

Handbook of Literary Terms

- allegory - A story in which the characters, setting, and events stand for abstract or moral concepts. Allegories have two meanings: a literal meaning and a symbolic meaning. Example-Animal Farm by George Orwell
- alliteration - The repetition of consonant sounds. Example: Sally sells sea shells at the sea shore.
- allusion - A reference to a statement, person, place, event, or thing that is known from literature, history, , myth, politics, sports, science or pop culture. Example: In the songs, "Jesus Walks" by Kanye West and "Gangsta's Paradise" by Coolio, both lyricists make an allusion to the bible when they quote the line from Psalm 23, "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death."
- ambiguity - An event or situation that may be interpreted in more than one way; it could also mean expressing oneself in a vague or unclear manner.
- anaphora - Repetition of a word, phrase, or clause at the beginning of two or more sentences in a row. This is a deliberate form of repetition and helps make the writer's point more coherent. Example: Martin Luther King, Jr. repeats the beginning phrase, "I have a dream" in his speech on the Washington Mall.
- antagonist - The character or force that opposes or blocks the protagonist in a narrative. Example: In The Crucible, Abigail is the antagonist, and John Proctor is the protagonist.
- assonance - The repetition of vowel sounds. Example: The poet, e.e. cummings writes: "...on a proud round cloud in white high night."
- ballad - A song or songlike poem that tells a story. They usually tell a sensational story of tragedy, adventure, betrayal, revenge, and jealousy. Example: Green Day's "The Battle of Wilhelm Fink"
- blank verse - poetry that is not rhymed.
- carpe diem - A Latin phrase that means "seize the day."
- characterization - the process by which a writer reveals the personality of a character. Types of characters are: static, dynamic, round, flat, stereotypical, and caricatures.
- climax - The point of greatest emotional intensity or suspense in a plot when the conflict is decided, one way or another.
- comedy - In general, a story that ends happily.
- connotations - A meaning, association, or emotion that a word suggests. Example: The "n" word's connotation has changed from a word of degradation to a word of camaraderie.
- couplet - Two consecutive lines of poetry that rhyme. Example: From Romeo and Juliet, "Parting is such sweet sorrow. That I shall say good night till it me morrow."
- denotation - The literal, dictionary definition of a word.

Handbook of Literary Terms

diction - A writer's or speaker's choice of words.

epitaph - An inscription on a tombstone. Example: R.I.P.

epiphany - A moment of sudden insight or revelation that a character experiences; an "Aha!" moment when one understands.

ethos - ethical or moral appeal; When a writer tries to persuade or involve an audience/reader by appealing to his ethics, morals, respect, reputation, and sense of right and wrong.

farce - A type of comedy in which ridiculous and often stereotyped characters are involved in farfetched, silly situations.

figurative language or figures of speech - A word or words that are not literal, but symbolic. Figurative language expresses ideas in fresh, vivid, and imaginative ways. Examples: metaphors, similes, personification.

foil - A character who is used as a contrast to another character. Example: Bart and Lisa Simpson.

foreshadowing - The use of clues to hint at what is going to happen later in the plot.

free verse - poetry that has no regular meter or rhyme.

hyperbole - A figure of speech that uses exaggeration to express strong emotion or create a comic effect. Example: "I will die without your love" or "I could eat a horse."

imagery - Language that appeals to all the senses and produces a vivid impression.

irony - A contrast or discrepancy between expectation and reality- between what is said and what is really meant, between what is expected and what really happens, between what appears to be true and what is really true.

a. verbal irony - When a writer or speaker says one thing but really means the opposite. Example: calling a 6'8" man by the nickname of "Shorty" , Biggie Smalls

b. situational irony - occurs when what actually happens is the opposite of what is expected. Example: My boyfriend takes me out for a special dinner so that he can discuss something important with me. However, instead of "popping the question," which is what I expected, he breaks up with me.

c. dramatic irony - occurs when the audience or the reader knows something that the character in the book, movie, or play does not know. Example: In horror movies, many times the audience knows where the killer is lurking; however, the character in the film is completely unaware.

