

Girl's stories / Domestic Bliss

type of **story** — but with a good deal of 'realistic' detail

Characters: 'round,' individual, revealed by

- detailed description
- dialogue
- plot

Usual cast of characters:

- heroine(s)
- family — parents often absent
- other adult guides / role models
- siblings (often very important)
- peers (friend and / or foe)

Problem: characterization may be sexist.

Setting: very clearly located in time and place — detailed depiction of a specific society with its own rules of behaviour

Problem: usually emphatically middle-class — classist?

Plot: attempts to recreate a sense of everyday life; therefore **structure** must not be too obtrusive, but still contains an optimistic pattern

Usual ingredients of plot:

- psychological/moral tests/quest
- very little physical action
- optimistic ending

NO fantastic elements

Style: much more sophisticated than that of fairytale (and often also adventure story) -- metaphor and symbolism subordinate to desire to create impression of **verisimilitude**.

Some possible stylistic devices:

- detailed descriptions
- use of slang / vernacular

Usual themes

- relationship of child and family, child and society
- finding one's niche
- finding one's individual identity

- developing into a morally and socially responsible being

Problems:

- Themes sexist? Accessible primarily to young female readers? (Education in “correct conduct.”)

Understanding & interpreting stories for girls

Must assess which elements (e.g. characters & setting) are ‘realistic’ and what purpose they serve, e.g. what culture-specific messages/values they communicate.

Must assess which elements are not realistic (e.g. plot) and what purpose they serve, e.g. what messages/values (culture-specific and/or universal) they communicate.

Note: ‘**realism**’ and ‘**romance**’ = conventions that embody very different outlooks on life.

What is accomplished through creating an illusion of verisimilitude, i.e. depicting the world as it is?

What is accomplished through creating an idealistic portrayal of the world, i.e. depicting the world as it should be?

Consider the way these stories depict

trial esp. sacrifice

recognition

judgement esp. reward and success

Some of the issues to consider:

Characters drawn in great detail -- unique individuals, but do they reflect cultural ideals rather than ‘real’ people? What is a ‘little woman’?

Setting is also described in depth & detail, but why the focus on the domestic? What is a ‘home,’ a family?

Quest as pilgrimage in search of the treasure/reward of womanhood Implications/ connotations. . . ?

Above all, do stories for girls reflect patriarchal bias? feminist bias? neither? both?