

Literary Terms

Literary Term	Definition/ Example
Alliteration	The repetition of consonant sounds in words that are close together. <i>ex: She sells sea shells by the sea shore.</i>
Allusion	A literary or historical reference to a person, place, or event <i>ex: "Luke, I am your father." Darth Vader- Star Wars</i>
Analogy	A comparison made between two things to show how they are alike. <i>ex: Cold is to hot as fun is to boring.</i>
Anecdote	A brief story
Antagonist	The character/ or situation opposing the protagonist (the main character) <i>ex: The Wicked Witch of the West in <u>The Wizard of Oz</u>/ Kenny Kane in <u>Freak the Mighty</u></i>
Archetype	Character who follows a specific pattern of behavior; universal symbol or idea. <i>ex: Knights in shining armor- King Arthur, Villains, Tricksters</i>
Argument	Writing meant to convince the reader to think or act in a certain way.
Ballad	A song or songlike poem that tells a story.
Central Idea	The main point an author is making (main idea)
Character	A person or animal in a story. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Static Character</u>: does not change much throughout the story • <u>Dynamic Character</u>: changes throughout the course of the story. • <u>Flat</u>: only one or two character traits; we don't know much about this character. • <u>Round</u>: Complex; many traits developed; we know this character well
Characterization	The 4 methods used to determine the whole development of character: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical characteristics • A character's speech, thoughts, and actions • What other characters say, think, or do with/to the character • What the author directly states about the character
Chronological Order	The arrangement of events in the order in which they occurred. TIME order- You can SEE the passage of time! <i>Ex: At 7:30 I wake up. At 8:30 the bus comes. I get to school at 9:00...</i>
Cliché	An expression that has lost its power or originality from overuse <i>Ex: "Only time will tell." "It is what it is." "I was rushed for time."</i>
Conflict	A struggle in the story. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>External</u>: a character struggles with an outside force like another character, society, nature (<i>Man-v-Man, Man-v-Society, Man-v-Nature</i>) • <u>Internal</u>: a conflict that takes place inside a character's mind; a choice or decision. (<i>Man-v-Self</i>)
Description	Writing meant to recreate a person, place, thing, event or experience.
Dialect	A way of speaking that is characteristic of a certain geographical area or a certain group of people. <i>ex: Y'all (The South), Soda/Pop</i>
Dialogue	Conversation between two or more characters- usually in quotation marks.
Diction	Word Choice
Drama	Writing meant to be performed on stage.
Essay	Nonfiction writing that examines a single subject. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Subjective</u>: The focus is the writer's feelings and response to an experience. • <u>Objective</u>: The focus is on facts and details. • <u>Argument/ Persuasive</u>: The focus is on convincing the reader to accept the writer's point of view.
Exposition	Writing that explains or gives information. <div style="text-align: right;">**see also PLOT**</div>
Euphemism	A polite word or phrase used in place of one that might be too direct, unpleasant, or embarrassing <i>Ex: Your shirt is interesting. (Meaning: Your shirt is ugly.)</i>
Fable	Writing that explains or gives information <i>ex: "The Tortoise and The Hare"</i>

Fiction	Made up; not real
Figure of Speech	A word or phrase that describes one thing in terms of another and is not meant to be taken literally. <i>ex: "Falling in love" "Racking our brains"</i>
Flashback	Interruption in the present action of a plot to show events that happened at an earlier time. <i>Ex: In <u>Anne Frank</u>, the play starts off in November 1954 and then goes to July 1942 when the Franks and Van Daans go into hiding.</i>
Foreshadowing	The use of hints or clues in a story to suggest what action is to come; hints by the author of what is the happen in the story. <i>Ex: In "Flowers for Algernon" Algernon starts to lose his intelligence, foreshadowing that Charlie will also lose his intelligence.</i>
Free Verse	Poetry without a regular meter or rhyme scheme.
Headline	The title of an article in a newspaper, magazine, or website. It's usually in larger font than the rest of the text.
Historical Fiction	Fiction (fake) story set in a REAL historical period <i>ex: <u>Soldier's Heart</u>, <u>Boy in the Striped Pajamas</u></i>
Humor	Amusing elements of a text that maintain the reader's interest <i>ex: "Turd Kind" (which is also an allusion) "C-R-E-T-I-N"</i>
Hyperbole	An exaggeration <i>ex: "I'm so hungry; I'm STARVING!" "It's so cold; I'm freezing."</i>
Idiom	Expressions that mean something different from the literal meaning <i>ex: "Break a leg" (good luck) "In a pickle" (in trouble)</i>
Imagery	Descriptive words and phrases that appeal to one or more of the reader's five senses (sight, taste, smell, hearing, touch).
Inference	A guess about the text based on evidence and prior knowledge. <i>ex: "Dear departed daughter..." We realize, in <u>Freak the Mighty</u>, that Max's mother is dead because of this line.</i>
Irony	A contrast between expectation and reality. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Verbal</u>: A contrast between what is said or written and what is really meant. • <u>Situational</u>: What happens is very different from what was expected to happen. • <u>Dramatic</u>: When the reader or audience knows something a character does not.
Legend	A story of extraordinary deeds passed down from generation to generation. <i>ex: King Arthur, Robin Hood</i>
Limerick	A five line poem that is humorous or nonsensical
Literal Language	Language that conveys the exact meaning of what is being said.
Lyric Poem	A poem that expresses the feelings or thoughts of a speaker rather than telling a story.
Metamorphosis	A miraculous change from one shape or form to another.
Metaphor	An imaginative comparison between two unlike things in which one thing is said to be another thing. <i>ex: The clouds are cotton balls in the sky.</i>
Mood	The way the author wants you to feel when reading the work.
Motif	Any recurring element that has symbolic significance. Any object or idea that repeats itself throughout a literary work. <i>ex: In <u>Freak the Mighty</u>: the constant reference to King Arthur</i>
Myth	A story that explains something about the world and typically involves gods or supernatural forces. <i>ex: Hercules, Medusa</i>
Narrative	Writing that tells a story.
Narrative Poem	A poem that tells a story.
Narrator	The person telling the story.
Onomatopoeia	The use of words whose sounds imitate or suggest their meaning. <i>ex: Buzz, Rustle, Boom, Tick Tock, Tweet</i>
Oxymoron	A combination of two opposite or contradictory terms <i>ex: jumbo shrimp; icy hot; genuine imitation</i>

