


What Makes a Novel a Novel?

Now that you've received the scary news that you're going to write a novel, you're probably wondering exactly what that *means*. Well, think of novels you have read for school. How are they all alike? What rules do they all seem to follow?

Work with classmates to write a definition based on the novels you know about.

A novel is



Now choose one of the novels you have read, preferably one that you really liked a lot or just know inside and out. Write the name of that book, and its author, here:

My Model Novel:

by _____

For the rest of your novel-writing adventure, think of that book as a model you can use when you get stuck. You don't have to imitate it—and you never want to copy it, of course—but you can always look at it for ideas. Just think of that novel's author as your own personal novel-writing coach.

Now take out your model novel and fill in the blanks below.

1. Who are the important characters in your model novel?

2. In two sentences, what is the book mostly about?

3. What is the main conflict in this novel?

4. Whose perspective is the novel written from?

5. What point of view does the author use (first person, third person, etc.)?

6. How does the novel begin?

7. Where is the story set, generally?

8. Name one thing you love about the author's style of writing (such as "It's hilarious." or "The words flow like poetry.").

9. What is your favorite thing about this novel (such as "The quirky characters." or "The suspenseful plot.")?

Now that you've broken down the main components of your book and figured out what you loved about it, you're ready to present it to classmates with a book talk. Don't worry; a book talk is not a book report. You don't have to recount everything that happens in the book in excruciating detail. Instead, a book talk is like a movie trailer; it gives just enough information to leave the audience wanting more.

Take a look at this book talk, for example, about the real novel *Into the Great Wide Open* by Kevin Canty.

Kenny Kolodny, the main character of Kevin Canty's novel *Into the Great Wide Open*, has some serious problems. His mom is in a mental hospital. His dad drinks too much and then has a stroke. Kenny doesn't have much hope for the future, that is, until he meets Junie Williamson. Junie lives in a fancy house with her very successful parents, and her life seems perfect—but Kenny knows it isn't, because Junie has a problem that even her parents can't ignore. For a while Kenny and Junie's adventures provide an escape they both need; sooner or later though, both of them have to face reality. Will they be able to do it together?

After reading this book talk, you know the basics of *Into the Great Wide Open*: its title, its author, its main character, and some important things happening in his life. But you probably have a bunch of questions, too. What is Junie's problem? Why do Kenny and Junie have to "face reality"? Perhaps you are curious enough to check out this book for yourself!

As you can see, a book talk simply gives the audience a "taste" of what the book is about, who its main characters are, and what the important conflict is.

Below, prepare your own book talk about the novel you chose as your model. Keep in mind that you will be reading this aloud in order to get classmates interested in your book!
