

Lit Terms

American Literature

Allegory: a story with a “hidden” meaning beneath its surface

Alliteration: repetition of the same sounds in a series of words

Allusion: passing reference to something or someone outside the immediate scope of the work

Analogy: an explanation of a complex concept or idea using a more familiar one

Anecdote: a short account of an interesting or humorous incident

Aphorism: a short statement of general truth

Atmosphere/Mood: how a literary work makes you feel

Catharsis: the “cleansing” of the soul brought on by watching or reading a tragic work that arouses pity and fear

Character (Round vs. Flat; Static vs. Dynamic): any living thing in a narrative

Characterization: the act of creating and developing a character

- **Direct:** when an author directly or explicitly states a character’s traits (“He was a gentle and affectionate boy”).
- **Indirect:** when an author indirectly or inexplicitly reveals a character’s traits (the words and actions of a character or the ways in which others respond) thereby forcing the reader to interpret those internal attributes.

Climax: the moment of highest intensity in a story

Conflict: opposition between or among characters (or forces or ideas) that shapes the action of the plot

Dialect: the language and/or word pronunciation specific to a region or group

Dialogue vs. Monologue: dialogue refers to the spoken words used by interacting characters;
monologue is a speech made by only one character with no interaction.

Diction vs Syntax: diction is word choice; syntax is the arrangement of those words in a sentence

Duality: an instance of opposition or contrast between two concepts or two aspects of something

Embody: to exemplify, express, or represent an idea or concept

Form vs. Function: form is the organization of the parts of work; function is the effect of those parts

Foreshadowing: clues to events that have yet to happen

Genre: a type of literature or film based on its form, style, or subject matter

Hyperbole: exaggeration to an absurd degree for emphasis

Ideal: the perfect example of something

Idiom: a figure of speech; an expression

Imagery: the collection of images an author uses to convey a feeling, idea, theme, etc

Irony: the expression of one’s meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite (verbal irony); or when the opposite happens of what one might *naturally* or *logically* expect to happen (structural irony)

Metaphor: a comparison between two seemingly different things

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Microcosm: a small, representative system having analogies to a larger system

Mood/Atmosphere: how a literary work makes you feel

Motif: something that appears or happens again and again and again

Narrative: the story

Narrator: the storyteller (not the same as the author)

Onomatopoeia: words that imitate the sounds they describe, such as *bang, hum, ding-dong, buzz*, etc

Parable: a short, simple, and symbolic story that teaches a lesson

Paradox: a statement or proposition that seems self-contradictory or absurd but in reality expresses a possible truth

Paradigm: a typical example or pattern of something; a model

Parallelism: repeated use of a grammatical structure

Parody: a work that imitates the style and/or tone of another work

Personification: giving animals, objects, or even ideas “human” qualities

Plot: the series of events that make up a story

Point-of-View: the perspective from which a story is told (1st person, 2nd person, 3rd person, limited, omniscient)

Protagonist vs. Antagonist: the protagonist is the main character; the antagonist is his/her main opponent

Pun: the humorous use of a word or phrase so as to emphasize or suggest its different meanings or applications, or the use of words that are alike or nearly alike in sound but different in meaning; a play on words

Repetition: the repeated use of any element of language

Rhetorical Question: question asked only for dramatic effect, as the answer is usually obvious

Satire: a satire uses wit, sarcasm, and ridicule to attack the vices and follies of humankind

Setting: the time, place, and atmosphere in which a story takes place

Simile: a comparison of two unlike things using “like” or “as”

Stock Character/Stereotype: a recognizable, conventional “type,” as opposed to a fully rounded character

Style: the combined—overall—effect of the various literary devices employed by an author

Symbol: something that stands for something else

Theme: the main idea(s) or insights that emerges from the story

Tone or Voice: what a literary work sounds like

Utopia vs. Dystopia: utopia is a perfect place where everyone lives in harmony; dystopia is the opposite