

LITERARY TERMS

allegory - a story with two meanings, a literal meaning and a symbolic meaning. Allegory is a form of extended metaphor, in which objects, persons, and actions in a story, have deeper meaning, and characters often represent abstract ideas as charity, greed, or envy. For example, in *Lord of the Flies*, the boys represent all of mankind; the evil they display being the darkness within humanity.

allusion - a reference, within a literary work, to another piece of writing, a film, a piece of art, or even a real event or person. An allusion draws on outside sources to provide greater context or meaning to the selection. Examples include references to “Cinderella”, Adolf Hitler, McDonalds, or even Justin Bieber made within another text.

analogy - a comparison of an unfamiliar idea to a familiar one in an attempt to explain something that is new or difficult to understand. For example, comparing using voice (good diction) in writing to adding spice to a recipe.

anecdote - a brief story that is not really developed in the way a short story is. For instance, recapping a favourite memory from childhood within an autobiography that tells the story of your entire life.

antagonist - the character, force, or collection of forces in fiction or drama that opposes the protagonist and gives rise to the conflict of the story; an opponent of the protagonist. For example, Napoleon in *Animal Farm* and Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*.

anticlimax - something that is much less exciting or dramatic than it was expected to be; often used to describe a dull or disappointing ending or result.

appendix - a section of extra information added at the end of a book.

apostrophe - a figure of speech in which someone absent or dead or something nonhuman is addressed as if it were alive and present and could reply. For example, in *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo says, “I defy you stars!”

archetype - a universal symbol that may be a character, theme, symbol, or even setting. An archetype is a typical character, an action or a situation that seems to represent patterns of human nature. For example, **the hero** is an archetype; heroes usually display goodness and struggle against evil in order to restore peace and justice in society. Other archetypes include the innocent youth, the mother figure, the mentor, the villain, the scapegoat, etc.

atmosphere - the feeling surrounding a literary work. For instance, the atmosphere once Oedipus emerges onto the stage with his eyes gouged in the play *King Oedipus* is quite tense.

catharsis - the cleansing of emotions of a character(s). It can also be any other radical change that leads to emotional transformation of a person.

character - an imaginary person that inhabits a literary work. Literary characters may be major or minor, static (unchanging) or dynamic (capable of change).

characterization - the means by which writers present and reveal character.

Direct characterization occurs when an author states explicit information that reveals a character. For example, *Jack was a shy boy with an easy smile and a charming way.*

Indirect characterization occurs when the author reveals a character by what he/she says, what he/she does, what other characters say about him/her, and *sometimes*, by a name or a nickname. For example, the nickname *Piggy* in *Lord of the Flies* helps reveal his character to the reader, as we can make certain predictions about him based on the name alone.

climax - the highest point of tension, suspense, and/or action in a work; the turning point before the plot is resolved.

complication - a series of difficulties that form the central action in a narrative.

conflict - the struggle between two opposing forces within a work.

Internal conflict involves a struggle within (man versus himself). Examples of this include guilt, fear, decision making, etc.

External conflict involves the struggle of a character with an outside force (man versus nature, man versus man, man versus society, etc.).

connotation - the connotation of a word involves the attitudes and feelings associated with a word. These associations can be negative or positive. For many people, the word *mother* calls up strong positive feelings and associations - loving, self-sacrificing, always there for you, understanding; the denotative meaning, on the other hand, is simply "a female animal who has borne one or more children." Connotative meanings do not necessarily reflect reality.

demographic - the qualities of a specific group of people to whom a text is directed. For example, athletic children, single parents, teenaged boys, etc. (aka Target Audience)

denotation - the dictionary meaning of a word.

denouement - the final outcome of a series of events within a text; the resolution.

diction - the effective and precise choice and selection of words in a literary work. A work's diction is one of its most important literary elements. Writers use specific words to convey action, reveal character, imply attitudes, identify themes, and suggest values and convey emotion.

dominant impression or image - in descriptive writing, the one dominant aspect or overall feeling that stands out more than others. For example, terror, beauty, etc.

epiphany - a moment of realization experienced by a speaker or character; often referred to as a "light bulb moment".

eulogy - a speech or writing in praise of a person who has died.

extended metaphor - a metaphor that is used throughout a work or is continued for a few lines of a selection.

fallacy - the quality of being false or wrong; a wrong belief or a mistaken idea.

falling action - the sequence of events that follow the climax and end in the resolution within a story.

figurative language - a form of language use in which writers and speakers convey something other than the literal meaning of their words. Examples include hyperbole, understatement, simile, metaphor, personification.