Personification	An object or animal is given human feelings, thoughts, behaviors or attitudes. <i>Ex: The first rays of morning tiptoed through the meadow.</i>
Playwright	The author of a play.
Plot	<p>The series of events that make up a story.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Exposition (Introduction)</u>: tells what the conflict is and us who the characters are. • <u>Initial Incident</u>: the first real action of the story; comes right before a complication, thus it <i>can not be</i> the complication. • <u>Rising Action</u>: The events leading to the climax <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ <u>Complicating Incident</u>: a series of difficulties forming the central action in a narrative; these take place DURING the rising action • <u>Climax</u>: The turning point; the most exciting moment in the story. • <u>Falling Action</u>: The solving of the conflict • <u>Resolution/ Denouement</u>: When the conflict is resolved and the story ends.
Point-of-View	<p>The vantage point from which a story is told; who is telling the story</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>First Person</u>: The narrator is in the story. We only know, see, and feel what this character knows, sees, and feels. • <u>Second Person</u>: When a story is narrated using the pronoun you (<i>this is rarely used</i>) • <u>Third Person Limited</u>: The narrator is NOT in the story. The reader observes the actions through the eyes of only one character. The reader only knows one character's thoughts and feelings. • <u>Third Person Omniscient</u>: The narrator is not in the story, but knows everything about all of the characters and problems, knows what all the characters are thinking and feeling.
Protagonist	Main character in the story. The conflict revolves around the protagonist. The protagonist struggles against the antagonist (the character/situation that opposes him/her). <i>ex: Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz</i>
Proverb	A short, popular saying that expresses some obvious truth. <i>ex: "A friend is to be taken with his faults"- Portuguese</i>
Pun	A humorous use of a word where it can have different meanings. <i>ex: The shortest "knight" of the year.</i>
Rhyme Scheme	A map of the rhymes in a poem. The first line in a poem is always labeled "A." Each line that rhymes with that first line is also labeled "A." Every time a line has a new rhyme, it is labeled with a new letter of the alphabet. <i>ex: ABAB, AABB, ABBA</i>
Setting	The time AND place of a story.
Simile	A comparison between two unlike things using the words like or as . <i>ex: "She is as sweet as candy."</i>
Stanza	"Paragraphs" in poetry.
Stereotype	A fixed idea about the members of a particular group of people that does not allow for any individuality.
Suspense	The uncertainty or anxiety a reader feels about what will happen next in a story, novel, or drama.
Symbol	A person, place, thing, or even that has meaning in itself and stands for something beyond itself as well. <i>ex: Red= Anger, Apple= Teacher/Fall/Health, Sunshine=happy, US Flag= freedom, justice</i>
Syntax	The order of words; sentence structure
Tall Tale	An exaggerated, far-fetched story that is obviously false, but is told as though it should be believed. <i>ex: Johnny Appleseed</i>
Text Structure	The way in which a piece of writing is put together (<i>sequence/chronological, cause/effect, problem/solution, description, compare/contrast</i>)
Theme	The lesson or moral in the story. <i>The "Take Home Message"</i>
Tone	The author's attitude towards his/her subject, characters, and audience. Sometimes called author's perspective or point-of-view. <i>*Think Tone of Voice*</i>
Tragedy	A play, novel, or other narrative in which the main character comes to an unhappy end.