

# WHAT DOES "LITERARY MERIT" MEAN?

(Hint: "Literary Merit" does not mean you have to read a "classic" like *The Grapes of Wrath* or *Moby Dick*.)

"'Literary merit' can seem like code for really old, very moldy, and exceedingly boring. You might also think it means books are written by [authors from the past] who know nothing about modern life. As fun as it is to imagine a literary mafia full of doddering old professors plotting world domination through boredom, it's not true. There *is* a method to the madness." (Hartmann)

## CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU DETERMINE IF A BOOK IS "OF LITERARY MERIT."

(Questions 1 and 2 are probably the most helpful in determining a book's merit.)

- 1. Is it historically significant? Does the content help mark the passage of a momentous time in society?**
- 2. Does it give a voice to the people who are underrepresented and have been written out of our history books and popular media?**
3. Do the characters live, breathe, and behave as real people do?
4. How well do the author's words create a world in your mind that is just as, if not more, vivid and alive as the one you live in?

5. Are the themes integrated in an insightful, skillful, and original way?
6. Consider the author's prose. Are his/her words and sentences crafted strategically and beautifully to act as the building blocks of the story?
7. What's the dialogue like? Does it convey a picture of a character's personality, background, deceptions, and thoughts through their words alone.
8. Does the structure of the story help to tell the story itself?

**It's about more than just being an entertaining book. Books that have some literary merit should have some substance to them. Whether that substance takes the form of wonderful storytelling, a fresh new style, or dazzling historical significance (or some combination of the above), you know you're onto something.**

Below is a list of books from the Texas Library association that is a starting place to look. This list is merely a list to get you thinking, and is, by no means, an exhaustive list of books of literary merit or an exhaustive list of your summer reading choices. You should choose a book that is age-appropriate and relevant to your interests as a reader.

[2022 TAYSHAS List for High School Students](#)

## Work Cited

Hartmann, Christina. "How to Tell if a Piece of Fiction Has Literary Merit." *Medium.com*. 20 June 2017. [medium.com/@cmmhartmann/how-to-tell-if-a-piece-of-fiction-has-literary-merit-2a1413c5354f](https://medium.com/@cmmhartmann/how-to-tell-if-a-piece-of-fiction-has-literary-merit-2a1413c5354f), 9 April 2019.