**Literature Terminology**

**A**

**Allegory:**

## Reading Between the Lines

Think about the story 'The Three Little Pigs.' Each pig builds a house out of different materials: straw, sticks, and bricks. The pig who spends the most time building his house and making his out of bricks is the only pig who gets eaten by the wolf.

An **allegory** is a poem, story, or picture that has a hidden meaning. It's like one really long **metaphor** that literally says one thing but means something else, like ''It's raining cats and dogs,'' which means to say that it's raining an extreme amount! While a metaphor is a short phrase, an allegory is a longer story.

So what about 'The Three Little Pigs'? This tale could be an allegory that teaches us a lesson: that projects that take time and effort pay off in the end.

**Alliteration:**

A series of words in a sentence all beginning with the same sound.

Examples: Cassie casually caressed the carefree cat; the Wicked Witch of the West went on her way to work; she sells seashells down by the seashore; Tim thought that Tammy was tired today.

**Antagonist:**

This is the main character in a work of fiction who comes into conflict with the protagonist (hero or heroine). Note that the antagonist does not always have to be a character; it could be a thing or a situation (a monster, a storm, a flood, etc.).

Example: Beauty and the Beast. The Beast is the antagonist.

**Assonance:**

using words that have the same or very similar vowel sounds near one another (as in "summer fun" and "rise high in the bright sky"), vowels are repeated, but consonants are not; popular in poetry and prose.

**C**

**Character:**

featured in a story and used as a medium to communicate/interact with the reader; he or she is given a specific attitude or attitude, appearance, name, etc., to direct a storyline. [Characters](https://www.scribendi.com/advice/creating_believable_characters.en.html) can be major or minor and static (unchanging) or dynamic (capable of change).

**Characterization:**

The method used by a writer to make a character in a story seem like a real person. Common ways for writers to illustrate characters is through their speech, dress, actions, and mannerisms.

**Climax:**

The moment of greatest intensity in a work of fiction; the most exciting and important part of a story, usually occurring at or near the end. The climax is the turning point in the action.

Example: The climax of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* occurs when Romeo, seeing Juliet's body and thinking she is dead, kills himself; then, when Juliet wakes up and sees that Romeo is dead, she kills herself.

**Complication:**

A situation or detail of a character that complicates the main thread of a plot. A complication builds up and develops the primary or central conflict in a literary work.

**Conflict:**

A struggle, disagreement, or difference between opposing forces in a literary work, usually resolved by the end of the work.

**Connotation:**

Connotation consists of the ideas, emotions, associations, or images that come to mind **beyond a word or text's literal meaning**. When we read or see something, we can think of it in literal terms.

Example: Shakespeare's Sonnet 18: "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" *A summer's day* connotes beauty.

**D**

**Denotation:**

The precise/actual meaning of a word; the opposite of connotation.

**Dénouement:**

The outcome of a plot; the resolution or final outcome of the main dramatic complication in a literary work. The dénouement reveals the answers to secrets/misunderstandings in the plot and comes after the climax.

**Dialogue:**

A written composition in which two or more characters are represented as conversing; the conversations between characters in a literary work, typically enclosed within quotation marks.

**Dramatic Irony:**

Dramatic irony, which often shows itself as some type of miscommunication, occurs when the reader becomes aware of something important of which the characters in the story are not aware.

**E**

**Exposition:**

This also refers to the first stage of a plot, in which necessary background information is provided.

**F**

**Falling Action:**

The action in a story that occurs after the climax, thus moving it toward its resolution.

**Fiction:**

A story about people and events that are not real; literature that tells a story that has been imagined by the writer. Non-fiction is the opposite.

**Figurative Language:**

Language that does not mean exactly what it states but instead requires the reader to make their own association from the comparison.

Examples: hyperbole, understatement, analogy, personification, euphemism, onomatopoeia, simile, metaphor

**Flashback:**

When a relevant past event is brought up in the story's current time, a common way for this to occur is through narration or a dream. Flashbacks create complications within the chronology of the plot to help enrich the experience of time. Flashforward is the opposite and shows the future.

