

GLOSSARY OF LITERARY AND WRITING TERMS

act

large units within a dramatic work of literature

allegory

a story with both literal and symbolic meanings, with characters, occurrences, and setting representing certain ideas

Ex. George Orwell's *Animal Farm*; John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*; Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*

alliteration

repetition of the same consonant or sound at the beginning of words

Ex. "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers."

allusion

a reference to a real or fictional person, place, historical event, or work of art

Ex. "He said if I warn't so ignorant, but had read a book called *Don Quixote*, I know without asking." [Mark Twain, from *Huckleberry Finn*]

analogy

the expression of a relationship between ideas which are dissimilar

Ex. "Nature's first green is gold/ Her hardest hue to hold./ Her early leaf's a flower;/But only so an hour." [Robert Frost, from "Nothing Gold Can Stay"]

anecdote

a story that serves to entertain or to make a point

antagonist

a character or force conflicting with the protagonist and his/her goal

Ex. Voldemort is the antagonist to Harry Potter. [J.K. Rowling, from the *Harry Potter* series]

aside

- in drama: a short speech from an actor on stage, which is inaudible to other actors

Ex. from drama: “Time, thou anticipatest my dread exploits” [William Shakespeare, from *Macbeth* 4:1]

- in writing: adding additional information to a point, placed within commas, hyphens, or parentheses

Ex. from writing: “Yes, often, I am reminded of her, and in one of my vast array of pockets, I have kept her story to retell. It is one of the small legion I carry, each one extraordinary in its own right. Each one an attempt—an immense leap of an attempt—to prove to me that you, and your human existence, are worth it. Here it is. One of a handful. *The Book Thief*. If you feel like it, come with me. I will tell you a story. I’ll show you something” [Markus Zusak, from *The Book Thief*, 15).

assonance

repetition of vowel sounds

Ex. “I ask them to take a poem/ and hold it up to the light/ like a color slide/ or press an ear against its hive.” [Billy Collins, from “Introduction to Poetry”]

atmosphere

the mood the reader gets from the setting, characters, and tone of the author

Ex. “Once upon a midnight dreary” [Edgar Allan Poe, from “The Raven”]

autobiography

nonfiction that reveals the author’s own life story

biography

nonfiction that reveals the life story of someone other than the author

blank verse

poetry containing unrhymed iambic pentameter

Ex. “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,/ That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,/ And spills the upper boulders in the sun.” [Robert Frost, from “Mending Wall”]

brainstorming

a pre-writing activity that involves the open and free sharing of ideas to generate and develop content for writing

characterization

the development of a character throughout the text. Direct characterization involves the author telling the reader what a character is like; indirect characterization is achieved through the characters' dialogue or actions.

Ex. (direct characterization) "She was one of those pretty, charming young women who are born, as if by an error of Fate, into a petty official's family. She had no dowry, no hopes, not the slightest chance of being appreciated, understood, loved, and married by a rich and distinguished man..." [Guy de Maupassant, from *The Necklace*]

Ex. (indirect characterization) "...she would think of exquisite dishes served on gorgeous china, and of gallantries whispered and received with sphinx-like smiles while eating the pink flesh of trout or wings of grouse." [Guy de Maupassant, from *The Necklace*]

conflict

a necessary element of fiction, and often the central aspect of the plot. The conflict always involves the protagonist and antagonist (keeping in mind that either/both may not be a human force.) The main types of conflict are as follows:

- *internal* - a character is conflicted within him/herself (character vs. self)
 - *external* - a character is hindered by another character (character vs. character), by a group of people (character vs. society), or by outside forces (character vs. fate/nature)
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connotation

the implied (figurative) meaning of a word

consonance

repetition of consonant sounds, especially at the ends of words

Ex. "He ran his hand/ over it, called me a good man, roared away." [William Stafford, from "Fifteen"]

context clue

a word, phrase, or passage that helps to explain a section of the text

couplet

two successive rhyming lines, usually with similar length and meter

Ex. "For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings/ That then I scorn to change my state with kings." [William Shakespeare, from "Sonnet 29"]

denotation

the literal (dictionary) meaning of a word

dialogue

conversation between characters; within prose, quotation marks indicate a speaker's words

diction

word choice

drama

a genre of writing that includes dialogue and stage directions; it is intended to be performed on stage

dynamic character

term used to describe a character who changes during the course of the story

enunciation

the manner of pronouncing words or syllables

epic

a long narrative poem, usually about heroes and/or gods

Ex. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are usually regarded as the first important epic poems and are considered to define the form.

epic simile

a longer, extensive simile, also referred to as a Homeric simile, in which two dissimilar subjects are compared

