

Literary Terms

I. Literary Device: Any literary device or technique used to achieve a specific effect.

A. Allusion: A reference to a LITERARY, MYTHOLOGICAL, BIBLICAL OR HISTORICAL person, place or thing. (Examples):

1. Beowulf
2. Aphrodite
3. Garden of Eden
4. Auschwitz

B. Irony: A contrast between appearance and reality.

1. Situational Irony: a situation turns out differently from what one would normally expect.

- a. A fire station that burns down
- b. A boxer being helped in a fight by an old lady
- c. Pro-life advocate supporting the death penalty

2. Verbal Irony: when a speaker or narrator says one thing but means the opposite.

- a. "Oh Great!" after something bad happens

3. Sarcasm: a person appears to be praising something but is actually insulting it.

- a. "My, aren't YOU clever"

C. Allegory: a story in which the characters and events are symbols that stand for ideas about life or for a political or historical situation.

D. Symbol: The use of any object, person, place or action that both has a meaning in itself and that stands for something larger than itself, such as a quality, attitude, belief or value. (Examples):

1. Owls symbolize wisdom
2. Doves symbolize peace
3. Lions symbolize courage

E. Foreshadowing: The use in a literary work of clues that suggest events that have yet to occur.

F. Epiphany: An event in which the essential nature of something—a person, a situation, or an object is suddenly understood in a new way; a sudden realization; an “ah ha” moment.

G. Detail: Facts revealed by the author or speaker that support the attitude or tone in the work.

H. Suspense: The quality of literary work that makes the reader uncertain or tense about the outcome of events.

I. Motif: A recurring element in a literary work; a pattern or strand of imagery or symbolism in a work of literature used to establish theme or mood. Common Motifs:

1. Darkness and light
2. Supernatural
3. Magical powers
4. Consequences of greed
5. Temptation
6. Journey from innocence to awareness
7. Revenge
8. Seasons
9. Corruption by power
10. Colors such as red or black

J. Archetype: A type of character, action, or situation that occurs over and over in literature; a pattern or example that occurs in literature and life. Common Archetypes:

1. Hero's quest
2. Utopia
3. Coming of Age
4. Stranger Comes to Town
5. Romance

K. Tone: The writer's attitude toward his or her subject. Tone can often be described by a single adjective.

L. Theme: A central message or insight into life revealed through the literary work - a lesson about life or people.

M. Point of View: The perspective from which a story is told.

1. **1st Person:** narrator is one of the characters in the story.
2. **3rd Person Limited:** narrator is NOT a character in a story and knows the thoughts and feelings of ONE character.
3. **3rd Person Omniscient:** narrator is NOT a character in a story and knows thoughts and feelings of ALL characters.

N. Mood: The feeling created in the reader by a literary work or passage.

O. Setting: The time and place of the action in a literary work

P. Style: How the author writes; developed through the use of diction, connotation, imagery, and syntax.

Q. Flashback: Present movement of the story is halted and a scene from the past is relived; readers relive the past moment in the present.

R. Rhetorical Shift: A change or movement in a piece resulting from an epiphany, realization, or insight gained by the speaker, character, or the reader.

S. Imagery: The words or phrases a writer uses to represent persons, objects, actions, feelings, and ideas descriptively by appealing to the five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch).

II. CHARACTERIZATION: The methods used by an author to create a character including:

- The character's physical appearance
- The character's own speech, thoughts, actions, and/or feelings
- OTHER characters' speech thoughts, actions, and/or feelings about the character
- Direct comments by the author about the character

A. Direct: The writer tells you directly what the character is like.

B. Indirect: The writer reveals a character through the character's appearance, speech, thoughts, feelings, or actions, and what other characters think and say about this character.

C. Motivation: A reason that explains a character's thoughts, feelings, actions, or behavior

D. Protagonist: Main character; story revolves around this character

E. Antagonist: Against the protagonist; can be a person, idea of force

F. Dynamic Character: A character that undergoes a change in actions or beliefs during the course of a story.

G. Static Character: A character that does not grow or change throughout the story, and ends as he/she began.

H. Flat Character: Often a minor character; not fully developed by the author.

I. Round Character: Character is developed fully by the author

J. Parallel Character: Characters who have similarities and can be compared.

K Character Foil: Characters who are opposites; they contrast each other.

