



6.7 Literature

The rise of the novel



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WARM-UP

- 1 **DISCUSS** what features you look for when you buy a novel.

The literature of the 18th century reflected the economic and intellectual progress of the period and an increasing popular interest in reading. Lending, or circulating, libraries acquired great importance and since subscriptions were moderately priced, they led to an increase in the reading public. More printed items were produced, literacy increased (60% of the adult male and 40% of the adult female population could read) and more and more readers belonged to the middle and lower classes. People preferred prose to verse and drama. They liked reading about the practical needs of different trades, stories of pirates and thieves, books dealing with journeys to distant countries, accounts of crime, political pamphlets and newspapers. Writing became a profession ruled by economic criteria, and the value of an author depended on the number of pages he or she wrote. The belief in the power of reason and the individual's trust in

his own abilities found expression in the novel.

By definition, a novel is 'a long prose narrative about largely fictional, if usually realistic, characters and plausible events'.

The 18th-century novelist was the spokesman of the middle class.

The realism of the novel was not linked to the kind of life presented, but to the way it was shown. The

writer's primary aim was to write in a simple way in order to be understood even by less well-educated readers. The novel, which was primarily concerned with everything that could alter social status, was particularly appealing to the practical-minded tradesman, who was self-made and self-reliant. The sense of reward and punishment, which was the 'message' of the novel itself, was related to the Puritan ethics of the middle classes.

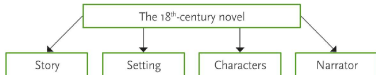


1 A portable bookstall, ca 1700. The British Library, London.

2 Unknown artist, *Jonathan Wild unkenning the butler*, 18th century.

- 2 **READ** the text about the rise of the novel in the 18th century and the **Literary language box**, and do the following activities.

- 1 List the reasons that led to the increase in the reading public.
- 2 Explain what kind of people read and what they enjoyed reading.
- 3 Complete the chart below.



- 3 **SUM UP** the 18th-century writer's aim and the message he wanted to convey.

Literary language

The 18th-century novel



18th-century novels shared the following features:

- ✓ Events were usually narrated in chronological sequence.
- ✓ Narration was in the 1st person (the narrator and the protagonist are the same person) or the 3rd person (the narrator is omniscient).
- ✓ The setting was given great attention, with specific references to names of countries, streets and towns.
- ✓ References were made to particular times of the year or of the day.
- ✓ All the characters were given contemporary names and surnames to reinforce the impression of realism, and they struggled either for survival or for social success.
- ✓ The hero of the novel was always the 'bourgeois man', with his problems. He was generally the mouthpiece of his author and the reader was expected to sympathise with him.
- ✓ The language was simple and factual.