

A DEFINITION OF LITERARY MERIT

The Work of Literature:

1. Entertains the reader and is interesting to read.
2. Does not merely conform to the expectations of a single genre or formula.
3. Has been judged to have artistic quality by the literary community (teachers, students, librarians, critics, other writers, and the reading public).
4. Has stood the test of time in some way, regardless of the date of publication.
5. Shows thematic depth: The themes merit revisiting and study because they are complex and nuanced*.
6. Demonstrates innovation in style, voice, structure, characterization, plot and/or description.
7. May have a social, political or ideological impact on society during the lifetime of the author or afterward.
8. Does not fall into the traps of “pulp” fiction such as clichéd** or derivative*** descriptions and plot devices, or sentimentality rather than “earned” emotion.
9. Is intended by the author to communicate in an artistic manner.
10. Is universal in its appeal (i.e., the themes and insights are not only accessible to one culture or time period).

*nuance: ability to express delicate shadings of meaning.

**cliché: a phrase or expression that has been used so often that it is no longer original or interesting

***derivative: something that comes from something else