flashback - an interruption of a work's chronology (order of occurrence) to describe or introduce an event that occurred prior to the main timeframe of the main action of the piece.

flash fiction - a very short piece written in prose, often focusing on a particular incident, thought, or epiphany. It does not involve elaborations of characterization and plot in a short story and has some characteristics of poetry in its focus on a particular meditation or incident.

foil - a character whose qualities or actions serve to emphasize those of another character (usually the protagonist) by providing a strong contrast with that character. For instance, Asher is a foil for Jonas in *The Giver*.

foreshadowing - when hints of what is to come in the action of a play or a story are given.

frame story - a story within a story, and sometimes within another story. For example, in a story focused on a soldier going to war (story #1) there could also be a second and third story involving the relationship between the soldier and his love interest (story #2), and the story of his broken relationship with his brother (story #3).

genre - a French word meaning *kind* or *type*. The major genres in literature include poetry, narration, essay writing, fiction, non-fiction, drama.

hubris - excessive pride or over confidence; often a character's tragic flaw.

hyperbole - intended exaggeration often used to create a desired effect such as humour or sarcasm.

imagery - language which describes something in detail, using words to substitute for and create sensory stimulation. Imagery often evokes one or more of the senses.

irony (dramatic, situational, and verbal) - There are three distinct types:

dramatic irony occurs when the audience and/or one or more characters in a work are aware of information that another character or characters are not. For instance, in *King Oedipus*, the audience is aware of the fact that Oedipus is married to his mother, but he is not.

situational irony is evident where an unexpected event occurs, in the sense that it is somehow the opposite of what would be expected or appropriate. Mere coincidence is generally not ironic; neither is mere surprise, nor are any random or arbitrary occurrences. For instance, in *King Oedipus*, Oedipus says that he fears that the murderer of Laius will come after him too. The irony is that Oedipus himself killed Laius.

verbal irony is speech in which what is said is the opposite to what is meant. It is a form of sarcasm. For example, saying *I love broccoli*, when really you detest it.

juxtaposition - the arrangement of two or more ideas, characters, actions, settings, phrases, or words side-by-side or in similar narrative moments for the purpose of comparison, contrast, or character development. For instance, villains and heroes are opposites in narratives, and as a result, they are juxtaposed.

literal meaning – involves the reality of what is occurring in a text. Discussing the literal meaning of a selection requires no interpretation on a figurative level. For example, giving the literal meaning of a poem merely involves the retelling or summarizing of what is happening on a literal level.

lyrics - the words to a song.

memoir - autobiographical writing; the story of a person's life written by that individual (often a snapshot memory).

metaphor - a comparison between essentially unlike things without an explicitly comparative word such as *like* or *as*. An example is *I was lost in a sea of nameless faces*.

monologue - a composition, oral or written, by a single individual. More specifically, it is a speech given by a single individual in a drama or other public entertainment. It has no set length, although it is usually several or more lines long.

mood - the overall feeling the reader gets from a text. Most pieces of literature have a prevailing mood, but shifts in this mood may provide comic relief, or echo the changing events in the plot or changes in a character. For example, the prevailing mood throughout the end of *King Oedipus* is desperate and hopeless.

motif - a recurring important idea or image. A motif differs from a theme in that it can be expressed as a single word or fragmentary phrase, while a theme expressed as a complete sentence. A motif in *King Oedipus* is sight/vision.

narrator - the voice and implied speaker of a fictional work, and is often separate from the actual living author. For instance, Eliezer Wiesel is the narrator of *Night*, but the author is Elie Wiesel.

oxymoron - involves using contradiction and opposites in a manner that oddly makes sense on a deeper level. Simple or joking examples include *jumbo shrimp*, *sophisticated rednecks*, and *freezer burn*.

paradox - a statement that seems to contradict itself or doesn't seem to make sense, but is somehow true. There's usually a loophole that makes the statement make sense if you dig a little deeper. For example, the saying *More hurry, less speed* is paradoxical since more hurry would typically bring more speed but upon deeper analysis, we realize that rushing usually puts people behind because they are not as careful or clear minded. Another example is found in the play *Macbeth*: *Fair is foul and foul is fair*.

parody - a humorous, mocking imitation of a literary work, sometimes sarcastic, but often playful and even respectful in its playful imitation.

personification - involves giving a nonliving object or an abstract idea, human traits. For example, *Traffic slowed to a crawl*.

plot development - refers to what happens in a story and the order in which it happens. There are typically five stages in plot development: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, denouement (resolution).

