – a system of cognitive structures stored in memory. These structures abstractly present prior knowledge concerning events, objects, operations, processes, and relationships in the world, including knowledge about literacy.

secondary sources/texts – commentaries on primary sources/texts, such as summarization of *The Declaration of Independence* in a history book, a piece of historical fiction about Martin Luther King, or a biography of Benjamin Franklin.

simile – a comparison or figure of speech in which two essentially unlike things are compared using *like* or *as*

symbolism – attributing symbolic meanings or significance to objects, events or relationships

text complexity – the inherent difficulty of reading and comprehending a text combined with consideration of reader and task variables; in the standards, this represents a three-part assessment of text difficulty that pairs qualitative and quantitative measures with reader-task considerations

text features – print and visual features of a text that help the reader navigate the text and often provide additional information to help students comprehend the content, including the table of contents, glossary, italics, headings, and diagrams

text structure - refers to the ways that authors organize information in text, and includes basic story elements for literary text (characters, setting, plot) and basic organizational structures for informational text, including:

- argumentative** – presents a series of persuasive statements or opinions with reasons/evidence attached
- categorical** – presents information in logical categories and subcategories of related material
- cause and effect** – demonstrates or describes how and why things happen
- chronological sequence** – describes items or events in the order that they happened
- compare and contrast** - shows how two or more things are alike and/or how they are different
- description** – a topic, idea, person, place, or thing is described by listing its features, characteristics, or examples
- problem and solution** – tells about a problem then provides one or more possible solutions
- procedural** – explains how to do something, and is almost always organized in a temporal sequence, taking the form of directions or descriptions of a process
- question and answer** – organizes information in a series of questions with responses

theme – a statement about a central underlying idea, concept, or message that the author conveys in a text; in elementary grades, students may begin identifying *theme* as a singular word or concept. In middle school and high school, the theme should represent or describe what the author is saying about that concept. Texts may have multiple, defensible themes that are supported by textual evidence. See also *central idea*.

thesis – a statement that summarizes the main point or claim of an essay or research paper

tone – the attitude of the writer toward the topic; a tone can be serious, playful, objective, etc.

warrant – explains how evidence supports a claim in an argumentative piece of writing

Genre

Genre refers to a category of text or artistic work that has a characteristic form or technique.

adventure / adventure story – a contemporary realistic or historical fiction or fantasy text that presents a series of exciting or suspenseful events, often involving a main character taking a journey and overcoming danger and risk

autobiography – a biographical text in which the story of a person’s life is written and narrated by that person

biographical fiction – a fiction text in which a real person may be identified and used as a starting point, but in which the writer imagines many events, actions, and characters, as well as dialogue

biography – a biographical text in which the story (or part of the story) of a real person’s life is written and narrated by another person

classic/classical book – a book that over time is considered to epitomize the characteristics of high-quality literature. Classics exist in all genres and include themes that have been important in many different eras.

directions (“How To”) – a procedural nonfiction text that shows the steps involved in performing a task. A set of directions may include diagrams or drawings with labels.

editorial – a persuasive nonfiction text in which the purpose is to state and defend an opinion, usually by an editor of a magazine, newspaper, or TV news show

epic – a traditional tale or long narrative poem, first handed down orally and later in writing. Usually an epic involves a journey and a set of tasks or tests in which the hero triumphs. Generally the nature of the deeds and attributes of the hero have grown and become exaggerated over time. Like comedy, tragedy, and satire, epic was once a widely produced genre but now appears in different forms or embedded within other genres. Also known as *saga*.

essay – an analytic or interpretive piece of expository writing with a focused point of view, or a persuasive text that provided a body of information related to a social or scientific issue

expository text – a nonfiction text that gives the reader information about a topic. Expository texts use a variety of text structures, such as compare and contrast, cause and effect, chronological sequence, and problem and solution. Seven forms of expository text are categorical text, recount, collection, interview, report, feature article, and literary essay.

fable – a folktale that demonstrates a useful truth and teaches a lesson. Usually including personified animals or natural elements such as the sun, fables appear to be simple but often convey abstract ideas.

