

Literary Terms and Definitions

1	Allegory: a story that can be understood literally and symbolically.
2	Alliteration: the repetition of initial consonant sounds within a series of words. "He lies on the <u>s</u> andy shores,/ <u>S</u> o quiet, so quiet, he <u>s</u> carcely <u>s</u> nores." –James Reeves
3	Allusion: reference to historical, mythical, or literary person, place or thing. Plan ahead. It was not raining when <u>N</u> oah <u>b</u> uilt the <u>a</u> rk. Come to the party. Don't be such a <u>S</u> crooge.
4	Analogy: a comparison or similarity between like features of two different things; used to help reader/listener understand better: your heart is like a pump for your body.
5	Anaphora: the repetition of a word, phrase, or clause at the beginning of successive clauses or sentences.
6	Anecdote: a brief story of an individual or incident.
7	Antagonist: the character who opposes the main character.
8	Antithesis: contrasting ideas in a parallel arrangement of words. "It was the <u>b</u> est of times, it was the <u>w</u> orst of times, it was the age of <u>w</u> isdom, it was the age of <u>f</u> oolishness..." –Charles Dickens
9	Aphorism: a brief saying embodying a moral. Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads. –Henry David Thoreau Failure to prepare is preparing to fail. –Ben Franklin
10	Apostrophe: [POETRY] directly addressing an absent person, abstract concept, or inanimate object.
11	Aside: [DRAMA] words spoken by a character on stage which only the audience can hear.
12	Assonance: [POETRY] repetition of accented vowel sounds in a series of words. "...O <u>s</u> leep! O gentle <u>s</u> leep! Nature's soft nurse, how have I frightened <u>th</u> ee, That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down, And <u>s</u> teep my senses in forgetfulness?" –William Shakespeare
13	Asyndeton: the omission of conjunctions (and, but, or, nor, etc.) that would ordinarily join words. "I came, I saw, I conquered" instead of "I came, I saw, <u>and</u> I conquered."
14	Ballad: [POETRY] a narrative poem written in four-line stanzas, characterized by swift action and narrated in a direct style.
15	Blank verse: [POETRY] unrhymed iambic pentameter.
16	Cacophony: [POETRY] a harsh, discordant mixture of sounds. " <u>D</u> ash, <u>d</u> ash, With a mighty <u>c</u> rash, They seethe, and <u>b</u> oil, and <u>b</u> ound, and splash." E. Pauline Johnson
17	Caesura: [POETRY] a strong pause within a line of poetry. "He thought he'd 'list, perhaps, Off-hand like--just as I— Was out of work--had sold his traps— No other reason why." –Thomas Hardy
18	Carpe diem: "seize the day"; make the most of the life you have while you have it.
19	Catharsis: [DRAMA] emotional connection or emotional release.
20	Chorus: [DRAMA] A group of persons who speak or sing in unison, usually commenting on the action of the play.
21	Climax: [DRAMA] the highest or most intense point in a drama; the scene of greatest emotion .
22	Colloquialism: a word or phrase used in conversational language but not in formal speech or writing: gonna, wanna, y'all.
23	Conceit: [POETRY] comparison between two dissimilar things.
24	Connotation: the emotional associations evoked by a word. The connotations of "home" might include warmth, family, love, security.
25	Consonance: [POETRY] repetition of consonant sounds preceded by different vowel sounds. "The aut <u>u</u> m <u>n</u> t <u>i</u> m <u>e</u> has <u>c</u> o <u>m</u> e/ On woods that <u>d</u> r <u>e</u> a <u>m</u> of <u>b</u> l <u>o</u> o <u>m</u> ..." John Greenleaf Whittier
26	Couplet: [POETRY] A pair of two rhyming lines with the same metre. But if the while I think on thee, dear friend, All losses are restored and sorrows end. –William Shakespeare
27	Denotation: the exact, literal, "dictionary" definition of a word.

