

Literary Terms

Allusion – short reference supposedly familiar to the audience

Ambiguity – intentionally vague details

Anachronism – a person, object, or occurrence placed in a time period in which it does not belong

Analogy – a comparison of two things based on a shared characteristic or feature

Anaphora – a rhetorical device where a series of words are repeated at the beginning of successive phrases

Anecdote – a brief story or tale told by a character in a work of literature

Antecedent action – events that occur before a play or a story begins

Apostrophe – address to something not human or someone not there

Atmosphere – general mood or feeling of a literary work (see also **Tone**)

Carpe Diem – seize the day

Character – persons in a work of literature

Antagonist – a character in a story or poem who deceives, frustrates, or conflicts with the protagonist in some way

Protagonist – the main or central character in a novel, play, story, or poem

Archetype – a generic, idealized model of a person, object, or concept from which similar instances are derived, copied or emulated

Dynamic character – a character that changes throughout the story

Static character – a character that does not change throughout the story

Stock character – a character that displays generalizations about a specific people (stereotype)

Characterization – the description of a character's personality or appearance

Direct characterization – the author tells you explicitly about a character's personality or appearance

Indirect characterization – the personality or appearance has to be determined from hints or

clues

Conflict – struggle against opposing forces that the main character(s) undergo [usually man v. man, man v. self, or man v. nature (or non-human outside source)]

Dialogue – verbal exchange between two characters

Diction – an author or speaker's choice of words to fit an intended purpose

Euphemism – a milder or more acceptable word, phrase, or sentence use to substitute a more harsh, blunt, or obscene idea, object, or action

Epiphany – a sudden realization of a great or fundamental truth

Flashback – past events and conversations that are recalled

Figurative language – language that is used to describe one thing in terms of another (non-literal speech)

Cliché – a term so overused that it has lost its original meaning and strength

Hyperbole – exaggeration for emphasis or for poetic or dramatic effect

Metaphor – indirect comparison

Allegory – an extended metaphor used in a literary work to reveal a deeper, more complex meaning; characters generally have name which have meaning beyond themselves and can be a personification of abstract qualities

Metonymy – a figure of speech where a word is substituted for another that is characteristic of or associated with that word

Synecdoche – a figure of speech where a part of a being or object replaces the whole

Onomatopoeia – words that sound like what they express

Oxymoron – a paradox created by the juxtaposition of words which seem to contradict each other

Paradox – contradictory statement that makes sense

Simile – a comparison of two unlike things using the words 'like', 'as', or "than"

Foil – a contrasting personality

Foreshadowing – the use of clues to hint at what may happen later in the story



Genre – the category in which a literary work fits based on a loose set of criteria

Hubris – an overwhelming sense of pride in a character (usually leads to the character's downfall or failure)

Imagery – words that appeal to the senses

Irony – a situation or statement characterized by a significant difference between what is expected or understood and what actually happens or is meant

Dramatic Irony – when a character says or does something that they do not fully grasp but is understood by the audience [character(s) v. audience]

Situational Irony – implying, through plot or character, that the actual situation is quite different from that presented [character(s) v. character(s)]

Verbal Irony – the use of words in which the intended meaning is contrary to the literal meaning

Sarcasm – a form of verbal irony meant to mock or show contempt

Motivation – reason why characters do what they do

Extrinsic Motivation – motivation derived from some physical reward (i.e. money, power, lust)

Intrinsic Motivation – motivation derived from an internal reward (i.e. knowledge, pride, spiritual or emotional peace/wellbeing)

Parallelism – the use of recurring syntactical structures using similar or repeated words for emphasis and effect

Personification – giving human characteristics to something that is not human

Plot – Sequence of incidents or actions in a story

Exposition - introductions of characters, setting, and conflict (background information)

Rising action – series of events that lead up to the climax

Climax – highest point of action/drama; culmination of major conflict

Falling action – actions after climax leading to the resolution

Resolution – where all conflicts are resolved and plot concludes

Point of view – vantage point from which a story is told

1st person POV – narrator is the main character (told in 'I' voice)

3rd person POV – narrated by someone outside the action

Omniscient POV – all knowing narrator

Limited omniscient POV – narrator outside the action that focus' primarily on only a few characters

Rhetoric – the art of effective or persuasive speech or writing

Ethos – speech or writing which is an appeal to the ethical or authoritative character of the speaker/writer

Logos – speech or writing which is an appeal to logic and reason

Pathos – speech or writing which is an appeal to emotion

Satire – writing that attacks and ridicules some social evil or human weakness

Semantics – the meaning(s) of a word

Connotation – feelings and associations that are attached to the literal meaning of a word

Denotation – the literal meaning of a word

Setting – time and place of a story's action

Suspense – sense of uncertainty or anxiety of what will happen later in a story

Symbol – something that stands for itself as well as something broader or more abstract

Symbolism – the use of a material object to represent an abstract idea

Syntax – an author or speaker's choice of sentence construction and phrasing

Theme – main idea; central insight the work gives us about society or human nature

Thesis statement – an intellectual proposal; the stated main idea and/or intentions of a work

Tone – the mood or feeling of a literary work (see also **Atmosphere**)

Poetic Terms

Accent – where the stress(es) fall in a word creating a rhythm to speech

Alliteration – repetition of initial consonant sounds

Assonance – repetition of internal vowel sounds

Consonance – repetition of internal consonant sounds

Blank verse – unrhymed iambic pentameter

Caesura – an audible pause that breaks up a line of a verse

Conceit – an extended complex metaphor that encompasses an entire poem

End stopped – phrases end at the end of the line

Enjambment – when a phrase continues on to the next line or stanza

Free verse – poetry not adhering to any regular rhyme or rhythm patterns

Meter – the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables

Foot – the basis of meter, the regular unit of rhythm

Anapest – two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable (anapestic)

Dactyl – stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables (dactylic)

Iamb – unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable (iambic)

Pyrrhus – two unstressed syllables (pyrrhic)

Spondee – two stressed syllables (spondaic)

Troche – stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable (trochaic)

Dimeter – a metrical line of verse with two metric feet

Trimeter – a metrical line of verse with three metric feet

Tetrameter – a metrical line of verse with four metric feet

Pentameter – a metrical line of verse with five metric feet

Hexameter – a metrical line of verse with six metric feet

Heptameter – a metrical line of verse with seven metric feet

Octameter – a metrical line of verse with eight metric feet

Scan/Scansion – marking the stresses in a poem to establish the prevailing metrical pattern

Stanza – a (usually) regular grouping of lines; a unit within a larger poem

Couplet – two rhyming lines

Quatrain – four line stanza

Sestet – six line stanza

Octave – eight line stanza

