

Literary Analysis Terms

Keep these ALL YEAR! They are important and you need to *learn* them.

Note: Underlined words are defined elsewhere in the terms.

General Terms

1. **genre**- the type or class of a work, usually categorized by form, technique, or content. Some examples of literary genres are epic, tragedy, comedy, poetry, novel, short story, and literary nonfiction.

My notes about this term:

2. **literary text**- a text created with an purpose of being read for pleasure or fulfillment rather than strictly for information; characterized by the use of artistic techniques and devices not generally found in informational texts; literary texts are generally recognized as having artistic value and include prose fiction, drama, poetry, and literary nonfiction

My notes about this term:

3. **inference**- a *reasonable* and *intelligent* conclusion drawn from limited details or hints supplied by the author; inferences are always drawn from the text—they are *educated* (not *random* guesses or hunches based on feelings/what you want to be true). Note- in a testing situation, if the instructions ask you to infer and an answer choice is directly stated in the passage, it is not an inference and is the wrong answer!

My notes about this term:

4. **theme**- the central or universal idea of a literary work; the underlying, universal truth about life or human nature that a piece of literature reveals—must be expressed as a statement or sentence
- explicit: the theme is presented word for word in the text of the literary work
 - implicit: the reader infers the theme based on evidence presented in the literary work
- Note: A theme is different from a moral (a lesson taught by a literary work). While a theme explains how people actually behave, a moral expresses how people should behave. Sophisticated literary analysis is more interested in themes, or truths, than lessons; themes tend to be more meaningful and poignant; morals tend to sound like children's literature.*

My notes about this term:

5. **summary**- captures the main ideas and elements of a text; a factual, concise beginning-middle-end synopsis of content; an objective response to a text that presents no *subjective* ideas

My notes about this term:

6. **critique**- a response to a text that takes a position and expresses an opinion about the text; different from a summary because it expresses the writer's own subjective ideas and analysis

My notes about this term:

7. **objective**- expressing or dealing with facts or conditions as perceived without distortion by personal feelings, prejudices, or interpretations

My notes about this term:

8. **subjective**- modified or affected by personal views, experience, or background (the opposite of objective)

My notes about this term:

9. **tone**- the author's particular attitude toward his subject or audience, either stated or implied in the writing. Tone is often revealed through language devices

My notes about this term:

Plot-Related Terms

10. **plot**- what happens in a story; a series of related events (like the links of a chain) which present and resolve a conflict. If a writer is successful, he will build suspense with these events to hook the reader's interest. Plot structure consists of: a. exposition, b. complications, c. climax, and d. resolution.

11. **exposition**- first part of the plot structure that introduces character, setting, point of view, and basic situation. It establishes the mood by setting tone.

12. **complications**- part of the plot structure in which the protagonist takes some action to resolve the conflict and meets with some conflict such as danger, indecision, or hostility.

13. **climax**- the key scene; the point at which the main conflict must be resolved (often, but not always the moment in which the reader is most involved) *Note: the climax is not necessarily the most intense or interesting scene. If the main conflict of the story is not resolved, it is not the climax.*

14. **resolution** (falling action) - what happens after the conflict is solved; the "loose ends" are resolved

My notes about these terms:

15. **plot summary**- states the key beginning, middle, and end points in a brief form; always includes the title and author of the literary selection, and events are stated in the order in which they occurred

My notes about this term:

16. **setting**- *where and when* (not just where!!) the narrative takes place; can include the locale, the weather, the time of day and the time period; often inferred. *Functions of setting include: a. providing background, b. providing conflict, or c. establishing mood.*

My notes about this term:

17. **point of view**- the vantage point from which the writer has chosen to tell the story.

18. **first person**- one of the characters tells the story as a participant or an observer; uses personal pronouns (I, we, us etc.)

19. **third person limited**- the narrator is not a character in the story; reveals only one character's inner thoughts

20. **third person omniscient**- the narrator is not a character in the story, reveals more than one character's inner thoughts

My notes about these terms:

21. **conflict**- the opposition of persons or forces that brings about dramatic action central to the plot of a story. The main conflict must be resolved at the climax of the story (if it's not, the story may have no climax). The degree to which the reader cares about what happens often depends on the amount of conflict.

22. **internal conflict**- the problem or struggle is within the character himself (ex: sense of duty, opposing emotions, conscience)

23. **external conflict**- conflict that pits character against character, character against nature, or character against the forces of society (public opinion or tradition)

My notes about these terms:

24. **dialogue**- conversation between two or more characters

My notes about this term:

Character-Related Terms

25. **characters**- people, animals, and creatures in a fictional story (in nonfiction, they are just people, not characters!)

My notes about this term:

26. **protagonist**- the leading character of a short story, play, or novel; usually the character who is trying to accomplish something but faces challenges

My notes about this term:

27. **antagonist**- the adversary that opposes the protagonist; may be another character, the forces of nature, fate, or change

My notes about this term:

28. **characterization**- methods used by a writer to reveal the nature or personality of a character; complex characters often have conflicting characterization since real people often have conflicting elements of their personalities.