**Flat Character:**

An uncomplicated character in a story. A flat character is the opposite of a round character. Although flat characters are important, they tend to remain static in their temperaments and personalities throughout the story.

Example: Mr. Collins in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is a flat character.

**Foil:**

A character in a story whose purpose is to bring out certain characteristics in either the main character or in other characters. Thus, the foil character will contrast with and parallel those characters.

Example: Draco Malfoy can be seen as a foil to Harry Potter, being placed in similar situations but making choices that highlight the differences between them.

**Foreshadowing:**

To give a suggestion of something that will happen in the story.

[Example](https://examples.yourdictionary.com/foreshadowing-examples.html): In Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, the line "the leaves fell early that year" foreshadows an early death.

**Frame story:**

A frame story is a narrative that frames or surrounds another story or set of stories. It usually appears at the beginning and end of that larger story and provides important context and key information.

**Freytag's Pyramid:**

A pyramidal diagram of the structure of a dramatic work; symbolizes Gustav Freytag's theory of dramatic structure. This "dramatic arc," as it is known, comprises five parts: exposition (inciting incident), rising action, climax, falling action (resolution), and dénouement.



*Image source: Kaede4/Wikimedia Commons*

**G**

**Genre**

Genre originates from the French word 'meaning' or 'type.' As a literary device, genre refers to a form, class, or type of literary work. The primary genres in literature are poetry, [drama](https://literarydevices.net/drama/)/[play](https://literarydevices.net/play/), [essay](https://literarydevices.net/essay/), [short story](https://literarydevices.net/short-story/), and [novel](https://literarydevices.net/novel/). The term genre is often used to denote literary sub-classifications or specific types of literature such as [comedy](https://literarydevices.net/comedy/), [tragedy](https://literarydevices.net/tragedy/), [epic](https://literarydevices.net/epic/) poetry, thriller, science [fiction](https://literarydevices.net/fiction/), [romance](https://literarydevices.net/romance/), etc.

**H**

**Hyperbole:**

A figure of speech that describes something as better or worse than it actually is by way of extreme exaggeration.

Example: She is as thin as a toothpick; I was so hungry, I could have eaten a horse!

**I**

**Image:**

A mental picture or representation of a person, place, or thing in a literary work. Images are a powerful literary tool, as images can convey states of being, feelings, thoughts, and actions.

**Imagery:**

The images collected and used in a written work add to the ambiance; language used by a writer causes readers to imagine pictures in their minds, which gives them a mental image of the people, places, and things in a story.

Example: The autumn leaves are a blanket on the ground.

**Irony:**

The incongruity between situations developed in a drama and the accompanying words or actions understood by the audience (but not by the characters); also called dramatic irony.

Example: In William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Macbeth appears to be loyal to Duncan, even though he plans Duncan's murder. Duncan does not know Macbeth's plans, but the audience knows what is going to happen.

**M**

**Metaphor:**

A figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them (as in "drowning in debt").

Examples:

*He is the apple of my eye*. In this example, there is, of course, no real apple in a person's eye. The "apple" here refers to someone beloved and held dear.

**Metonymy:**

A figure of speech in which a word is replaced by something that is associated with it; it may provide a common meaning for that word.

Examples:

Crown – in place of a royal person.

*We must wait to hear from the crown until we make any further decisions.*

**Mood:**

a conscious state of mind or predominant emotion.

**N**

**Narrative:**

A collection of events featured in a story placed in a specific order and recounted to tell a story. The story may or may not be true.

**Narrator:**

The person or character who tells and explains a story.

**O**

**Onomatopoeia:**

Words that imitate, sound like, or evoke their own meaning; the naming of a thing or action by a vocal imitation of the sound associated with it (such as buzz, hiss, or murmur).

**P**

**Personification:**

Attributing human characteristics to something not human (a thing, an animal, or an abstraction).

