

Picaresque novel

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Callie Dahlhauser Lora Devereaux Composition II April 3, 2013 A Picaresque Novel The picaresque novel is an early type of novel originating from the Spanish word *picaro*. *Picaro* means a rogue or an adventurer. This type of novel describes the journeys that the main character or “*picaro*” take part in. The main character is usually of low social class and manipulates their way through life instead of working for what they want.

The main point of the picaresque novel is to present the main character and reveal his/her adventures (Murfin). There are seven key qualities that determine if a novel is picaresque or not. First, the novel will tell of the rogue’s life usually in first person. Second, the rogue comes from low social class and is very basic. Third, the novel is made up of “*episodes*” that are put together to create the whole. Forth, the main character will not change personality throughout this story. Fifth, the novel is going to portray realism. Sixth, the *picaro* does not engage in criminal activities.

Seventh, there is a variety of social classes thrown in throughout the novel (Harmon). Picaresque novels are told in first-person point of view and discuss thoroughly the social class of the characters. The picaresque novel is very much discontinuous and structureless. The point of this type of novel is to address the life story of the mischievous main character. This character relies on his intellects to get him far in life rather than hard labor. This adventurous character participates in escapades where he barely succeeds to escape (Harmon).

In a picaresque novel, the central character does not develop into someone else. They start of being a *picaro* in the beginning and end the same way. They describe the life of the rogue or even just part of their lives. Their <https://assignbuster.com/picaresque-novel/>

qualities stay the same as does the main characters social status. As mentioned before, these types of novels lack structure and usually involve unrelated parts that come together as a whole (Murfin). Many classify picaresque novels to be romantic because of the adventurous storyline.

The picaresque novel however is actually marked as being realistic. Because of the fact that the settings in these stories are very life-like, it gives the novel a realistic texture. The novel is presented with simplicity of language also. It can also be considered realistic because of the in depth detail that is portrayed throughout the novels (Bloom). The rogue in these novels usually does not involve themselves in criminal mischief. They lack virtue which means they rely on tricks and pranks to get them what they want.

Many times if the picaro is employed they do tedious work and do not fully apply themselves. In these novels, there is no plot. The story is made up of loosely connected adventures and stories (Harmon). One example of a picaresque novel is Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Huck Finn is the picaro in the story and the novel tells of his adventures. He was born of the low social status and wandered into danger during his adventures. Huck fits the definition of a rogue because of the fact that he is a loner.

He feels more comfortable on his own and away from society's cruel judgments (Bloom). Another great example of a picaresque novel is *The Unfortunate Traveller, or, The Life of Jack Wilton*. This is considered the first English example of a Picaresque novel. The narrator, Jack Wilton, tells of his adventures throughout the wars against the French. He describes the dangers he encounters and the tragedy that he witnesses. Another way that

makes this novel picaresque is because of the fact that Jack Wilton travels and comes into contact with many different societies (Bloom).

Another example of a picaresque novel is *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey. It is considered picaresque because of the corrupt society and the humor seen throughout the novel by the picaro. Randle McMurphy is the novel's main character and picaro. During the novel, he is faced with many different challenges. *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* tells of his adventures of being in the mental institute and describes his carefree personality (Bloom). Although picaresque novels came about in the 16th century, the picaresque genre is still used frequently today.

Picaresque novels have greatly influenced literature (Bloom). Works Cited
Bloom, Harold. "Episodic Novel." *Blooms Literary Reference Online*. N. p. : n. p. , 2012. N. pag. Facts on File. Web. 3 Apr. 2013.
Harmon, William. "Picaresque Novel." *A Handbook to Literature*. 11th ed. New Jersey: Pearson, 2009. 416-17. Print.
Murfin, Ross, and Supryia M. Ray. "Picaresque Novel." *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. 3rd ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2009. 382-83. Print.