

Fiction or Nonfiction?



Starting Off

1. Why do people read books?
2. What kinds of books do you like?
3. Describe a book that was very entertaining to you.
4. Describe a book that taught you a lot.

Vocabulary

fiction—(noun) something that is not true, an untrue story

I only read books about real events. I never read **fiction**.

I'm taking a class in **fiction** writing this year. Everyone in the class has to write a story.

momentarily—(adverb) for a short time

The bird sat on the roof **momentarily** and then flew away.

When the baby dropped his toy, he cried **momentarily**, but soon he began to smile again.

flexibility—(noun) room for freedom

There is some **flexibility** in the schedule. We can start any time between 8:00 A.M. and 10:00 A.M.

The teacher said that we have to write exactly three pages. We don't have any **flexibility**.

encompass— (verb) include

The United States **encompasses** land from the Atlantic coast of North America to the Pacific coast.

Zach is a very active man. His interests **encompass** all kinds of sports and outdoor activities.

obscure—(adjective) little known, hard to understand

My professor wrote a book about the history of western Massachusetts between 1850 and 1865. It's a very **obscure** topic. I don't think many people bought the book.

Barry likes some very **obscure** singers. I've never heard of any of them.

Reading

When authors write **fiction**, they can create worlds in their own minds and make those worlds come alive on the pages of a book. Because their writing doesn't have to be real, they are free to make up the most interesting stories they can. Some fiction authors write about international spies, space travel, or romance. These

stories may be a way for readers to escape their everyday lives and experience a world of excitement, at least **momentarily**.



Compared to fiction writers, authors of nonfiction don't have as much **flexibility** when writing a book, because all of the details in a nonfiction book must be true. Nonfiction authors do, however, write about a wide variety of subjects. Nonfiction **encompasses** history, biography, politics, science, and many other areas. People often choose to read nonfiction because they want to learn more about a particular subject. Even if you're interested in something **obscure**, someone has probably written a book about it. Naturally, most people don't read only fiction or nonfiction. They read both. Yet they may read different types of books for different reasons. Whether you want to study or just relax, a book can help you do it.

Comprehension Questions

1. Why might fiction be more interesting than nonfiction?
2. Why might someone want to read fiction?
3. What are four categories of nonfiction?
4. Why might someone want to read nonfiction instead of fiction?

Discussion Activities

Activity 1

In a small group, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of fiction and of nonfiction. Write your answers in the chart that follows.

Advantages of Fiction	Disadvantages of Fiction
Advantages of Nonfiction	Advantages of Nonfiction

Your class has decided to read a book and discuss it. The problem is that you can't decide on what type of book to read. The class will form two groups and debate. Group A will try to convince the class that it should read a work of fiction. Group B will try to convince the class that a work of nonfiction would be better. During this discussion, make sure that everyone has a chance to speak.

Conversation Tip

When you want to give someone more information, you can use these expressions:

What I mean is . . .

For example, . . .

A: I like cookbooks. They always teach me new things.

B: What do you learn from cookbooks?

A: A lot. **For example**, I learn how to make new dishes, and I learn what food is popular in other countries.

Language Learning Tip

When you see a word and you don't know how to say it, you can use this expression:

How do you pronounce _____ ?

A: I saw this word in a cookbook. **How do you pronounce** it?

B: You pronounce it "kim chee." It's a kind of Korean food.

A: Oh. I've heard of that.

Try to use these tips in your discussion.

Wrap Up

Which group was more convincing?

What were the strengths and weaknesses of each group's presentation?

Activity 2

Sometimes authors may mix fact and fiction. For example, they may write about an experience they had or a person they know, but they may change a few of the details. Of course, this can make some people very upset. In a small group, discuss the following situations.

Imagine that your friend wrote a story about some secret you told him or her. Even if your friend didn't use your real name in the story, people might know the story was about you. How would you feel?

Imagine that you are a writer and your friend has told you about an embarrassing incident from his or her life. You told your friend that it would make a great story, but your friend wants you to promise never to write about it, even if you change some of the facts. You think that the story could make you a successful author. Will you promise not to write about it?

Activity 3

In this activity, you and a partner will write a story, and the other pairs in the class will guess whether the story is fiction or nonfiction. Begin by telling your partner about a funny, interesting, or surprising incident in your life. Pick an incident that the other pairs in the class don't know about. If possible, try to choose something that your classmates might not believe. Next, your partner should tell you about an incident from his or her life. You and your partner should then write a story together about one of three things: the incident you described, the incident your partner described, or something fictional. If you choose to write fiction, try to make it somewhat believable. After the writing is finished, the pairs should read their stories to the class. After a pair reads its story, the other pairs must guess whether the story is fiction or nonfiction. If a pair guesses correctly, it gets a point. The pair with the most points at the end of the readings wins.

Write about It

1. Describe a book that you would like to write one day.
2. Who is your favorite character from a book? Why do you like that person?
3. What are some things we can't learn from books?

People Say . . .

Truth is stranger than fiction. —Saying

The good end happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what fiction means.
—Oscar Wilde, Irish dramatist, poet, and novelist

What do these sayings mean?

Do you know of similar sayings?

Vocabulary Review

1. We've learned many things about English. Our class _____ reading, writing, grammar, and pronunciation.
2. My parents used to live in Los Angeles. Now they live in a tiny, _____ town. You can't even find it on a map.
3. Monique only reads the newspaper and books about art. She never reads _____ .
4. My friend and I are planning a vacation together. I have to leave on a Friday, but he has some _____. He can leave on any day of the week.
5. The phone rang _____ , and then the ringing stopped. Someone must have answered it.