My notes about this term:

29. **direct characterization**- the writer tells us directly what kind of person the character is:

ex: It was Miss Murdstone who was arrived, and a gloomy-looking lady she was; dark, like her brother, whom she greatly resembled in face and voice.

My notes about this term:

30. **indirect characterization**- the reader has to take the evidence given about the character's physical description, thoughts, actions, words, and others' reactions to the character and use his or her own judgment to decide what the character is like:

ex: When she paid the coachman she took money out of a hard steel purse, and she kept the purse in a very jail of a bag which hung upon her arm by a heavy chain, and shut up like a bite.

Methods of indirect characterization:

1. *physical description*

3. *the character's actions and words (see dialect; colloquialism)*

2. *the character's thoughts*

4. *other characters' reactions to the character being described*

My notes about this term:

31. **character foil**- a secondary character who contrasts with the protagonist in order to highlight aspects of the main character's personality

My notes about this term:

32. **viewpoint**- the narrator's persona, his perspective (ex: in "The Bass, the River, and Sheila Mant," the story is told from the viewpoint of an older man who is reminiscing about his experiences as a teenager).

My notes about this term:

Language Devices - these devices relate to how an author purposefully and artistically crafts **language** in writing; includes sound devices like onomatopoeia and alliteration

33. **diction**- a stylistic device which refers to an author's word choice; used to create a personal style of writing. Most apparent through **evocative words** (words and language that conjure emotions, feelings, and senses). Can contribute to tone, mood, characterization, setting, and more. Related terms: connotation, denotation, dialect, idiom, colloquialism. *Note: it is not appropriate to say an author "uses" diction since any time anyone writes anything, he or she is "using" diction. It is more appropriate to connect diction to purpose: "The author's diction reveals..." and then highlight what is notable about the diction of a passage.*

My notes about this term:

34. **connotation** (connotative meaning)- the emotions or set of associations attached to a word that is implied rather than literal (e.g. "stink" has a negative connotation; "fragrance" has a positive connotation)

My notes about this term:

35. **denotation** (denotative meaning)- the dictionary definition of a word; the literal or cognitive meaning

My notes about this term:

36. **dialect**- a regional way of speaking a particular language; can add to characterization, mood, setting, etc.

My notes about this term:

37. **idiom**- an expression that has a meaning different from the meaning of its individual words; an expression that cannot be translated literally; some idioms are also colloquialisms. A type of figurative language.

My notes about this term:

38. **colloquialism**- the use of slang or informality in speech or writing, colloquialisms give a work a conversational, familiar tone; can include local and regional dialects; can add to characterization, mood, setting, etc.

My notes about this term:

39. **syntax**- the arrangement and sequence of words in sentences, clauses, and phrases. Can contribute to tone, mood, characterization, and more. *Note: similar to diction, it is not appropriate to say "The author uses syntax..." Any time an author puts words together, he or she is using syntax. It is more appropriate to connect syntax to purpose: "The author's syntax reveals..." and then highlight what is notable about the syntax of a passage.*

My notes about this term:

Literary Devices (some of the creative **concepts and ideas** with which the author enhances his or her work)

40. **symbol**- something concrete—a person, place, object or event that has meaning in itself, but stands for something beyond itself as well (that something may be concrete or abstract).

My notes about this term:

41. **imagery**- the sensory details or figurative language used to describe, arouse emotion, or represent abstractions
- sensory details**- details of sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch (senses = sensory)
 - figurative language**- figurative means “not literal,” so figurative language is language that is not meant to be taken literally. Figurative language is based on use of figures of speech such as:
 - simile**- comparison of two or more things using "like" or "as"
 - metaphor**- implied comparison of two or more things without using "like" or "as"
 - personification**- giving human qualities to inanimate objects, animals, or ideas
 - idiom**

My notes about these terms:

42. **motif**- a recurring theme, idea, word, phrase, or subject in a literary work. The color red is a motif in James Hurst’s “Scarlet Ibis.”

My notes about this term:

43. **mood**- the atmosphere or feeling or emotional aura that the writer creates; it may be accomplished through diction, sensory details, dialogue, or other devices (ex: Snoopy’s “It was a dark and stormy night”)

My notes about this term:

44. **flashback**- presentation of material that occurred prior to the opening scene. Methods used may include recollections of characters, dream sequences, and reveries. Can contribute to characterization.

My notes about this term:

45. **foreshadowing**- hints given by the author about what will occur later; often used to build suspense

My notes about this term:

46. **suspense**- the condition of not knowing what will happen next; often created by the delayed resolution of the plot’s conflict or by dramatic irony

My notes about this term:

47. **epiphany**- an intuitive grasp of reality achieved in a quick flash of recognition in which something usually simple and commonplace is seen in a new light; this sudden insight is the epiphany. *Note: an epiphany can contribute to characterization or may be/lead to the climax of a story.*

My notes about this term:

48. **allusion**- a reference within a literary work to another work of literature, art, or real event; the reference is usually brief and implied (so the audience has to “get it” without a lot of explanation)

Ex: That creepy guy reminds me of the big bad wolf! (allusion to Little Red Riding Hood)

My notes about this term:

