

Didacticism

Didacticism Definition

Didacticism is a term that refers to a particular philosophy in art and literature that emphasizes the idea that different forms of art and literature ought to convey information and instructions, along with pleasure and entertainment.

The word *didactic* is frequently used for those literary texts that are overloaded with informative or realistic matter, and are marked by the omission of graceful and pleasing details. Didactic, therefore, becomes a derogatory term referring to the forms of literature that are ostentatiously dull and erudite. However, some literary texts are entertaining as well as didactic.

Didacticism in Morality Plays

Morality plays of medieval Europe were perhaps the best exemplars of didactic literature. These plays were a type of theatrical performance that made use of allegorical characters to teach the [audience](#) a [moral](#) lesson. The most common themes that were presented in morality plays were what are commonly known as “the seven deadly sins”: pride, lust, greed, envy, wrath, sloth and gluttony. Another [theme](#) that such plays exploited was that repentance and redemption were possible for a person, even when that person intentionally gave in to temptation. Historically, morality plays were a transitional step that lay between Christian mystery plays and the secular plays of the Renaissance theatre.

Examples of Didacticism in Literature

Example #1: *Pilgrim's Progress* (By John Bunyan)

John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is one of the best didacticism examples in the form of spiritual [allegory](#). The poem describes a religious and spiritual journey of a man on the way to deliverance.

The poem describes an ordinary sinner, "Christian," who leaves the City of Destruction and travels towards Celestial City, where God resides, for salvation. On his way, he finds a companion, "Faithful," who helps him on his way to the City.

On many occasions, many characters – "Hypocrisy," "Apollyon," "Worldly Wiseman," and "Obstinate and Pliable" – try to discourage or stop him from achieving his goal. Finally, he reaches the Celestial City carried by Hopeful's faith.

The moral or didactic lesson that this allegorical poem intends to instruct is that the road to Heaven is not easy, and it is full of obstacles. Moreover, a Christian has to be willing to pay any cost to achieve his salvation. Besides, a man is full of sin, but this does not stop him from achieving glory.

Example #2: *Essay on Man* (By Alexander Pope)

Alexander Pope's [Essay on Man](#) is a moral treatise. It is a satirical [verse](#) that intends to instruct individuals in an indirect way by ridiculing vices of a society.

"Know then thyself, presume not God to scan
The proper study of Mankind is Man.
Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,
A Being darkly wise, and rudely great:
With too much knowledge for the Sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest;
In doubt to deem himself a God, or Beast;
In doubt his mind or body to prefer;
Born but to die, and reas'ning but to err;
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
Whether he thinks too little, or too much;"

The above excerpt is taken from the first verse paragraph of the second book of the poem. It clearly sums up the humanistic and religious principles of the poem.

Example #3: *Animal Farm* (By George Orwell)

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is an allegory, or a moral and didactic tale, that uses animals on a farm to describe the overthrow of the last of the Russian Tsar, Nicholas-II, and exposes the evil of the Communist Revolution of Russia before WWII. Clearly, the actions of the various animals on the farm are used to expose the greed and corruption of the revolution. It also contains a depiction of how powerful people can alter the ideology of a society. One of the cardinal rules on the farm is:

“All animals are equal but a few are more equal than others.”

The animals on the farm stand for different sections of the then-Russian society occupying Russia after the revolution. For example, “pigs” represents those who became the authority after the revolution; “Mr. Jones,” the owner of the farm, represents the overthrown Tsar Nicholas II; and “Boxer,” the horse, represents the laborer class. Didacticism in the novel permits Orwell to make his position on the Russian Revolution apparent, in order to expose its evils.

Function of Didacticism

Didacticism in literature aims at offering something additional to its readers, rather than merely offering pleasure and entertainment. Some critics may argue that didacticism may reduce literature to a tool for boring instructions, nevertheless it definitely gives readers a chance to improve their conduct, and comprehend evils which may lead him astray.