fairy tale – a folktale about real problems but also involving magic and magical creatures. Also called “wonder tales”, fairy tales have been handed down through oral language over the years.

fantasy – a category of fiction that includes the following genres – traditional literature, folktale, fairy tale, fable, legend, epic, ballad, myth, modern fantasy, animal fantasy, low fantasy, high fantasy, and science fiction.

high fantasy – a long, complex modern fantasy text characterized by the motifs of traditional literature – the quest, struggle between good and evil, the hero. High fantasy involves stories that take place in an alternative world alongside the real world, or where our world does not exist.

low fantasy – a modern fantasy text that takes place in the real world but which also includes characters, places, and events that do not and could not exist in the real world. Low fantasy may be contemporary or historical. In general, low fantasy requires less suspension of disbelief than high fantasy because the author provides a bridge between the real world and a world of fantasy.

modern fantasy – fantasy texts that have contemporary content. Unlike traditional literature, modern fantasy does not come from an oral tradition. Modern fantasy texts can be divided into four more specific genres: animal fantasy, low fantasy, high fantasy, and science fiction.

feature article – an expository text that presents information organized around a central theme or idea, or one particular aspect of a topic. A feature article may use one or more structural patterns to weave a cohesive sequence of ideas. Feature articles usually are published in newspapers and magazines.

fiction – invented, imaginative prose or poetry that tells a story. Fiction texts can be organized into the categories realism and fantasy. Along with nonfiction, fiction is one of two basic genres of literature.

folktale – a traditional fiction text about a people or “folk”, originally handed down orally from generation to generation. Folktales are usually simple tales and often involve talking animals. Fables, fairy tales, trickster tales, and pourquoi tales are some types of folktales.

graphic novel – a book-length fiction text with comic strips or other illustrations on every page and a story line that continues across the text. Illustrations, which depict moment-to-moment actions and characters’ emotions, are usually accompanied by dialogue in speech balloons and occasional narrative description of actions.

historical fiction – a fiction that takes place in a realistically (and often factually) portrayed setting of a past era. Historical fiction focuses on the problems and issues of life in a particular historic time period.

informational text – a nonfiction text including the following genres – biography, autobiography, memoir, and narrative nonfiction, as well as expository texts, procedural texts, and persuasive texts.

legend – a traditional tale, first handed down orally and later in writing, that tells about a noteworthy person or event. Legends are believed to have some root in history, but the accuracy of the events and people they describe is not always verifiable.

literary essay – an expository text that presents ideas about a work (or works) of literature in a formal, analytic way.

literary nonfiction – nonfiction texts that employ literary techniques, such as figurative language, to present information in engaging ways.

memoir – a biographical text in which a writer takes a reflective stance in looking back on a particular time or person. Usually written in the first person, memoirs are often briefer and more intense accounts of a memory or set of memories than the accounts found in biographies and autobiographies.

mystery/mystery story – a contemporary realistic or historical fiction or fantasy text that deals with the solution of a crime or the unraveling of secrets. A mystery has a plot that hinges on a puzzling situation or event that is resolved by the end.

myth – a traditional narrative text, often based in part on historical events, that explains human behavior and natural events or phenomena such as seasons and the sky.

nonfiction – prose or poetry that provides factual information. Along with fiction, nonfiction is one of the two basic genres of literature. According to their structures, nonfiction texts can be organized into the categories of narrative and non-narrative.

picture book – an illustrated fiction or nonfiction text in which pictures work with the text to tell a story or provide information

poetry – writing characterized by imagination and artistry and imbued with intense meaning. Along with prose, poetry is one of the two broad categories into which all literature can be divided.

ballad – a traditional poem or tale, often recited or sung, and usually telling a story important to a particular region or culture. First handed down orally and later in writing, ballads usually feature a hero whose deeds and attributes have grown and become exaggerated over time.

cinquain – a Japanese-inspired poem of five lines composed usually with two, four, six, eight, and two syllables.

concrete poetry – poems with words (and sometimes punctuation) arranged to present a concrete picture of the idea the poem is conveying. Sometimes also called a *shape poem*.

