

PAREF SOUTHRIDGE SCHOOL  
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT  
WORKLOAD FOR SOPHOMORES  
AFTERNOON SCHOOL  
For the Period June 26 to July 1, 2009

READ AND UNDERSTAND THE FOLLOWING.

**What is Literature? The Problem**

- Literature: From the Latin *littera* which means "an individual written character (letter, symbol, or numeric symbol)."
- Literature, understood as a set group of texts, is commonly understood to be a collection of select literary texts referred to as the "Canon"

The question of "*what is Literature*" is one that cannot be taken for granted. In contemporary times, it is a question that has been recognized as one that has previously been overlooked and now has entered a great deal of present literary discussions. In many academic papers and discussion, it is usually required that some model or theory on the nature of literature be presented before anything else can be said about the matter. However, despite its centrality in recent literary discussions and the recent acknowledgement of its problematic nature, many still cling to the various classical definitions previously ascribed to it.

Such classical views define Literature as:

**The Wisdom Thesis** - Literature is a collection of texts that explore the meaning of human experiences in a complex way leading to reflection concerning our lives and human existence, and hence allowing reader to arrive at some universal wisdom about the world.

**The Heuristic/Exploration Thesis** - Literary texts create "possible imagined worlds" that are dramatic embodiments of experience which allow the artist to explore the basic conditions of human nature, the human situation, and the structure of the world.

**The Representation Thesis** - It portrays moral and other experiences in a compelling, concrete, immediately felt way so as to allow reflection and reconsideration of the experiences involved. Literature is thus said to be a mimesis or a reflection of reality, and reflection of Literature is therefore necessarily a reflection of reality itself.

These various classical views on the nature of Literature have also led to the formulation of distinctly Literary Qualities, the attributes that a text must possess in order for it to be deemed Literature:

1. **Artistry and Style** - This refers to the uniqueness of the author's perceptions, the particular way he forms his ideas and expresses them through the use of techniques and devices.
2. **Intellectual Value** - The capacity of the literary work to stimulate thought and effect reflection. The literary work enriches our mental life by making us realize fundamental truths about life, the world, and the human condition.
3. **Suggestiveness** - The capacity of the work to inspire powerful emotion in the reader. It is the power of the literary text to elicit a powerful emotional response.

4. **Spiritual Value** - Literature elevates the spirit by bringing its readers to the realization of higher moral values and ideals.
5. **Permanence** - The endurance and lasting appeal of the literary text, its Timeliness and Timelessness. This refers to the inexhaustibility of possible interpretations and insights that might be gained through its engagement.
6. **Universality** - A great work of Literature is forever relevant. It appeals to all men of all eras because it deals with their essential humanity, shared feelings, universal truths and conditions.

In truth, however, "Literature" is a term that resists easy definition and the issue of its prime distinguishing feature has eluded all attempts made at its identification. Despite this, however, all reader is able to easily recognize what is Literature and what isn't without the aid of a stable and reliable definition. It is strange how recognition comes so easily while the issue of definitions remains unresolved and, in fact, is made even more problematic precisely because of this ease in recognition.

### **Literature (Upper case L) versus literature (lower case L)**

Classical definition of Literature has created a distinction between two categories of texts: Literature (Upper case L) versus literature (lower case L), where Literature is given a privileged position over literature. Literature is the category of texts that possess the various classical literary qualities so far described and appeals to man's higher nature while literature is a generic term for all other texts that are deemed lacking/deficient in that regard.

It is from this distinction, however, that the various conceptions about Literature and its definition become problematic, a question whose answer can no longer be taken for granted.

To demonstrate this problem, consider a classical example of Literature and, say, comic books. Comics, being a product of popular culture, are seen as not being sufficiently literary to be considered Literature and thus are categorized as being merely "literature". However, recent comic book publications clearly exhibit the various distinguishing attributes of literariness. Despite this, however, comic books still retain their lowly position as "literature" despite the rising popular movement to elevate comic books into the level of an art form.

It is only due to a commonly held prejudice that comics cannot be considered Literature. It is also due to the threat that once the texts of popular culture are raised to the level of Literature, the privileged position of canonical works will be challenged. As we can see here, these qualities are not the sole property of Canonical Literature and that, since the status of Literature can be withheld from texts that clearly possesses all the necessary qualities, these attributes or literary qualities are not the sole determinants of what is Literature.

So if the presence of these qualities in a text is not the sole reason for its classification as Literature, then how are we supposed to understand Literature?

Literature is not just an expression of culture that is shaped by history but also a powerful tool capable of reshaping culture.

DO THE FOLLOWING.

Submit a typewritten essay, 1½ to 2 pages, discussing the topic of Philippine Culture and Literature. For this essay, consider the following:

1. You can gain a better understanding of culture through its practices and products. Examine various modern Filipino cultural practices and cultural products (ex: modern Filipino music, literature, television or radio shows, art, etc...) and discuss what these things reveal about the attitudes of modern Filipinos.
2. The Philippines is not an isolated country but a country in a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected everyday. Based on your answers to #1, discuss your ideas on what cultural changes the Philippines must undergo if it is to survive in this globalized era.