

LITERARY TERMS

ALLEGORY story or poem in which characters, settings, and events stand for other people or events or for abstract ideas or qualities.

EXAMPLE: *Animal Farm*; *Dante's Inferno*; *Lord of the Flies*

ALLITERATION repetition of the same or similar consonant sounds in words that are close together.

EXAMPLE: "When the two youths turned with the flag they saw that much of the **regiment** had crumbled away, and the dejected **remnant** was coming slowly back." –Stephen Crane (Note how regiment and remnant are being used; the regiment is gone, a remnant remains...)

ALLUSION reference to someone or something that is known from history, literature, religion, politics, sports, science, or another branch of culture. An indirect reference to something (usually from literature, etc.).

AMBIGUITY deliberately suggesting two or more different, and sometimes conflicting, meanings in a work. An event or situation that may be interpreted in more than one way - this is done on purpose by the author, when it is not done on purpose, it is vagueness, and detracts from the work.

ANALOGY Comparison made between two things to show how they are alike

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.

ANASTROPHE Inversion of the usual, normal, or logical order of the parts of a sentence. Purpose is rhythm or emphasis or euphony. It is a fancy word for inversion.

ANECDOTE Brief story, told to illustrate a point or serve as an example of something, often shows character of an individual

ANTAGONIST Opponent who struggles against or blocks the hero, or protagonist, in a story.

ANTIMETABOLE Repetition of words in successive clauses in reverse grammatical order.

Moliere: "One should eat to live, not live to eat." In poetry, this is called **chiasmus**.

ANTITHESIS Balancing words, phrases, or ideas that are strongly contrasted, often by means of grammatical structure.

DYNAMIC CHARACTER is one who changes in some important way as a result of the story's action.

FLAT CHARACTER has only one or two personality traits. They are one dimensional, like a piece of cardboard. They can be summed up in one phrase.

ROUND CHARACTER has more dimensions to their personalities---they are complex, just a real people are.

CHIASMUS In poetry, a type of rhetorical balance in which the second part is syntactically balanced against the first, but with the parts reversed. Coleridge: "Flowers are lovely, love is flowerlike." In prose this is called **antimetabole**.

CLICHE is a word or phrase, often a figure of speech, that has become lifeless because of overuse. Avoid clichés like the plague. (That cliché is intended.)

COLLOQUIALISM a word or phrase in everyday use in conversation and informal writing but is inappropriate for formal situations.

Example: "He's **out of his head** if he thinks I'm **gonna go for** such a stupid idea.

COMEDY in general, a story that ends with a happy resolution of the conflicts faced by the main character or characters.

CONCEIT an elaborate metaphor that compares two things that are startlingly different. Often an extended metaphor.

CONFESSIONAL POETRY a twentieth century term used to describe poetry that uses intimate material from the poet's life.

CONFLICT the struggle between opposing forces or characters in a story.

EXTERNAL CONFLICT conflicts can exist between two people, between a person and nature or a machine or between a person a whole society.

INTERNAL CONFLICT a conflict can be internal, involving opposing forces within a person's mind.

CONNOTATION the associations and emotional overtones that have become attached to a word or phrase, in addition to its strict dictionary definition.

COUPLET two consecutive rhyming lines of poetry.

DIALECT a way of speaking that is characteristic of a certain social group or of the inhabitants of a certain geographical area.

DESCRIPTION a form of discourse that uses language to create a mood or emotion.

EXPOSITION one of the four major forms of discourse, in which something is explained or “set forth.”

NARRATIVE the form of discourse that tells about a series of events.

EXPLICATION act of interpreting or discovering the meaning of a text, usually involves close reading and special attention to figurative language.

FABLE a very short story told in prose or poetry that teaches a practical lesson about how to succeed in life.

FARCE a type of comedy in which ridiculous and often stereotyped characters are involved in silly, far-fetched situations.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE Words which are inaccurate if interpreted literally, but are used to describe. Similes and metaphors are common forms.

FLASHBACK a scene that interrupts the normal chronological sequence of events in a story to depict something that happened at an earlier time.

FOIL A character who acts as contrast to another character. Often a funny side kick to the dashing hero, or a villain contrasting the hero.

FORESHADOWING the use of hints and clues to suggest what will happen later in a plot.

FREE VERSE poetry that does not conform to a regular meter or rhyme scheme.

HYPERBOLE a figure of speech that uses an incredible exaggeration or overstatement, for effect. “If I told you once, I’ve told you a million times....”

HYPOTACTIC sentence marked by the use of connecting words between clauses or sentences, explicitly showing the logical or other relationships between them. (Use of such syntactic subordination of just one clause to another is known as **hypotaxis**).
I am tired because it is hot.

IMAGERY the use of language to evoke a picture or a concrete sensation of a person, a thing, a place, or an experience.

INVERSION the reversal of the normal word order in a sentence or phrase.

IRONY a discrepancy between appearances and reality.