point of view - the perspective established by the narrator of a literary work.

first-person - a character in the story is telling the story. In this instance, the main character conveys the incidents he/she encounters, as well as giving the reader insight into himself as he reveals his/her thoughts, feelings, and intentions. For example, Eliezer Wiesel tells his own story and narrates *Night*.

second-person - the narrator addresses the protagonist directly as *you* and never reverts back to *I*. The second person point of view is used in essays and poems, but is not common. Includes consistent use of pronouns "you, your".

third-person limited - a person who is not a character in the story, tells the story. The narrator's knowledge of a character is limited and the focus is on the thoughts/feelings of ONE character, as if they are always following that one character. For example, in *The Giver* the focus is primarily on Jonas.

third-person omniscient - a person who is not a character in the story, tells the story. The narrator knows everything about ALL of the characters, including their feelings, thoughts, etc. The narrator moves from

one character to another as necessary to provide those character's respective motivations and emotions. For example, *Lord of the Flies* uses this point of view.

protagonist - considered to be the main character or lead figure in a novel, play, story, or poem. For example, Jonas in *The Giver*.

proverb - a simple and concrete saying popularly known and repeated, which expresses a truth, based on common sense or the practical experience of humanity. For example, *Absence makes the heart grow fonder*.

pun - a humorous play on words. For example, saying *I do it for the pun of it* instead of *for the fun of it*.

purpose - the reason for the existence of a text. The purpose could be to describe, entertain, inform, respond, reflect, clarify, identify, persuade, summarize, etc.

rhythm - the recurrence of accent or stress in lines of verse (bah BAH bah BAH bah BAH). Line breaks, parallel structure, and repetition of words and sounds help create rhythm.

rising action - the sequence of events and complications that build in intensity and eventually lead to the climax in a story.

sarcasm - occurs when verbal irony is used to mock; people say the opposite of what they actually mean. For example, when a person appears to be praising something, but is actually insulting it. This is the case when someone says *I love broccoli!*, when really they detest it.

satire - a literary work that criticizes human misconduct and ridicules vices, stupidities, and follies. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is a famous example, as well as the short story "The Lottery Ticket" by Anton Chekhov. Common topics of satire include criticism of politics, greed, media, and other news-worthy topics.

setting - the time, place and circumstances of a literary work that establish its context.

simile - is a figure of speech involving a comparison between unlike things using *like*, *as*, or *as though*. For example, *He is as strong as an ox* and *The handshake felt like warm laundry*.

stereotype - a fixed opinion that someone has when making judgments, instead of taking a fresh, open-minded look each time. Stereotypes are often based on biased and/or oversimplified opinions or images of a person or group of people. This literary device is most often used in a negative, and sometimes derogatory, fashion. A few examples are a Harvard student being thought of as a *bookworm*, or an Alaskan that is assumed to live in an igloo, or saying that all teenagers are troublemakers.

subplot - a secondary plot or storyline that coexists with the main story. For example, the main plot may be a love story between two characters and a subplot could involve a quirky best friend who works with the female lead and is constantly setting her up with all of the wrong guys.

suspense - the excited anticipation of conflict or an approaching climax.

symbolism - when an object or action in a literary work means more than itself, and stands for something beyond itself. For example, in *The Giver*, pale eyes symbolizes the ability to see beyond.

temporal references - reference to time within a text. For example, *last week*, *next month*, *before*, etc.

thematic statement - a single sentence that describes a specific interpretation of the overall meaning of a work of literature. It must be brief, focused and insightful.

thematic topic - the subject matter of a piece of writing. For example, survival, relationships, war, etc.

theme - the message an author wishes to convey in through a work. A theme should not be written as merely one word; it is a statement, nor should it be written as a cliché. Think of a theme as a statement about life that is usually true, and is being conveyed through a literary text. For example, *Growing up is often full of challenges*.

title (significance) - the significance of the title can be ascertained by determining how the title relates to the work and what new insights can be gained from the work when one considers the title. Titles are often symbolic, ironic, imply a particular tone, reveal conflict or character traits, or are meaningful to characters within a text.

tone - is the implied attitude of a writer toward the subject and characters of a text. The tone of a selection may be serious, humorous, judgemental, sarcastic, etc.