Ex. "As a mountain falcon, swiftest of all birds, swoops down upon some cowering dove – the dove flies before him but the falcon with a shrill scream follows close after, resolved to have her – even so did Achilles make straight for Hector with all his might, while Hector fled under the Trojan wall as fast as his limbs could take him." [Homer, from *The Iliad*]

expository

a genre of writing in which the writer intends to report, discuss, explain, speculate, and/or evaluate a subject; nonfiction that provides information, explains a process, or discusses ideas

fiction

writing in which the plot and characters are imagined

figurative

sometimes referred to as "reading between the lines"; language and or ideas which are not literal. The figurative meaning is the "deeper" meaning.

flat character

term used to describe a character who shows only one trait

fluent

a word used to describe writing that is smooth, clear, and logical

foil

a character who offers a distinct contrast to another character

Ex. Draco Malfoy is a foil to Harry Potter [J.K. Rowling, from the Harry Potter series]

foreshadowing

hints or clues that suggest future occurrences

free verse

poetry written using the natural rhythms of speech, unlike other poetry that contains a rhythmical pattern

genre

the different types or categories of writing. The three major categories are prose, drama, and poetry

historical fiction

a story that is based upon some historical facts. At least one element of the story must be factual.

hyperbole

language utilizing an extreme exaggeration

Ex. "And I will love thee still, my dear,/ Till all the seas go dry." [Robert Burns, from "A Red, Red Rose"]

iambic foot

an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.

iambic pentameter

a type of meter (rhythmic structure) which contains five iambic feet

Ex. "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" [William Shakespeare, from "Sonnet 18"]

imagery

language that evokes one or all of the five senses

Ex. sight: "The shadows where the Mewlips dwell are dark"
smell: "Beside the rotting river stand"
sound: "And slow and softly rings their bell"
taste: "And the Mewlips feed"
touch: "The cellars where the Mewlips sit are deep and dank and cold"
[J.R.R. Tolkien, from "The Mewlips"]

impromptu

a spontaneous, unrehearsed response or presentation

indirect characterization

when an author shows the reader traits of a character allowing the reader to make his/her own interpretations

infer

to draw a conclusion based on context clues

inference

a conclusion that is made based on context clues

inflection/intonation

the change in the pitch and tone of the voice

inversion

the reversal of the usual order of words to create special effect or for emphasis

Ex. "Slowly and smoothly went the ship" [Samuel Taylor Coleridge, from "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"]

This sentence would traditionally be written, "The ship went slowly and smoothly"

irony

the contrast between what is expected, or appears to be, and what actually is

- *verbal irony*: the contrast between what is said and what is actually meant
 - *irony of situation*: an occurrence that is the opposite of what is expected or intended
 - *dramatic (or situational) irony*: when the audience or reader knows more than the characters do
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juxtaposition

when themes, ideas, or characters are paralleled to one another to show contrast

Ex. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was

the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness” [Charles Dickens, from *A Tale of Two Cities*]

literal

refers to comprehending text where the information is clearly stated, sometimes referred to as “reading the lines”

metacognition

a process by which the learner is consciously thinking about how he/she is learning. This is also known as “thinking about thinking.”

meter

the rhythmical pattern of a poem designated by its stressed and unstressed syllables

memoir

the writing of one’s life or personal experiences

metaphor

the comparison of two often unlike things, saying that one is the other

Ex. “The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor” [Alfred Noyes, from “The Highwayman”]

- *extended metaphor* (also called a conceit): a metaphor which is developed at great length, occurring frequently in or throughout a work.

Ex. “This old woman/ no longer cares/ what others think/ but spits her black tobacco/ any which way/ stretching full length/ from her bumpy bed./ Finally up/ she sprinkles ashes/ on the snow” [Wendy Rose, from “Loo Wit”]

monologue

in a play, a long speech given by one character and addressed to another character(s)

mood

the feeling a reader gets from the descriptive details of the setting, characters, and/or author’s tone. This is similar to atmosphere.

moral

the lesson taught by a literary piece. Morals may be directly stated or implied.

Ex. “But children, remember Sarah Stout/ And always take the garbage out!” [Shel Silverstein, from “Sarah Cynthia Sylvia Stout Would Not Take The Garbage Out”]

motif

a recurrent or dominant thematic element or idea in an artistic or literary work

myth

a traditional story, usually of unknown authorship, that tells about the actions of gods or heroes or explains how something came to be, such as nature or customs

Ex. Stories from mythology such as *Persephone*

narrative

the telling of a story which can be either factual (non-fiction) or imagined (fiction)

non-fiction

factual writing information, includes such genres as biography, autobiography, encyclopedia, magazine, and newspaper

onomatopoeia

a word that imitates the sound it represents

Ex. "Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot! Had they heard it? The horse hoofs ringing clear" [Alfred Noyes, from "The Highwayman"]

oxymoron

Placing two contradictory words together to express meaning, such as *pretty ugly*, *deafening silence*, *jumbo shrimp*, *sweet sorrow*

Ex. "Parting is such sweet sorrow" [William Shakespeare, from *Romeo and Juliet*]

paragraph

the grouping of similar information into one cohesive group of sentences including topic sentence, supporting details, transition words, and concluding sentence

parallel structure (also called **parallelism**)

the use of similar patterns of words or grammatical forms to express similar or related ideas or ideas of equal importance. Using parallel structure creates rhythm and balance and enables the writer to present ideas clearly, concisely, and smoothly.