Haiku – an ancient Japanese form of non-rhyming poetry that creates a mental picture and makes a concise emotional statement.

limerick – a form of rhyming verse, usually surprising and humorous and frequently nonsensical.

lyric – a songlike poem that has rhythm and sometimes rhyme and is memorable for sensory images and description.

sonnet – a form of poetry consisting of fourteen lines, usually with three four-line stanzas – each with its own rhyme pattern – and ending with a couplet. Sonnets are written in regular meter (ten beats per line).

pourquoi tale – a folktale intended to explain why things are the way they are, usually having to do with natural phenomena

prose – the ordinary form of spoken or written language in sentences and paragraphs and without the structure of poetry. Along with poetry, prose is one of the two broad categories into which all literature can be divided. Prose includes two basic genres, fiction and nonfiction.

realistic fiction – a fiction text that takes place in contemporary or modern times about believable characters involved in events that could happen

satire – a fiction text that uses sarcasm and irony to portray and ridicule human failures

science fiction – modern fantasy texts that involve technology, futuristic scenarios, and real or imagined scientific phenomena

sequel – a literary work, typically found in fiction text, that continues a story begun in a previous book. The central character usually remains the same, and new secondary characters may be introduced.

short story – a work of fiction that is focused on human experience as it is revealed in a series of interrelated events that is shorter and less complex structurally than a novel

tall tale – a folktale that revolves around a central legendary character with extraordinary physical features or abilities, and often includes a great deal of exaggeration

traditional literature – stories passed down in oral or written form through history. An integral part of world culture, traditional literature includes the following genres – folktales, fairy tales, fables, legends, epics, sagas, ballads, and myths.

tragedy – a fiction text that ends unhappily and that is intended to evoke strong emotions in the audience. Tragedy often involves a noble or otherwise dignified hero who struggles against eventual defeat.

trickster tale – a folktale featuring a clever, usually physically weaker or smaller animal who outsmarts larger or more powerful animals

Beginning Reading

decodable text – text that is written for beginning readers that contains a high number of regularly spelled, decodable words and high-frequency words

decoding – the ability to translate the alphabet letters into recognizable sounds (e.g., saying /f/ for the letter f) and to use that knowledge to pronounce words

developmental spelling – spelling patterns that young students demonstrate as they move toward correct or conventional spelling. Also, referred to as **emergent**, **invented**, or **temporary** spelling.

emergent reader – a young reader who demonstrates early reading behaviors that were once identified as **pretend reading**, **picture reading**, or “talking” a story. This is recognized as an important developmental step through which children move on their way to conventional reading.

high frequency words – the words a student can read and pronounce accurately and automatically, with no necessity for decoding or guessing. Also referred to as **sight words**.

onset – all the sounds in a word that come before the first vowel (e.g., the /**bl**/ in the word **blank**, the /**sh**/ in the word **ship**).

phoneme – the units of speech that make up words and make a difference to meaning. If a student changes the first phoneme in the word **sat** from /**s**/ to /**p**/, it changes the meaning of the word. Phonemes are not letters; the number of phonemes in a word does not always match the number of letters (e.g., **dog** and **chin** each have three phonemes; /**d**/.../**o**/.../**g**/, /**ch**/.../**i**/.../**n**/).

rime – the first vowel in a word and all the sounds that follow (e.g.; /**ank**/ in **blank** and /**ip**/ in **ship**)

word solving - tasks that readers perform when they do not instantly recognize a word (e.g., left-to-right blending of sounds, using known parts of words, phonics, structural analysis, context, beginning sound + pictures).

These definitions have been adapted from a variety of sources, including the Indiana Academic Standards 2014 English / Language Arts Glossary, Fountas & Pinnell’s *Genre Study*, the Arizona Department of Education’s Language Arts Glossary, the New Jersey Language Arts Literacy Curriculum Framework, the Common Core State Standards, and Naperville Community Unit School District’s *Literacy Terms Dictionary*.