III. DICTION: Word choice. An author chooses words to create a specific EFFECT; the appropriateness of the words with regard to the emotions and/or ideas associated with them.

A. Denotation: The specific dictionary definition of a word.

B. Connotation: The emotions or associations a word normally arouses in people using, hearing, or reading the word. A word may have a POSITIVE connotation, a NEGATIVE connotation, or a NUETRAL connotation.

C. Dialect: The pronunciation of a particular region or country.

D. Euphemism: The use of an indirect, mild, delicate, inoffensive, or vague word or expression for one thought to be unpleasant, offensive, or blunt - a nice way to say something.

1. Passed away instead of died
2. Pre-owned car instead of used car
3. Sanitary landfill instead of garbage dump

E. Dialogue: written conversation between two characters

IV. CONFLICT: A struggle between two opposing forces.

A. Internal: Problem or struggle within a character; the decisions a character must make; fear.

1. **Man vs. Self:** When a character must make a decision about a problem or struggle he is having with himself.

B. External: A problem or struggle between two characters or between one character and some outside force like weather or society.

1. **Man vs. Man:** When a character has a problem with another character.

2. **Man vs. Society:** When a character has a problem with a tradition or rule of society.

3. **Man vs. Nature:** When a character has a problem with a force of nature such as cold, storms, earthquakes, etc.

4. **Man vs. Fate:** When a character has a problem with something he can't do anything about, such as God, luck, death, etc.

V. FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE: Words or phrases that describe one thing in terms of something else; always involve some sort of imaginary comparison between seemingly unlike things; not meant to be taken literally.

A. Simile: A comparison of two different things or ideas through the use of words LIKE or AS.

B. Metaphor: A comparison of two unlike things not using LIKE or AS.

C. Extended Metaphor: A comparison (**at some length**) of two unlike things not using like or as.

D. Personification: Writing that gives inanimate objects or abstract ideas human characteristics.

E. Pun: A play on words that are identical or similar in sound but have sharply different meanings. Puns can have serious as well as humorous uses.

1. A man stole a case of soap from the corner store. The cops said he made a **clean** getaway.

F. Paradox: When elements of a statement contradict each other; may appear illogical, impossible, or absurd, but turns out to reveal a hidden truth. Examples:

1. "War is peace."
2. "Freedom is slavery."
3. "Ignorance is strength."

G. Oxymoron: A form of paradox that combines a pair of opposite terms into a single unusual expression. Examples:

1. Jumbo Shrimp
2. Pretty Ugly
3. Virtual Reality
4. Seriously Funny

H. Idiom: An accepted phrase or expression having a meaning different from the literal. Examples:

1. "Piece of cake"
2. "Break a leg"
3. "Cost an arm and a leg"
4. "Two-faced"

I. Metonymy: A form of a metaphor in which the name of one thing is applied to another thing with which it is closely associated. Examples:

1. "The Crown" meaning power or authority
2. "Let me give you a hand." Hand means help.
3. "The Suits on Wall Street" referring to business people

J. Synecdoche: A form of metaphor in which a part of something is used to signify the whole. Examples:

1. Referring to a car as "a set of wheels"
2. "Singing is my bread and butter." Bread refers to food or money.
3. "The Pentagon" referring to a few military decision makers

K. Hyperbole: A deliberate, extravagant and often outrageous exaggeration; may be used for either serious or comic effect.

L. Satire: Humorous devices like irony, understatement, and exaggeration to highlight a human folly or societal problem. Examples:

1. "Scary Movie"
2. "Meet the Spartans"
3. "Saturday Night Live"

M. Apostrophe: A form of personification in which the absent or dead are spoken to as if present and the inanimate, as if animate. Examples:

1. "Twinkle, twinkle little star." (Jane Taylor)
2. To a clock, "Why aren't you moving faster?"

N. Literal: An exact rendering—word for word; taking words in their usual or primary sense.

O. Figurative: The expressive use of language in which words are used in other ways than their literal senses so as to suggest and produce pictures or images in a reader or hearer's mind, bypassing logic and appealing directly to the imagination in order to give particular emphasis to an idea or sentiment.

