

English

Literary Terms

Glossary

Grades 9th - 12th

Allegory - A story with both a literal and symbolic meaning.

Example: *The Ant and The Grasshopper*

Alliteration - The repetition of initial consonant sound in two or more successive or nearby words.

Example: *fit and fearless; consonant clusters coming closely cramped and compressed*

Allusion - A reference to a well-known person, place, event, work of art, myth, or religion.

Example: Hercules, Eden, Waterloo, Prodigal Son, Superman.

Analogy - A comparison that points out similarities between two dissimilar things

Example: Just as the mother eagle shelters her young from the storm by spreading her great wing above their heads, so does Capital Acme Insurers of America spread an umbrella of coverage to protect its policy holders from the storms of life.

Anapest - A foot of poetry with two unaccented syllables followed by one accented syllable.

Example: *disengage*.

Anaphora - A type of repetition in which the same word or phrase is used at the beginning of two or more sentences or phrases.

Anecdote - A brief personal story about an event or experience.

Antagonist - A character, institution, group, or force that is in conflict with the protagonist.

Antihero - A protagonist who is markedly unheroic, morally weak, cowardly, dishonest, or any number of unsavory qualities.

Apostrophe - A figure of speech in which the speaker directly addresses an object, idea, or absent person.

Example: "*Milton!* thou shouldst be living at this hour." (*London 1802* by William Wordsworth)

Archetypes – An original model or type after which other similar things are patterned; a prototype.

Example: warrior, crossroads

Atmosphere - The way that setting and landscape affects the tone or mood of a work.

Example: The sun will not show on the day of Romeo's and Juliet's funeral.

Aside - In drama, lines delivered by an actor to the audience as if the other actors on stage cannot hear what he is saying.

Assonance - The repetition of vowel sounds in a group of words.

Example: Old King Cole was a merry old soul.

Asyndeton - The omission of conjunctions in a series.

Example: "I came, I saw, I conquered." *Julius Caesar*.

Ballad - A long narrative poem in regular meter and rhyme with a naive folksy quality that distinguishes it from epic poetry.

Example: *Barbara Allan, Lord Randal*

Blank verse - Poetry written in unrhymed iambic pentameter.

Example: *Shakespearean plays*.

Cacophony - The unharmonious combination of words that sound harsh together.

Caesura - A natural pause or break in a line of poetry.

Caricature - Writing that exaggerates or distorts personal qualities of an individual.

Chiasmus – A verbal pattern in which the second half of an expression is balanced against the first with the parts reversed. A type of antithesis; essentially the same as antimetabole.

Example: Never let a fool kiss you or let a kiss fool you.

Classicism - A literary approach that imitates the literature and art of ancient Greece and Rome that stresses order, balance, reason, and idealism.

Climax – (turning point) The high point in the plot after which there is falling action.

Comedy - A work of literature that has a happy ending.

Comic relief - Humorous action or lines spoken in a serious point in a play.

Example: The Porter's Scene *in Macbeth, Act II, scene iii*

Conflict - The struggle between two opposing forces at the center of plot.

Connotation – All the suggested meanings and associations that a word brings to mind beyond its denotation or literal meaning.

Context - The words and phrases surrounding a word that influence its meaning.

Couplet – Two consecutive line of the same meter that rhyme.

Denotation - The definition or meaning of a word.

Denouement - The conclusions or tying up of loose ends in a literary work; the resolution of the conflict and plot.

Dialect - Regional speech that identifies a character's social status.

Dialogue - Conversation between two or more characters.

Diction - Word choice.

Double entendre - A statement that has two meanings, one of which is suggestive or improper.

Dramatic irony - Results when the reader or audience knows or understands something that a character does not know.

Dramatic monologue - A narrative poem in which a character other than the poet delivers a long speech to a silent listener

Dynamic character - A character who undergoes change of heart or world view as a result of actions of the plot.

Dystopia - The opposite of utopia. Literally “bad place.”

Examples of literature about dystopias include *Anthem* by Ayn Rand, *1984* by George Orwell, and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley.

Elegy - A formal poem about death.