Juxtaposition - placing two disparate images side by side.

logos - logical appeal; persuading an audience or reader by using logic to support one's viewpoint.

Handbook of Literary Terms

lyric poetry - Poetry that focuses on expressing emotions or thoughts, rather than telling a story.

metaphor - A figure of speech that makes a comparison between two unlikely things. Example: Men are dogs.

mood- The atmosphere of the story.

motif - In literature, a word, character, object, image, metaphor or idea that recurs in a work. Example: the boots in *All Quiet OnThe Western Front*

non-sequitur - Latin phrase meaning it "does not follow." When one statement is not logically connected to another.

myth - An anonymous story that usually explains a belief, custom, or mysterious phenomenon. Example: Greek mythology

onomatopoeia - The use of a word whose sound imitates or suggests its meaning. Example: Boom! Pow! squish, crunch, clap, snort, etc.

oxymoron - A figure of speech that combines two contradictory terms. Examples: bitter sweet. Biggie Small, jumbo shrimp, pretty ugly, same difference, thunderous silence, etc.

parable - A short, allegory that teaches a moral or religious lesson about life. Examples: Aesop's Fables & "The Parable of the Prodigal Son"

paradox - A statement that appears to be contradictory but is true. Example: "I must be cruel, in order to be kind." (Shakespeare)

parody - The imitation of a work of literature, music, art, or movie for amusement or instruction. Example: Scary Movie, The Daily Show, Weird Al Yankovic's song parodies, such as "Another One Rides the Bus" for "Another One Bites the Dust."

pathos - emotional appeal; using pity, sympathy, and tender emotions to sway the audience or reader.

persona - a fictional voice, mask, or alter ego.

personification - A figure of speech in which inanimate objects, animals. Ideas, or abstractions are endowed with human traits. Examples: Money talks. Love Is blind.

point of view - The vantage point from which a writer tells a story. There are three main points of view: omniscient, first person, and limited third person.

1. omniscient - all knowing point of view; the narrator is a godlike observer who can tell us what all the characters are thinking and feeling.

2. first person - The narrator tells us his or her story using the pronoun "I." 3. limited third person - The narrator is an observer of the story and tells us what happened from his/her vantage point.

Handbook of Literary Terms

pun - a play on words that are identical or similar in sound but have sharply diverse meanings. Example: when Mercutio is bleeding to death in *Romeo and Juliet*, he says, "Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man."

protagonist - The main character in fiction, drama, or narrative poetry. Example: Harry Potter

quatrain - A four-line stanza or poem, or a group of four lines in a rhyme scheme.

refrain - A repeated word, phrase, line, or group of lines.

repetition - Is the deliberate use of any element of language more than once; it can be a sound, word, phrase, sentence, grammatical pattern, or rhythmic pattern.

rhetoric - The art of effective communication.

rhyme - The repetition of sounds in two or more words or phrases that appear close to one another.
Example: *Blue's Clues*

sound devices - are stylistic techniques that convey meaning through sound. Examples: rhyme, beats, repetitions, assonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia

setting - The time, place, date, climate, and mood of a story.

simile - A figure of speech that makes a comparison between two things by using "like" or "as." Example: "Men are like dogs."

stanza - A group of consecutive lines in a poem that form a single unit. A stanza in a poem is something like a paragraph in prose: It often expresses a unit of thought.

stream of consciousness - A writing style that tries to depict a random flow of thought, emotions, memories and associations rushing through a character's mind.

symbol - A person, place, thing, or event that stands for itself and for something beyond itself. Example: A dove symbolizes peace. A heart symbolizes love.

syntax - means the arrangement of words and the order of grammatical elements in a sentence.

theme - The central idea or insight of a work of literature.

tone - The writer's attitude. There is a difference between mood and tone. Example: the mood of Jonathan Swift's essay, *A Modest Proposal* is serious, and yet the author's tone is satirical.

tragedy - A play, novel, or other narrative depicting serious events in which the main character comes to an unhappy end. Example: *Romeo and Juliet*

wit - A quality of speech that combines verbal cleverness with keen perception.