- Non-parallel: Gold requires hand-eye coordination, flexibility, and to be able to concentrate.
- Parallel: Gold requires hand-eye coordination, flexibility, and concentration.

Ex. "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."
[John F. Kennedy]

peer editing

the process in which students conference with their classmates to provide feedback on a written draft. This process should strengthen the writing/editing/revising skills of both the author and the editor.

personification

when non-human subjects are given human qualities

Ex. "Perhaps the night dreams that it is no longer night" [Anna Maria Iza, from "Formula"]

persuasion

a type of writing that is meant to sway the reader's feelings, beliefs, or actions. Persuasive writing is normally used to appeal to both the mind and emotions of the reader.

point of view

the angle from which a story is told.

- *First Person Point of View* means that one of the characters is telling the story.
 - *Third Person Point of View* means that someone outside of the story is telling it.
 - An *omniscient third person narrator* can tell the readers what any character thinks and feels.
 - A *limited third person narrator* tells the story through one character, and reveals only that character's thoughts and feelings.
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plot structure

the development of a problem and solution in a story:

- *Exposition* (usually at the beginning of the story) explains what happened before the story started, the setting of the story, and often introduces the characters.
 - *Rising Action* is the central part of a story during which various problems arise, and it leads up to the climax.
 - *Climax* is the main turning point of the action in the story. It is usually the highest point of tension.
 - *Falling Action* is the part of a story that follows the climax, or turning point.
 - *Resolution* occurs at the end of the story, during which the problem is resolved.
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poetry

a type of expressive writing in which an author's feelings are stated through the use of sensory details. Poetry is written in a variety of forms, and this adds to the uniqueness of this form of expression

prose

normal, everyday writing, including everything *except* poetry, drama, or song

protagonist

the main character in a work of literature, who undergoes a transformation

realistic fiction

a story in which the characters, setting, and plot sound believable but are not

reflection

a genre of writing in which an author considers both the process and the product of a writing experience as it relates to his/her development as a writer. It is also known as "writing about writing."

round character

term used to describe a character who is fully developed, showing both negative and positive character traits

Ex. In "The Scarlet Ibis" by James Hurst, the character named Brother demonstrates frustration, anger, love, and remorse.

satire

the use of humor, irony, or ridicule to expose or criticize vice or stupidity

scene

smaller units within acts of a work of drama

setting

the time and place of a story

show, don't tell

a technique used by authors that provide the necessary clues to create an impression for the reader. Rather than outright saying what happens ("don't tell"), the author uses sensory details and imagery ("show")

simile

a comparison of two dissimilar things, using "like" or "as"

Ex. “. . . the oriole nest in the elms was untenanted and rocked back and forth like an empty cradle.” [James Hurst, from “The Scarlet Ibis”]

soliloquy

a long speech from an actor on stage, which expresses his/her thoughts and is inaudible to other actors

sonnet

a fourteen-line lyrical poem, which is usually written in rhymed iambic pentameter following an *abab cdcd efef gg* rhyme structure

stage directions

found in drama, these words are written in italics and provide information describing the setting, as well as the appearance, behavior, and movement of the characters

stanza

marks the division between lines in a poem

static character

term used to describe a character who does not change during the course of the story

Ex. In “The Most Dangerous Game” by Richard Connell, the antagonist, General Zaroff, is a game hunter of humans who will never change his ways.

stressed syllable

in a multi-syllabic word, the syllable which is emphasized

symbol

using a concrete object to mean more than its literal meaning (usually an abstract idea)

Ex. In *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry, Mama cares for a struggling plant, which represents the struggles and hopes of her family.

syntax

the grammatical arrangement of words to form phrases, clauses, and sentences.

theme

the message the author intends to express through his/her text, which is often a universal concept

theme indicator

word(s) that represent the "big ideas" the author is writing about, which guide a reader to understand the theme of the work

theme statement

a sentence that states a work's theme by elaborating on the "theme indicator"

tone

the attitude an author has towards his/her subject

transitional words/phrases

used by authors to show the relationship between/among ideas. Transitional words help to connect ideas and add to the organization of the piece

Ex. therefore, however, similarly, furthermore

universal

related to the human experience

unstressed syllable

in a multi-syllabic word, the syllable that is not emphasized

varied sentence structure

a technique an author uses to enhance any written piece. It involves varied sentence beginnings, a varied pattern of subject and verb positioning, and the inclusion of phrases and/or clauses to build a variety of sentences

writing process

the stages of producing a written work, including pre-writing, drafting, editing, revising, and publishing