Ellipsis - Three periods (. . .) that signify the omission of one or more words.

Enjambment - A technique in poetry that involves the running on of a line or stanza.

Epic - A long narrative poem told in formal stately language about a larger than life hero who embodies national ideals.

Example: *Beowulf*, *The Odyssey* by Homer.

Epiphany - A sudden insight or change of heart that happens in an instant.

Essay - A short nonfiction work about a specific subject. Essays may be narrative, persuasive, descriptive, expository, or argumentative.

Example: *Nature* by Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Euphemism - An indirect way of saying something that may be offensive.

Example: *Passed away* instead of died, *senior citizens* instead of old people.

Existentialism - 20th century philosophy concerned with the plight of the individual who must assume responsibility for acts of free will. Characteristics are alienation, anxiety, loneliness, absurdity.

Example: *The Stranger* by Albert Camus.

Extended metaphor - A metaphor that is elaborated on and developed in several phrases or sentences

External conflict occurs when a character struggles against an outside force such as another person, nature, society, or fate.

Falling action - All action that takes place after the climax.

First person viewpoint – The story is told by one of the characters using first-person personal pronouns like *I*, *me*, *our*.

First person narration - The story is told from the point of view of one character.

Example: *Catcher in the Rye* J. D. Salinger, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain.

Flashback - A plot device that allows the author to jump back in time prior to the opening scene.

Flat character - A one-dimensional character.

Foil - A character who, through contrast, reveals the characteristics of another character.
Example: Tybalt and Mercutio from *Romeo and Juliet*

Foreshadowing - A clue that prepares the reader for what will happen later on in the story.

Free verse - Poetry that is not written in consistent patterns of rhyme or meter.

Hero/Heroine - The main character, the protagonist whose actions inspire and are admired.

Hyperbole - A figure of speech that uses exaggeration.

Example: *Our chances are one in a million. I like this car ten times more than our other one. I will love you till the seas run dry.*

Iamb - A foot of poetry with one unaccented syllable followed by one accented syllable.

Example: *alone*

Indirect Characterization—Characterization through appearance, actions, words, and reactions of other characters.

Inference - Information or action that is hinted at or suggested, but not stated outright.

Internal conflict occurs within a person.

Irony is the contrast between actual meaning and the suggestion of another meaning.

Litote - Understatement that makes a positive statement by using a negative opposite.

Example: *He's not a bad singer.*

Metaphor - A direct comparison between dissimilar items without using *like* or *as*.

Example: *Your eyes are like stars.*

Meter - The rhythm in a line of poetry. The number and types of stresses or beats on syllables are counted as feet.

Examples:

- **monometer** (*one foot*)
- **dimeter** (*two feet*)
- **trimeter** (*three feet*)
- **tetrameter** (*four feet*)
- **pentameter** (*five feet*)
- **hexameter** (*six feet*)
- **heptameter** (*seven feet*)

Metonymy - The use of an object closely associated with a word for the word itself.

Example: *Using crown to mean king or oval office to mean president*

A figure of speech in which a representative term is used for a larger idea.

Example: The pen is mightier than the sword.

Monologue - A speech given by one person.

Mood – Emotional response that a piece of literature stimulates in the reader.

Motif - A recurring pattern of symbols, colors, events, allusions, or imagery used to develop a theme or character.

Myth – An anonymous traditional story with its roots in cultural or national folk beliefs that rely on the supernatural to explain the mysteries of the world.

Narrative poem - A poem that tells a story.

Example: ballads (Barbara Allen) and epics (Beowulf, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner).

Narrator - The person telling the story.

Octave - An eight-line stanza.

Novel - A long work of fiction that has plot, characters, themes, symbols, and settings.

Novella - A tale or short story.

Ode - A long, formal poem.

Omniscient narrator - When the narrator's knowledge extends to the internal thoughts and states of mind of all characters.

Example: The Pearl by John Steinbeck.

Onomatopoeia - A figure of speech that uses words to imitate sound.

Example: clink, buzz, hum, splash, hiss, boom.

Oxymoron - A figure of speech that combines words that are opposites.