VI. SOUND DEVICES: Stylistic techniques that convey meaning through sound.

A. Alliteration: Beginning several consecutive or neighboring words with the same sound.

Ex. "And the silken sad uncertain rustling . . ." (E.A. Poe)

B. Assonance: The repetition of vowel sounds in a series of words.

Ex. "Eagerly I wished the morrow; --vainly I had sought to borrow from my books surcease of sorrow--" (E.A. Poe)

C. Consonance: The repetition of a consonant sounds within a series of words.

Ex. "While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping"
(E.A. Poe)

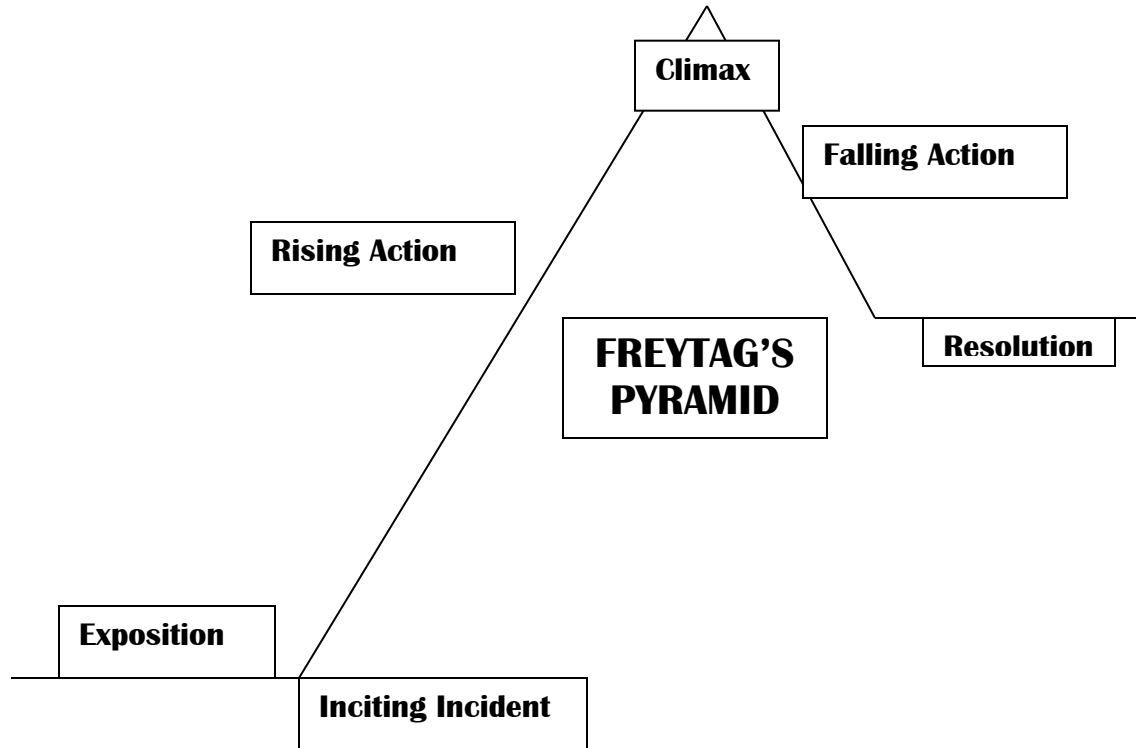
D. Onomatopoeia: The use of words to mimic the sounds they describe.

Ex. Boom, Buzz, Knock-Knock, Smack, Swoosh

E. Repetition: A device in which words, sounds, and/or ideas are used more than once to enhance rhythm and to create emphasis.

F. **Rhyme:** The repetition of sounds in two or more words or phrases that appear close to each other in a poem.

VII. **PLOT:** The sequence of events or actions in a Short Story, Novel, Play or Narrative Poem.



Exposition: The author lays the groundwork for the story revealing the:

- * Setting – Time and Place
- * Relationships between characters
- * Situation as it exists before conflict begins

Inciting Incident: Interrupts the peace and balance of the situation and one or more of the characters comes into conflict with an outside force, himself, or another character.

Rising Action: The action and events that take place in the story and build up to the critical moment when the main conflict is confronted.

Climax: The most critical moment in the story; the point at which the main conflict is at its highest point.

Falling Action: Events that occur after the climax and lead up to closure and conclusion of the story.

Resolution: The problem set up in the inciting incident is unraveled; there is a revelation of meaning.