

Literary Terms

Alliteration – The repeating of consonant sounds most often at the beginning of words.

Allusion – A reference in a work of literature to a character, place, or situation from another work of literature, music, or art.

Anecdote - A brief account of a true event, usually intended to entertain and to reveal personality through a person's actions.

Argument - The kind of writing that uses reason to affect people's opinions and actions.

Aside - In a play a character's comment that is heard by the audience, but not by other characters.

Assonance - The repeating of vowel sounds, especially in a line of poetry.

Atmosphere - The emotional quality or mood of a story.

Autobiography – The story of a person's life written by that person.

Ballad - A short, musical, narrative poem.

Biography - The account of a person's life written by someone other than the subject.

Blank Verse - Poetry written in unrhymed iambic pentameter. This is a rhythm made up of five feet to a line, each foot containing one unstressed and one stressed syllable.

Character - A person in a story, play, or novel. Characters that reveal only one personality trait are described as flat. Characters who show varied traits are called round. Stereotyped characters are common character types whose actions are predictable.

Characterization - The personality of a character and the method that an author uses to reveal this personality.

Climax - The point of our highest interest and greatest emotional involvement in a narrative.

Comedy - A type of drama that is humorous and usually has a happy ending.

Concrete Language or Sensory Language - Words that appeal to the senses.

Conflict – At the center of the plot, the struggle between two opposing forces.

Connotation - The unspoken or unwritten meaning associated with a word beyond its dictionary definition.

Couplet - Two consecutive lines in a poem or play that rhyme.

Denotation - The literal or dictionary meaning of a word.

Description - Any careful detailing of a person, place, thing, or event.

Dialect - A variation of a language, sometimes spoken by a particular group but most often associated with a particular region.

Dialogue - Conversation between characters in a story, work of nonfiction, novel, play, or dramatic poem. Dialogue can advance the plot and reveal character's personalities.

Diary - A day-by-day account of events in a person's life. Diary is a form of autobiography.

Drama – A play or story meant to be performed before an audience. Drama can be divided into two types – comedy and tragedy.

Dramatic Convention – A device that a playwright uses to present a story on stage and that the audience accepts as realistic.

Dramatic Poetry - Poetry in which one or more characters speak.

Epic - A long narrative poem that traces the adventures of a hero.

Epic Hero - A legendary figure of almost super-human qualities whose adventures are for, the core of the epic poem.

Epithet – A descriptive word or phrase attached to the name of a person or thing, usually stressing a particular characteristic.

Essay – A short piece of nonfiction writing on any topic.

Exposition - An introduction to people, places, and situations that are important to the plot of a story, novel, or play.

Fable – A very brief story told to teach a lesson.

Falling Action - In a play or story the action that is the result of the climax.

Farce - A type of comedy that presents stereotyped characters in improbable situations.

Fiction – A prose narrative work of the imagination including novels and short stories.

Figurative Language – Language used for descriptive effect.

Flashback - A scene in a narrative that breaks the normal time sequence of the plot to narrate events that happened earlier.

Foot - The basic unit of measurement in rhythm.

Foreshadowing – The use of clues by an author to prepare readers for events that will happen later in a story.

Frame Story - A story structure that includes the telling of a story within a story.

Free Verse – Poetry that has no fixed meter or pattern.

Full-Length Play – A drama that usually has several major characters and a complicated plot that is usually divided into acts and scenes.

Haiku – A three line poem usually about nature, often with a suggestion of deeper meaning. First line 5 syllables, second line 7 syllables, third line 5 syllables.

Image – A picture or likeness made with words to help the reader of a poem or story form a mental portrait.

Imagery – The collection of sense images in a poem or a story.

Irony - A term used to talk about a contrast between reality and what seems to be real.

Situation Irony – Exists when what happens in a situation is the opposite of what we expect to happen.

Verbal Irony - Exists when a person says one thing and means another.

Dramatic Irony – Occurs when the audience has important information that characters in the play do not have.

Jargon – Slang that is associated with a particular career or activity.

Local Color – Literature with local color is tied in location and topic to one section of the country.

Lyric Poetry - Poetry that expresses a speaker's personal thoughts and feelings.

Metaphor - A figure of speech that makes a comparison between two seemingly unlike things.

Meter – A regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables giving a line of poetry its rhythm.

Monologue - A long speech by a character in a play.

Mood – The emotional quality of a story and especially of a story's setting – that influence the attitudes of characters and the readers.

Narration – The kind of writing or speaking that tells a story.

Narrator – The person who tells a story.

Onomatopoeia – The use of a word or phrase that actually imitates or suggests the sound of what it describes.

Parable - A simple story from which a lesson should be drawn.

Paraphrase – A summary in the reader's own words of a piece of literature.

Personification – A figure of speech in which an animal, object, or idea is described as having human form or characteristics.

Plot - The sequence of events in a story, novel, or play, each event causing or leading to the next.

Point Of View – The relationship of the story teller to the story.

First Person Point Of View – The story is told by one of the characters referred to as I.

Third Person Point Of View – The narrator tells the story from the point of view of only one characters, speaking of the character as he or she.

Omniscient Point Of View – The author acts as an omniscient narrator who stands outside the story.

Resolution – The part of a plot that ends the falling action by telling or implying the final outcome.

Rhyme – The repetition of accented vowel sounds and all succeeding consonant sounds.

Rising Action – The part of a story's plot that adds complications to the problems and increases reader interest.

Sensory Language – Language that appeals to the senses and represents concrete objects, people, or events.

Setting – The place and time in which a story, play, or novel happens.

Short Story – A brief fictional narrative in prose.

Simile – A figure of speech that directly compares two seemingly unlike things using a comparing word such as like or as.

Soliloquy – In a play a long speech spoke by a character who is alone on stage.

Stanza – A group of lines forming a unit in a poem.

Style – An author's choice and arrangement of words in any kind of writing.

Theme – The main idea of a story, poem, novel or play, usually expressed as a general statement about life.

Tragedy – A play in which a main character suffers a major downfall.

Word Choice - The selection of words in a piece of literature to convey meaning, suggest attitude, and create images.