SOUND DEVICES

alliteration - the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words in close proximity. Alliteration can still exist when the words containing repeated consonant sounds are separated by 1-2 words. For example, *My mother makes a mouthwatering pie*, and *The lion licked his lips*.

assonance - the repetition of similar vowel sounds in different words in close proximity. Assonance can still exist when the words containing repeated vowel sounds are separated by 1-2 words. For example, *The light of the fire is a sight*, and *Go and mow the lawn*.

cacophony - harsh, unpleasant consonant sounds that are used in poetry, often to create an effect. For example, *the claws that catch*.

consonance - the repetition of similar consonant sounds at the ends of words. Assonance can still exist when the words containing repeated vowel sounds are separated by 1-2 words. For example, lines of poetry that end with the following words: *lost / past, confess / dismiss, middle / muddle*. Another example is, *I will crawl away with the ball*.

euphony - soothing, pleasant, harmonious sounds, especially words spoken in combination. For example, the “s” and “w” sounds in *Success is counted sweetest* are euphonic. Also, the f’s in, *From forth the fatal loins of these two foes*.

onomatopoeia - the use of words to imitate the sounds they describe. Words such as *buzz* and *crack* are onomatopoeic.

LANGUAGE TERMS

audience - the people for which something is written or produced. For instance, the selection/visual may be created for a very specific audience such as teenagers who play sports, etc., or it may be created for a general audience, such as all adults.

bias – an opinion that is not based on reason or proof, that shows a preference of one particular point of view over another. For example, someone who thinks that all old people drive slowly are acting in a manner that is biased against the elderly.

cliché - a commonplace or overused, time-worn phrase. For example, *She fell head over heels*.

coherence – relates to how a piece of writing flows from one point to another; comes from the Latin word meaning “to stick together”. Coherence is the quality that makes it easy for reader to follow a writer’s train of thought as it moves from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph. There are several ways to create coherence.

Methods of Creating Coherence:

emphatic devices - used to emphasize an idea; include listing, font, punctuation, repetition, parallel structure, fragments, and short sentences.

parallel structure / parallelism - using the same pattern of words to show that two or more ideas have the same level of importance. This can happen at the word, phrase, or clause level. For example: *I like running, jumping, and skiing.*

pronoun reference - replacing key nouns with pronouns. For example, “the children” can be replaced with “they, them”.

repetition - repeating key words and phrases, or recognizable synonyms, for key words. Examples include using *baby*, *infant*, and/or *newborn*.

transitions - using conjunctive adverbs or thought-connecting words such as *nonetheless*, *moreover*, *therefore*, *however*, *subsequently*, *accordingly*, etc.

sequence - arranging the sequence of events in some order. For example, narration is usually arranged chronologically, description is arranged spatially, and exposition is arranged logically.

comparison - used to identify the **similarities** and **differences** between two works, characters, ideas, etc.

composition - the act of combining parts or elements to form a whole as in writing, visual art, dance, music, etc. to create an intended effect or convey a message.

context - specifically, the parts of a text that come immediately before and after a particular word or passage, giving it a fuller and clearer meaning. It is easier to see what a word means when you see it in context. The context of a text as a whole refers to all the elements or circumstances influencing its creation or interpretation including purpose, time, place, intended audience, cultural or gender influences, etc.

contrast - to examine two or more items by looking at only their **differences**.

emphatic device - used by authors to emphasize an idea. Methods to achieve this include repetition, font [bold and italics], short sentences, punctuation, interrupted movement, short sentences and sentence fragments.

Examples of Emphatic Devices

- **listing** - (numerical order, bullets, sequencing)
- **font** - (bold, unusual capitalization, italics, underlining). For example, Hello. *Hello!* **HELLO!!**
- **punctuation** (colon, dash, exclamation mark, ellipsis, brackets) - show breaks in thought and shifts in tone
- **repetition** - the repeated use of the same word or word pattern. For example, *It is important you study for your test. If you do not study, you will not get the marks you deserve! So, not studying could cost you valuable marks.*
- **parallel structure** (see notes below) - For example, *Be sure to eat your supper, complete your homework, and study your notes before going to sleep tonight.*
- **sentence fragments** - an incomplete sentence that can be missing a subject or verb. For example,

The circus clown.