Example: Lightning danced across the sky; the flower begged to be watered.

**Plot:**

The direction of a story's main events and incidents and how they relate to one another.

**Point of View (POV):**

The angle from which a story is told or narrated. Point of view can be first-person, objective, limited omniscient, or omniscient.

– First-person: the narrator is either a character in the story or an observer.

– Objective: the narrator knows (or seems to know) no more than the reader.

– Limited omniscient: the narrator knows some things about the characters, but not everything.

–  Omniscient: the narrator knows everything about the characters.

Example: Using the word "I," this sentence is written in the first-person perspective: "It was times like these when I thought my father, who hated guns and had never been to any wars, was the bravest man who ever lived" (Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*).

**Protagonist:**

The principal or main character in a literary work.

Example: Beauty in Beauty and the Beast

**R**

**Recognition:**

the point at which a character acknowledges his or her situation for what it really is; the act of knowing who or what someone or something is because of previous knowledge or experience.

**Resolution:**

The act of finding an answer or solution to a conflict or problem.

**Reversal:**

The point in the plot at which the action turns in an unexpected direction; usually involves the protagonist.

**Rising Action:**

The set of conflicts in a story that leads up to the climax.

**Round Character:**

A character in a story who is complex, dynamic, and maybe even contradictory; a round character is the opposite of a flat character. A round character's personality, background, motives, and other features are fully delineated by the author.

Example: Harry Potter in the *Harry Potter* series is a round character, as readers are made aware of the intricacies and complexities of his background, motives, and choices.

**S**

**Satire:**

A way of using humor to show that someone or something is foolish, weak, bad, etc.; humor or a literary work that shows the weaknesses or flawed qualities of a person, government, society, etc.

**Setting:**

The time, place, and conditions in which the action of a story takes place and which establish its context.

**Simile:**

A comparison of two different things using the words *like* or *as*.

Example: His eyes were like blazing coals.

**Subject:**

The main topic of a piece of writing; what a story is about. A subject can be found in a sentence, a paragraph, an essay, or a book.

**Subplot:**

A subordinate plot in fiction that coexists with the main plot.

**Symbols**

**Symbols** are that stand for more than just themselves. They can even represent feelings or thoughts

Common symbols used in literature include colors, animals, seasons, and weather.

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| --- | --- |
| **Symbol** | **Meaning** |
| Color - White | Innocence, peace |
| Color - Green | Envy |
| Color - Black | Mystery, death |
| Color - Blue | Calm |
| Heart | Love |
| Key | Solution to a problem |
| Fire | Knowledge, passion |
| Dove | Peace |
| Eagle | Freedom |
| Snake | Evil |
| Owl | Wisdom |
| Spring | Beginning, birth |
| Flowers | Beauty, calm |
| Wind/storms | Anger, trouble |
| Fox | Cleverness, sneakiness |

**T**

**Tale:**

A story about imaginary events; an exciting or dramatic story; a story about someone's actual experiences; an exciting story that may not be entirely true.

Example: Fairy tales, such as *Cinderella*.

**Theme:**

An underlying message or the big idea of a story. This message could tell more about human nature or life in general. Many stories have more than one theme.

Examples:

* Courage
* Perseverance
* Family
* Friendship
* Growing up
* Acceptance
* Loyalty
* Transformation
* Compassion
* Honesty

**Tone:**

Tone describes how a writer feels about a character, event, or subject. Some readings have optimistic tones (positive), while others have pessimistic tones (negative). Paying particular attention to the details, imagery, and language will help the reader determine the tone.

**Tragic Hero/Tragic Figure:**

A protagonist whose story comes to an unhappy end due to his or her own behavior and character flaws.

Example: Shakespeare's *Hamlet*is a tragic hero.

**W**

**Writing Style:**

How an author chooses to write words for his or her readers, including how he or she arranges sentences, paragraphs, dialogue, and verse. Style also refers to how the author develops ideas and actions with description, imagery, and other literary techniques.