

What is the "public domain?"

When something is "in" the public domain, it is not privately owned. The phrase can be used to refer to land, such as the lands administered by the federal government. It can also refer to creative works and inventions where the exclusive rights of the authors or inventors either never existed or have lapsed.

When the phrase, "public domain," is used in reference to creative works, it is referring to the vast number of works that are unprotected by copyright. These works are in the "domain" that belongs to the public, where any work that is accessible may be used without restrictions.

"Creative work" is a general term used to refer to something that could be copyrighted. It is used interchangeably with "work of authorship," or, simply, "work."