- **short sentence** – a very simple sentence. For example, *I froze.*

essay development

argumentation / persuasion - an essay that attempts to persuade the reader to the writer's point of view; the writer can be either serious or funny, but always tries to convince the reader of the validity of his or her opinion.

cause and effect - the aim is to explain the causes (reasons) or the effects (results) of an event or situation.

classification and division - a writer organizes, sorts, or divides things into categories.

compare and contrast - an author discusses the similarities and differences between characters, people, ideas, objects, etc.

definition - an author explains by defining. For example, *What is friendship?*

description - the exercise of representing characters, scenes, ideas or actions to make the writing more vivid and appealing for the reader. Imagery, effective diction and figurative language are used to appeal to the five senses.

examples and illustration - an example is offered as support to clarify and inform in almost every paragraph.

exposition - an essay that is explanatory in nature. It deals with the world of ideas and is logically arranged. The methods of development for essays include compare and contrast, classification and division, example and illustration, process analysis, and definition. (There is usually a combination of methods in any expository essay, but quite often, there is one dominant method.)

narration - writing that tells a story or part of a story; includes characters, setting, conflict, suspense, etc. Narratives are chronologically arranged and must involve some type of conflict.

process analysis - a pattern of essay development in which the author explains how to do something. For example, *How to be a successful student.*

journal - a daily record of events or business; a private journal is usually referred to as a diary.

language style - the characteristic ways that an individual author uses language; includes word choice, length and complexity of sentences, patterns of sound, and use of imagery and symbols.

Types of Language Style

colloquial - the language characteristic of everyday informal speech; it's conversational. For example, "*You're getting on my nerves!*" instead of the more formal "*You are irritating me.*"

dialect - the way a language is spoken in a particular region or place. For example, in Newfoundland, "*luh!*" is used for "*look*", and "*me son*" for "*my friend*".

euphemism - a less offensive or harsh way of saying something negative; For example, "*pass away*" instead of "*die*", and "*unsuccessful*" instead of "*failure*".

formal - polite, respectful, and following particular conventions of language. Used when writing a letter to apply for a job, an important speech, etc.

informal - has less strict grammar rules and often has shortened sentences. Informal language is mostly used among friends or co-workers.

jargon - words or expressions used by a particular group or profession, such as medical jargon or computer jargon. For example, “*btw*” (by the way), “*AWOL*” (absent without leave = military jargon).

slang - an informal variety of speech characterized by newly coined and rapidly changing words and phrases. For example “*goin’ for a razz*” (driving around), “*that’s sick*” (awesome).

parallel structure / parallelism - using the same pattern of words to show that two or more ideas have the same level of importance. This can happen at the word, phrase, or clause level. For example, “*I like running, jumping, and skiing*”, and “*We wondered who he was and what he was doing.*”

paraphrase – a summary of the meaning of a text using different words.

rhetorical question - a question for which there is no expected answer. For example, “*Do you think money grows on trees?*”

style - is the way an author chooses words, arranges them in sentences or in lines of dialogue or verse, and develops ideas and actions with description, imagery, and other literary techniques. The style may be formal or informal which can largely be determined by the author’s choice usage.

transitions - words used to connect the sections of the text, and help them to orient the audience to the chronology, structure and other elements of writing. It helps to create coherence. Examples include, *thus, because, therefore, finally*, etc.

logical - show the logical connection between two ideas. Examples: *further, furthermore, moreover, in addition, additionally*, etc.

spatial - function to restrict, limit or qualify space. Examples: *in the middle, to the left/right, in front of, on this side, in the distance, here and there, in the foreground, in the background*, etc.

temporal / chronological -has the function of limiting, restricting, and defining time. Examples: *at the present time, from time to time, sooner or later, at the same time, up to the present time, in the meantime, in the first place*, etc.

understatement - presenting something as being smaller, less important, or worse than it actually is.

unity - means that all information in a piece of writing is relevant to the thesis and the topic sentence. Irrelevant facts should be disregarded in order to create unity or oneness. Paragraph unity means that one paragraph is about ONLY ONE main topic. That is, all the sentences - the topic, supporting sentences, the detail sentences, and (sometimes) the concluding sentence - are all telling the reader about ONE main topic. If your paragraph contains a sentence or some sentences that are NOT related to the main topic, then we say that the paragraph *lacks unity*, or that the sentence is *off-topic*. In general, unity means that your paper is coherent, easy to follow, and each paragraph relates to the main thesis.

Methods of Creating Unity:

closing by return - a restatement – either in the closing sentence of a paragraph or in the conclusion of an essay – of the main idea expressed within the topic sentence or thesis statement found within the opening paragraph.

repetition - repeating key words and phrases throughout.

supporting evidence - information and facts used to prove or develop the main point (thesis).

thesis (statement) - the central argument of an essay; a complete sentence (although sometimes it may require more than one sentence) that establishes the topic of the essay in clear language.

topic sentence - a sentence stating the main idea of a paragraph.

voice - the personality of the speaker or creator that is revealed in a work through such elements as style, tone, diction, emphatic devices, etc.