DEAD METAPHOR is a metaphor that has been used so often that the comparison is no longer vivid: "The head of the house", "the seat of the government", "a knotty problem" are all dead metaphors.

MIXED METAPHOR is a metaphor that has gotten out of control and mixes its terms so that they are visually or imaginatively incompatible. "The President is a lame duck who is running out of gas."

METONYMY a figure of speech in which a person, place, or thing, is referred to by something closely associated with it. "We requested from the crown support for our petition." The crown is used to represent the monarch.

MOOD An atmosphere created by a writer's diction and the details selected.

MOTIF a recurring image, word, phrase, action, idea, object, or situation used throughout a work (or in several works by one author), unifying the work by tying the current situation to previous ones, or new ideas to the theme. Kurt Vonnegut uses "So it goes" throughout Slaughterhouse-Five to remind the reader of the senselessness of death.

MOTIVATION the reasons for a character's behavior.

ONOMATOPOEIA the use of words whose sounds echo their sense. "Pop." "Zap."

OXYMORON a figure of speech that combines opposite or contradictory terms in a brief phrase. "Jumbo shrimp." "Pretty ugly." "Bitter-sweet"

PARABLE a relatively short story that teaches a moral, or lesson about how to lead a good life.

PARADOX a statement that appears self-contradictory, but that reveals a kind of truth.

KOAN is a paradox used in Zen Buddhism to gain intuitive knowledge: "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

PARALLEL STRUCTURE (parallelism) the repetition of words or phrases that have similar grammatical structures.

PARATACTIC SENTENCE simply juxtaposes clauses or sentences. I am tired: it is hot.

PARODY a work that makes fun of another work by imitating some aspect of the writer's style.

PERIODIC sentence that places the main idea or central complete thought at the end of the sentence, after all introductory elements.

QUATRAIN a poem consisting of four lines, or four lines of a poem that can be considered as a unit.

REFRAIN a word, phrase, line, or group of lines that is repeated, for effect, several times in a poem.

RHYTHM a rise and fall of the voice produced by the alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables in language.

RHETORIC Art of effective communication, especially persuasive discourse.

RHETORICAL QUESTION a question asked for an effect, and not actually requiring an answer.

ROMANCE in general, a story in which an idealized hero or heroine undertakes a quest and is successful.

SATIRE a type of writing that ridicules the shortcomings of people or institutions in an attempt to bring about a change.

SIMILE a figure of speech that makes an explicitly comparison between two unlike things, using words such as like, as, than, or resembles.

SOLILOQUY a long speech made by a character in a play while no other characters are on stage.

STEREOTYPE a fixed idea or conception of a character or an idea which does not allow for any individuality, often based on religious, social, or racial prejudices.

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS a style of writing that portrays the inner (often chaotic) workings of a character's mind.

STYLE the distinctive way in which a writer uses language: a writer's distinctive use of diction, tone, and syntax.

SUSPENSE a feeling of uncertainty and curiosity about what will happen next in a story.

SYMBOL a person, place, thing, or event that has meaning in itself and that also stands for something more than itself.

SYNECDOCHE a figure of speech in which a part represents the whole. "If you don't drive properly, you will lose your wheels." The wheels represent the entire car.

SYNTACTIC FLUENCY Ability to create a variety of sentence structures, appropriately complex and/or simple and varied in length.

PURITANISM Writing style of America's early English-speaking colonists. emphasizes obedience to God and consists mainly of journals, sermons, and poems.

RATIONALISM a movement that began in Europe in the seventeenth century, which held that we can arrive at truth by using our reason rather than relying on the authority of the past, on the authority of the Church, or an institution. **ALSO CALLED NEOCLASSICISM AND AGE OF REASON**

REALISM a style of writing, developed in the nineteenth century, that attempts to depict life accurately without idealizing or romanticizing it.

REGIONALISM literature that emphasizes a specific geographic setting and that reproduces the speech, behavior, and attitudes of the people who live in that region.

ROMANTICISM a revolt against Rationalism that affected literature and the other arts, beginning in the late eighteenth century and remaining strong throughout most of the nineteenth century.

SURREALISM in movement in art and literature that started in Europe during the 1920s. Surrealists wanted to replace conventional realism with the full expression of the unconscious mind, which they considered to be more real than the "real" world of appearances.

SYMBOLISM a literary movement that originated in late nineteenth century France, in which writers rearranged the world of appearances in order to reveal a more truthful version of reality.

TRANSCENDENTALISM a nineteenth century movement in the Romantic tradition, which held that every individual can reach ultimate truths through spiritual intuition, which transcends reasons and sensory experience.

TIME LINE:

Puritanism 1620 - 1770s

Neoclassic 1770s - early 1800s

Romanticism early 1800s - 1870s

Realism 1850s -early 1900s

Regionalism 1884 - early 1900s

Naturalism - late 1800s - mid 1900s

Modernism - 1920s - [1945]

[Post-Modernism - 1945 -]