

Name _____ Period _____

Literary Forms

A **Literary Form** is a style of writing, such as an origin story, narrative, short story, autobiography, genealogy, riddle or letter. To understand the message of a particular book in the Bible, one must understand the literary form in which it was written. Confusion and misinterpretation can result from failure to recognize the literary form.

1. To show the importance of literary form, consider the following examples from a daily newspaper.
What must a person know about the following literary forms to understand the meaning of each? It may be helpful to look at a newspaper and read an article that falls into each category.

Example: Stock market report: The reader would need to know that the letters listed refer to the names of companies that trade on the stock market. To make sense of the columns of numbers, he or she would need to understand stock market terms, such as the year's high and low, dividends, net change and price-earnings ratio.

- a) An editorial
- b) A recipe in the food section
- c) A classified for a car or house
- d) A sports headline, such as "Cowboys Pluck Falcons on Thanksgiving Day"

Taken literally (that is, word for word), what could this headline mean?



vs.



2. Find and example in the Bible of each of the following literary forms. Give the citation and describe briefly. Use your Bible's index, section headings and your textbook to help you.

Example: Parable: Matthew 18:21-35 (Parable of the Unforgiving Servant)

- a) Poem

- b) Law
- c) Letter
- d) Genealogy
- e) Prophecy
- f) Infancy narrative
- g) Proverbs
- h) Origin story

3. What are the literary forms of the following biblical texts?

- a) 2 Samuel 1:17-27 _____. In a dictionary, look up the meaning of the literary form mentioned in verse 17.
- b) Read Judges 14. What is the literary form in Judges 14:14?

4. The Bible employs a wide variety of literary forms. Using a dictionary, describe the following literary forms.

- a) Didactic story (The Book of Jonah is an example.)
- b) Saga
- c) Eponymous story

5. Do you prefer to read poetry or prose? Why? Do you prefer to read books of fact or fiction? Why? When you write for reasons other than school tasks, what literary form do you use most often? If you became a famous writer, which literary form would you prefer to publish: poetry, fiction (which kind?), scholarly research, editorials/opinions, or another form? Explain why?