28	Denouement: [DRAMA] resolution; resolves plot elements; ties up loose ends.
29	Dialect: nonstandard subgroup of a language with its own vocabulary and grammatical features “Then when I got home I walked smack dab into the crib door. Hit my eye and scratch my chin. Then when that storm come up last night I shet the window down on my hand.” –Alice Walker
30	Diction: word choice.
31	Concrete diction: words that describe physical qualities or conditions. “The cat rubbed up against her knee. He was black all over, deep silky black, and his eyes, pointing down toward his nose, were bluish green. The light made them shine like blue ice.” –Toni Morrison
32	Abstract diction: words to describe ideas, emotions, conditions or concepts that are intangible or difficult to define precisely. “...perhaps all the wisdom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible.” –Joseph Conrad
33	Low/informal diction: language of everyday use.
34	Elevated/formal diction: language that creates an elevated (high) tone; contains words with many syllables and long, sophisticated sentences. “Discerning the impracticable state of the poor culprit’s mind, the elder clergyman, who had carefully prepared himself for the occasion, addressed to the multitude a discourse on sin, in all its branches, but with continual reference to the ignominious letter.” –Nathaniel Hawthorne
35	Colloquial diction: informal expressions; part of everyday speech, but inappropriate in formal writing.
36	Dissonance: [POETRY] harsh and inharmonious sounds.
37	Elegy: [POETRY] solemn, reflective poem, usually about death.
38	End rhyme: [POETRY] a rhyme that occurs in the last syllable of verses.
39	Epic: [POETRY] a long narrative poem dealing with heroes/adventures.
40	Epigraph: a quotation at the beginning of a poem, short story, or other text that introduces or refers to the larger themes of the text.
41	Euphony: [POETRY] a harmonious succession of sounds or words.
42	Exposition: [DRAMA] the beginning of a play/story: introduces characters; details setting; sets tone/mood.
43	Falling action: [DRAMA] series of events following climax, leading to denouement/resolution.
44	Figurative language: words or phrases that describe one thing in terms of something else (simile, metaphor, personification, etc.).
45	Flashback: a scene that interrupts the action of a work to show a previous event.
46	Foil: characters whose traits highlight the strengths/weaknesses of other characters.
47	Foreshadowing: hint of what is to come, usually negative.
48	Free verse: [POETRY] verse with no regular meter, rhyme, or length. “A noiseless patient spider, I mark’d where on a little promontory it stood, isolated, Mark’d how to explore the vacant vast surrounding, It launch’d forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself, Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.” –Walt Whitman
49	Genre: literary type or class.
50	Gothic: [GENRE] a mode or genre of fiction that combines elements of both horror and romance.
51	Hubris: excessive pride.
52	Humor: [GENRE] appealing to an audience by being comical or amusing.
53	Hyperbole: deliberate/outrageous exaggeration. “The shot heard ‘round the world.” --Ralph Waldo Emerson
54	Iambic pentameter: [POETRY] 5-footed line of 2-syllable feet with an unstressed/stressed pattern.
55	Imagery: words that appeal to the five senses.
56	In media res: [DRAMA] literally “in the middle of things”; jumping right into the action of a story.
57	Interior monologue: a representation of an “inner voice” or “thinking in words”.
58	Irony: the opposite of what is expected.
59	Juxtaposition: putting two or more things side by side in order to compare them.
60	Lyric poem: [POETRY] poem, usu. short, expresses emotion/state of mind; single impression; highly personal.
61	Magical realism: [GENRE] a genre of fiction in which magical elements blend with real world elements and are presented in a straightforward manner.

