

Literary Terms

Archetype – old imaginative pattern appearing in literature

character archetypes include the hero, the savior, the benevolent guide, the mother goddess, the damsel in distress

plot archetypes include the death of a hero, boy wins girl, a quest

image archetypes include a place where people never die, the living and giving tree

Symbolism – a person, place, thing, or an event that has meaning in itself and that also stands for something more than itself (example: an oak tree often symbolizes strength and age; a dove represents peace)

Plain style – a way of writing that stresses simplicity and clarity of expression (uses formal language proper grammar) writers of the Beginnings period

Inversion – the reversal of the normal word order in a sentence or phrase in order to accommodate the meter or rhyme; example from Anne Bradstreet, “In silent night when rest I took.”

Allusions – a reference to someone/something, well known from history, literature, religion, politics, sports, science, or other branch of culture

Characterization – the process by which an author reveals the personality of a character. Several ways:

Direct characterization: the writer just says what the character is like (appearance/personality)

Indirect characterization: we have to judge based on the actions or conversations of the character

Several types of characters: static – one who does not change much; dynamic – changes in an important way as a result of the story's action; flat – one with few personality traits summed up by a single phrase); round – one with dimensional personalities that are complex and real

Figures of speech – words or phrases that compare one thing to another unlike thing

metaphors – compare two unlike objects with use of specific words of comparison

similes – explicit comparison between two unlike things using words of comparison (like, as)

personifications – an object or animal is given human feelings, thoughts, or attitudes

symbols -- a person, place, thing, or event that has meaning itself and also stands for something more than itself

Persuasion – a form of speech that uses logical and emotional appeals to convince another to think or act a certain way

Autobiography – a first hand account of one's own life

Plot – sequence of events that unfold in a story

exposition: tells who the characters are and introduces their conflict; complications: arises as the characters take steps to resolve their conflicts; climax: the point in the plot that creates the greatest intensity, suspense, or interest; rising action: all the action before the turning point; turning point: the point at which the hero experiences a decisive reversal of fortune (comedy – things begin to work out; in a tragedy they get worse); falling action: action after the turning point which leads to the resolution; resolution or denouement: point when the story's problems are all resolved and the story ends

Aphorism – a brief, cleverly worded statement that makes a wise observation about life

Style – the distinctive way in which a writer uses language

Inference – an educated guess based on what one already knows and what one learns from reading a text looking beyond what is being stated directly and what is being implied or hinted at

Appeals – emotional: persuasive technique intended to touch a reader's emotional state; ethical: persuasive technique intended to create an ethical reaction from the reader; logical: persuasive technique intended to make a reader think deeply about the topic presented

Analogy: a comparison made between two things to show they are alike.

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

Extended Metaphor: a direct comparison that is developed over a number of lines or with several examples.

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

Paradox: a statement that appears self-contradictory but reveals a kind of truth

Parallelism: the repetition of words or phrases that have similar grammatical structures

Rhetorical question: a question that is asked for effect and that does not actually require an answer.

Tone: the attitude a writer takes toward the subject of a work, the characters in it, or the audience.

Antagonist: the opponent who struggles against or blocks the hero, or protagonist, in a story.

Character motivation: refers to the reasons why characters behave as they do.

Irony: verbal: occurs when someone says one thing but really means something else; situational: takes place when there is a discrepancy between what is expected to happen or what would be appropriate to happen, and what really does happen; dramatic irony: is so called because it is often used on stage – in this kind of irony a character in the play or story thinks one thing is true, but the audience or reader knows better.

Protagonist: the central character in a story, the one who initiates or drives the action

Theme: the central idea presented through a work by the audience

Allegory: a story or poem in which characters, setting, and events stand for other people or events or for abstract ideas or qualities.

Autobiography: an account of the writer's own life.

Myth: an anonymous traditional story that is basically religious in nature and that usually serves to explain a belief, ritual, or mysterious natural phenomenon

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