

Literary Elements and Devices

English I

- I. **Plot** - systems of actions presented in a dramatic or narrative work
 - A. Exposition - background information provided by the writer to enhance a reader's understanding of context (introduces characters and setting)
 - B. Rising action - conflicts that arise; First conflict is called the **complicating incident**
 - C. Climax - the point at which the reader makes his greatest emotional response. The outcome is finally made clear. In dramatic structure, the climax is the turning point in the action.
 - D. Turning Point - may be at the same point as the climax. The turning point is the crucial moment in which the fate of the main character is sealed. The events of the plot begin to move toward a happy or unhappy ending.
 - E. Falling action - resolution of a dramatic plot; moves toward resolution.
 - F. Denouement - unraveling of unexplained elements (sometimes used to mean falling action or catastrophe) Conclusion and working out of final details.
- II. **Conflict** - problem that arises
 - A. Internal conflict

Man vs. himself - "Most Dangerous Game" - Rainsford must overcome his fear in order to control his ability to reason and defeat Zaroff.
 - B. External conflict

Man vs. man - "Most Dangerous Game" - Rainsford must defeat Zaroff
"Cask of Amontillado" - Montresor vs. Fortunato
Man vs. society - "Harrison Bergeron" - each person is given a handicap; Harrison rebels.
Man vs. nature - "Sound of Thunder" - killing an animal in another time period
Man vs. fate - "The Scarlet Ibis" - Doodle must overcome the disability he has had since birth
- III. **Characterization** - the method(s) an author uses to develop characters in a work
 - A. Direct - author tells the reader

In "Most Dangerous Game," the narrator describes General Zaroff.
"Rainsford's first impression was that the man was singularly handsome; his second was that there was an original, almost bizarre quality about the general's face. He was a tall man past middle age, for his hair was a vivid white; but his thick eyebrows and pointed military moustache were as black as the night from which Rainsford had come. His eyes, too, were black and very bright. He had high cheekbones, a sharp-cut nose, a spare, dark face, the face of a man used to giving orders, the face of an aristocrat" (Connell 17).
 - B. Indirect
 1. Speech
 2. Actions
 3. Appearance
 4. Thoughts and/or feelings
 5. Reactions of others
 - C. Types of characters
 1. Protagonist - chief character in a dramatic or narrative work; trying to achieve a goal
 2. Antagonist - opponent of the main character or hero; hinders the achievement of a goal
 3. Flat - presented only in outline without much individualizing detail; single quality
 4. Round - complex, fully realized or developed individual
 5. Dynamic - undergoes a change in personality or attitude usually for the better
 6. Static - a character who stays the same throughout the work
 7. Stock (stereotypic) - character types that recur repeatedly in literature
 8. Foil - character whose traits are the opposite of another and who thus points out the strengths and weaknesses of the other character.

- IV. Setting** - locale and period in which the action takes place; creates the atmosphere of the story
- V. Theme** - central idea or ideas of a work of fiction or nonfiction, revealed and developed in the course of a story or explored through argument. It could be the **revelation** the author has as a result of an event.
- VI. Style** - choices in diction, tone, and syntax that a writer makes. In combination they create a work's manner of expression. Style is thought to be conscious and unconscious and may be altered to suit specific occasions. Style is often habitual and often evolves over time.
- A. Diction (choice of words) - descriptive, narration, dialog, vocabulary
 - B. Dialect - language particular to a certain region
 - C. Sentence patterns - length, type, and punctuation
 - D. Repetition
 - E. Intimate or casual
 - F. Informal or formal
- VII. Mood** - feeling conveyed to the reader through the story (how the reader feels as he/she reads).
- VIII. Tone** - attitude of the author toward the subject of his writing or toward his audience; revealed through diction, figurative language, and organization.
- IX. Point of View** - perspective from which a fictional or nonfictional story is told
- A. First person - character in the story is the narrator (I, me, my, mine) "The Scarlet Ibis"
 - B. Third person omniscient - narrator is not in the story (he, she, they) and is "ALL-KNOWING" of characters' thoughts and feelings. "The Necklace"
 - C. Third person objective - narrator is not in the story and tells events only as they happen (like a reporter on the scene). "The Princess and the Tin Box"
 - D. Third person limited - narrator is outside the story and reveals the thoughts and motives of a limited number (usually one) character in the story. "The Most Dangerous Game"
- X. Foreshadowing** - hints of what is to come later in the story
- XI. Flashback** - a "flash" into the past in which author interrupts story to present events that happened before
- XII. Symbol** - a thing, event, or person that represents or stands for some idea or event. Symbols also simultaneously retain their own literal meanings. Common symbols are roses = love, dove = peace, spring = youth, cross = Christianity. In "Scarlet Ibis," Ibis is a symbol for Doodle; in death, they are both alike. In "The Necklace," the diamond necklace symbolizes all Mathilde's dreams of beauty and wealth.
- XIII. Irony** - a contrast
- A. Situational irony - when a situation turns out differently than expected
In "The Necklace," Mme. Loisel works for ten years to pay for a necklace that was fake.
 - B. Verbal irony - when a character says one thing and means another
In "Most Dangerous Game," Zaroff says, "We will have some capital hunting, you and I. I shall be most glad to have your society." He will not be hunting with Rainsford; he will be hunting Rainsford.
 - C. Dramatic irony - when the audience or reader knows more about the situation than a character-- In "Cask of Amontillado," we know that Montresor is only befriending Fortunato so he can get revenge for an insulting comment to his family.
- XIV. Stereotype** - fixed ideas about a character or situation, typical of a specific culture and/or time period