Example: sweet sorrow, feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health (Romeo and Juliet)

Parable – A brief usually allegorical narrative that teaches a moral.

Paradox - A statement or situation that at first seems impossible or self-contradictory but is true in fact or figurative sense. *Example: The faster I go, the further behind I get.*

Personification - A figure of speech that attributes human qualities to an inanimate object.

Example: The wind sighed. The moon hid behind the clouds.

Pentameter - Five feet of verse.

Petrarchan sonnet - A sonnet divided into two parts: 8-line octave that often rhymes abba abba, 6 line sestet that often rhymes cde cde. The octave presents a situation or problem, and the sestet solves the problem. Also called an Italian sonnet. (John Milton) "On His Blindness"

Plot - The sequence of events in a literary work.

Point of view - The perspective from which a story is told.

Prose - Written language that is not poetry, drama, or song. Prose can be fiction or nonfiction.

Protagonist – The central character of a literary work. The action usually revolves around the protagonist who generally receives the reader’s sympathy.

Pun - A play on words. Example: He wanted to become a chef, but he didn’t have the thyme

Quatrain - A four-line stanza.

Refrain - Regularly repeated line or group of lines in a poem or song.

Rhyme scheme - The pattern of rhyming words. The last word in each line is assigned a letter of the alphabet beginning with A.

Example: If the last words in each of four lines are *me (a)*, *grave (b)*, *see (a)*, and *save (b)*, the rhyme scheme is *abab*

Rising action – In a play or story, the action and conflicts that lead to the climax.

Round character - A character who shows a variety of complex and or contradictory traits.

Example: *Macbeth*

Sarcasm - A bitter remark intending to hurt and express disapproval. Less subtle than verbal irony.

Satire – A kind of writing that uses humor and wit to criticize or ridicule individuals or societies with the intention of correcting some ill or evil but without providing some solution.

Examples: Chaucer, Dante, Voltaire, Moliere, Swift, and Twain wrote satire.

Setting - The time, place, and chief circumstances of a story.

Shakespearean sonnet - A sonnet with three quatrains that present a problem or situation and a couplet that ends the poem and presents a concluding statement or solution. The rhyme scheme is *abab cdcd efef gg*. Also called an English or Elizabethan sonnet.

Simile - A figure of speech that compares two things that are not alike, using the words like, as, or than.

Example: *eyes gleaming like live coals, as delicate as a snowflake, colder than ice.*

Situational irony results from recognizing the oddness or unfairness of a given situation be it positive or negative.

Soliloquy – In a play a long speech made by a character who is alone on stage and who reveals private thoughts and feelings to the reader or audience.

Example: Hamlet’s “To Be or Not To Be”

Sonnet - A fourteen-line lyric poem about a single theme.

Stanza - Lines of poetry considered as a group.

Static character - A character who remains primarily the same throughout the work.
Example Tom Sawyer in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Style - The individual way an author writes, how it is recognized and imitated.

Symbol – A person, object, or place that represents something else in addition to its literal meaning.

Example: the albatross (guilt) in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the handkerchief (infidelity) in *Othello*, the red letter A (adultery) in *The Scarlet Letter*.

Synecdoche - A figure of speech in which the part symbolizes the whole.

Example: *All hands on deck, or I've got some new wheels.*

Syntax - Word order, the way in which words are put together.

Theme – The author's message about a topic.

Third person limited: Narrator tells the story from the limited viewpoint of one character speaking of the character using the personal pronouns *he* or *she*.

Third person omniscient: Narrator who stands outside the story has unlimited awareness, understanding, and insight into character, setting, background, and all other elements of the story and uses personal pronouns *he* or *she*.

Tone - The attitude the author expresses towards his or her subject and audience.

Trochee - A foot of poetry consisting of one accented syllable followed by one unaccented syllable. Example: *monkey*

Unreliable narrator - A narrator who is not credible when it comes to telling the story.
Example: Chief Bromden in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* or Victor Frankenstein in *Frankenstein*.

Utopia - A perfect or ideal world.

Verbal irony occurs when the actual intent that is expressed in words carries the opposite meaning. It is less harsh than sarcasm.

