

LITERARY TERMS

Below you will find a list of literary terms that you will encounter throughout your high school English classes. Please familiarize yourself with these words and their meanings, as there will be a quiz on them the first week of classes.

Alliteration--use of the same consonant at the beginning of each word

Allusion--passing reference or indirect mention

A reference to a statement, person, place, event, or thing that is known from literature, history, religion, myth, politics, sports, science, or pop culture.

Anachronism--something located at a time when it could not have existed

Examples: the clock and book mentioned in Shakespeare's play Julius Caesar. In 44 B.C. there were no clocks; they used sundials to tell time. Also, there were no books; they used scrolls.

Antagonist--someone who offers opposition

The character who comes into conflict with the protagonist in a literary work.

Assonance--the repetition of similar vowels in successive words

Ballad--a narrative poem of popular origin

blank verse--unrhymed verse (usually in iambic pentameter)

characterization--the act of describing essential features

direct characterization: where the author describes the character directly; i.e. John is a good soldier.

indirect characterization: where the author describes the character indirectly through actions, speech, appearance, private thoughts, or other characters responses.

climax--the highest point of anything

The most intense or exciting moment in the story when something happens to decide the outcome of the conflict.

Conflict--an open clash between two opposing groups

Internal Conflict: man vs. self

External Conflict: man vs. man, man vs. nature, man vs. society, man vs. the supernatural

Connotation--an idea that is implied or suggested

All the meanings, associations, or emotions that a word suggests.

Couplet--a stanza consisting of two successive lines of verse

Denotation--the most direct or specific meaning of a word or expression

Denouement--the outcome of a complex sequence of events

AKA resolution: the moment in a story where all problems are resolved, either happily or unhappily, and the story is closed (untying the knot)

Drama--a work intended for performance by actors on a stage

Enjambment--continuation from one line of verse into the next line

Epic--a long narrative poem telling of a hero's deeds

Exposition--A type of writing that explains, gives information, or clarifies an idea.

Fiction--a literary work based on the imagination

figure of speech--language used in a figurative or nonliteral sense

flashback--a transition in a story to an earlier event or scene

foreshadowing--the act of providing vague advance indications

free verse--poetry that does not rhyme or have a regular meter

hyperbole--extravagant exaggeration

imagery--the use of words that appeal to the five senses

internal rhyme--a rhyme between words in the same line

irony--incongruity between what might be expected and what occurs

meter--a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in verse

narration--giving an account describing a course of events

nonfiction--prose writing that is not formed by the imagination

novel--an extended fictional work in prose

onomatopoeia--using words that imitate the sound they denote

personification--attributing human characteristics to abstract ideas

persuasion--communication intended to induce belief or action

poetry--literature in metrical form

point of view--a mental position from which things are perceived

protagonist--the principal character in a work of fiction

quatrain--a stanza of four lines

rhythm--alternation of stressed and unstressed elements in speech

satire--witty language used to convey insults or scorn

scansion--analysis of verse into metrical patterns

setting--the physical position of something

simile--a figure of speech comparing to different things using like or as

sonnet--a verse form of 14 lines with a fixed rhyme scheme

speaker--The voice that is talking to us in a poem.

Stanza--a fixed number of lines of verse forming a unit of a poem

Stress--the relative prominence of a syllable or musical note

Theme--the message a writer intends to convey to the reader

Tone--The attitude a writer takes toward the reader, a subject, or a character.

Metaphor--a figure of speech that suggests a non-literal similarity

Didactic--instructive, especially excessively

didactic literature: writing that aims primarily to teach (parables)

symbol--something visible that represents something invisible

soliloquy--speech you make to yourself

end-rhymed--rhymed on the terminal syllables of the verses

iambic--of or consisting of iambs

unstressed, stressed syllable in a word: i.e. deny besiege

iambic pentameter: five iambs in a line of poetry (used in sonnets and Shakespeare's plays)

dramatic irony--when the audience but not the characters understands a scene