- XV. Inference** - when something is implied, not actually stated
- XVI. Connotation** - rather than the dictionary definition, the associations suggested by a word; implied meaning rather than literal meaning or denotation.
- XVII. Denotation** - actual, literal dictionary meaning
- XVIII. Figurative Language**
- A. Simile - figurative comparison of two things, often dissimilar, using the connecting words *like*, *as*, or *than*. "You are beautiful and faded like an old opera tune."
 - B. Metaphor - comparison of two things, often unrelated "His fist was a knotty hammer."
 - C. Personification - inanimate objects are given human traits. "The sun smiled upon the land."
 - D. Allusion - an indirect reference to something (usually a literary text) with which the reader is supposed to be familiar. Allusion is often used with humorous intent, to establish a connection between writer and reader, or to make a subtle point. "We had both wandered too far into a net of expectations and had left no crumbs behind." Alludes to Hansel and Gretel
 - E. Alliteration - repetition of initial consonant sounds "Sounds of soft, spring showers."
 - F. Hyperbole - conscious exaggeration used to heighten effect; not intended literally; humorous "The shot heard around the world."
 - G. Onomatopoeia - use of a word whose pronunciation suggests its meaning. "Buzz," "Hiss," "Pop."
 - H. Imagery - language that appeals to any sense or any combination of senses. Most imagery is visual. ". . . trying to peer through the dank, tropical night . . ."
 - I. Anachronism - assignment of something to a time when it was not in existence. "The jousting area resembled a modern day football field."
 - J. Tragic flaw - tragic error in judgment; a mistaken act which changes the fortune of the tragic hero from happiness to misery.
 - K. Motif - a frequently recurrent character, incident, or concept in literature such as the mockingbird in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.
 - L. Paradox - a seemingly contradictory statement which is actually true. this rhetorical device is often used for emphasis or simply to attract attention.
 - M. Epithet - strictly, an adjective used to point out a characteristic of a person or thing such as "noisy mansions" for schools.
 - N. Epiphany - a major character's moment of realization or awareness; a revelation about life.
 - O. *Euphemism – less offensive synonym; a word or phrase used in place of a term that might be considered too direct, harsh, unpleasant, or offensive. The phrase "collateral damage" is a euphemism for injury to civilians during a military operation
 - P. *metonymy – a stylistic device which uses an attribute of something to stand for the thing itself, such as "laurels" when it stands for "glory" or "brass" when it stands for "military officers"
 - Q. *synecdoche – stylistic device that uses the word for part of something to mean the whole; for example, "sail" for "boat," or vice versa.
 - R. *syllogism – a form of deductive reasoning made of a major premise, a minor premise and a conclusion; such as "all birds have feathers, penguins are birds, therefore penguins have feathers."

*You will not need these terms until we get to the novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. However, they will show up again and again on close readings and AP tests, so learn them now!