62	Metaphor: implied comparison.
63	Meter: [POETRY] pattern of stressed/unstressed syllables in poetry.
64	Metonymy: a figure of speech in which a closely related term is substituted for an object or idea. We have always remained loyal to the <u>crown</u> (Crown=royal family).
65	Mood: overall atmosphere of work.
66	Motif: recurring ideas, images, topics, or literary devices that can help to develop the theme/s of a novel.
67	Myth: [GENRE] a traditional, legendary story that serves to explain natural or social aspects of a world or society.
68	Naturalism: [GENRE] a genre of literature in which events are determined by heredity and environment; characters are studied in terms of their surroundings and environment.
69	Octave: [POETRY] 8-line stanza.
70	Ode: [POETRY] long lyric poem, formal and complex, commemorates/celebrates occasion or quality.
71	Onomatopoeia: the use of words to imitate the sounds they describe, such as “buzz” and “crack”.
72	Oxymoron: combination of opposite terms into single expression, such as “jumbo shrimp,” “freezer burn,” or “constant variable”.
73	Parable: brief story that illustrates a lesson.
74	Paradox: an apparent contradiction which, after consideration, is true. “The swiftest traveler is he that goes afoot.” –Henry David Thoreau
75	Parallelism: grammatical similarity between sentences or parts of sentence. “[I]t has truly been said that never in history have <u>so many educated people</u> devoted <u>so much attention to so few children.</u> ” –Jane Howard “ <u>Give me liberty, or give me death.</u> ” –Patrick Henry
76	Pastoral (idyll): [POETRY] lyric poem which idealizes rural life.
77	Personification: attributing human qualities to inanimate objects.
78	Perspective: the point of view from which the narrative is told: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. first person: narrator is a person in the story (I, we). b. third person: narrator is not a part of the story (he, she, they). c. limited: author is restricted to the minds of a few or a single character. d. omniscient: author can enter the minds of all characters.
79	Protagonist: central character.
80	Polysyndeton: the repeated use of conjunctions in a sentence (especially when they are not necessary).
81	Quatrain: [POETRY] 4-line stanza.
82	Realism: [GENRE] a type of literature in which authors depict contemporary life in terms of everyday activities and experiences in an effort to replicate the true nature of reality.
83	Refrain: [POETRY] repetition of one or more lines in a stanza.
84	Regionalism: [GENRE] a type of literature, also known as “local colour,” that focuses on the characters, dialect, customs, etc., of a particular region.
85	Resolution: [DRAMA] the problem of the climax is resolved.
86	Rhetorical question: question to which no answer is expected, or answer is self-evident. “And ain’t I a woman?” –Sojourner Truth
87	Rhyme scheme: [POETRY] pattern of rhyme in a stanza.
88	Rising action: [DRAMA] series of events that lead to the climax; the building of tension in a narrative.
89	Romanticism: [GENRE] a type of literature that focuses on the individual rather than society, and highlights the individual’s beliefs and emotions.
90	Sarcasm: kind of verbal irony in which the speaker appears to be praising something, but is actually insulting it.
91	Satire: [GENRE] poke fun at human weakness with intent to change it.
92	Sestet: [POETRY] 6-line stanza.
93	Setting: the time and place in which events in a narrative occur.
94	Simile: comparison of two dissimilar things using “like” or “as”. The stars twinkled <u>like tiny candles</u> in the black sky.
95	Soliloquy: [DRAMA] character speaks true thoughts alone on stage.

96	Sonnet: [POETRY] a poem which typically expresses a single, complete thought or idea in 14 lines of rhymed iambic pentameter.
97	Speaker: [POETRY] the narrative voice in a poem who speaks of his/her situations or feelings; the author of a poem is not necessarily the speaker.
98	Stanza: [POETRY] group of lines that set off division in poem.
99	Stock character: a fictional character based on a common literary or social stereotype.
100	Symbol: a concrete object that represents an abstract quality or idea.
101	Synecdoche: a figure of speech in which a part of something is substituted for the whole, entire thing, "lend me a hand".
102	Syntax: the grammatical order of words in a sentence or line. In the following example, the normal order (subject, verb, object) is inverted: "Whose woods these are I think I know".
103	Theme: the main idea/ central message/author's insight into life.
104	Tone: author's attitude toward subject. a. objective tone: the writer shows no bias. b. subjective tone: the writer exhibits a bias.
105	Tragedy: [DRAMA] a play in which a main character suffers a major downfall after serious struggles, but does so in a way that shows his/her nobility of spirit.
106	Tragic flaw: [DRAMA] error in judgement that causes a character's downfall.
107	Tragic hero: [DRAMA] protagonist (usu. of high moral standing) in tragedy; suffers downfall as a result of tragic flaw.
108	Understatement: a deliberate representation of something as less than it is. "I have to have this operation . . . It isn't very serious. I have this tiny little tumor on the brain." –Holden Caulfield in <i>The Catcher In The Rye</i> , by J. D. Salinger
109	Utopia/dystopia: [GENRE] imaginary society organised to create ideal conditions for humanity/utopian ideal gone awry leading to conditions that hurt humanity.
110	Volta: [poetry] a shift in a poem's tone, subject, or logic that gains power from a matching shift in structure.