

## Literary Elements

There is no substitute for memorizing the terms and definitions.

### 1. Allegory\*

A story illustrating an idea or a moral principle in which objects take on symbolic meanings. In Dante Alighieri's "Divine Comedy," Dante, symbolizing mankind, is taken by Virgil the poet on a journey through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise in order to teach him the nature of sin and its punishments, and the way to salvation.

### 2. Alliteration

Used for poetic effect, a repetition of the initial sounds of several words in a group. The following line from Robert Frost's poem "Acquainted with the Night" provides us with an example of alliteration, "*I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet.*" The repetition of the s sound creates a sense of quiet, reinforcing the meaning of the line.

### 3. Allusion

A reference in one literary work to a character or theme found in another literary work. T. S. Eliot, in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" alludes (refers) to the biblical figure John the Baptist in the line *Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter, . . .* In the New Testament, John the Baptist's head was presented to King Herod on a platter.

### 4. Ambiguity

A statement which can contain two or more meanings. For example, when the oracle at Delphi told Croesus that if he waged war on Cyrus he would destroy a great empire, Croesus thought the oracle meant his enemy's empire. In fact, the empire Croesus destroyed by going to war was his own.

### 5. Anecdote\*

A very short tale told by a character in a literary work. In Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales," "The Miller's Tale" and "The Carpenter's Tale" are examples.

### 6. Antagonist

A person or force which opposes the protagonist in a literary work. In Stephen Vincent Benet's "The Devil and Daniel Webster," Mr. Scratch is Daniel Webster's antagonist at the trial of Jabez Stone. The cold, in Jack London's "To Build a Fire" is the antagonist which defeats the man on the trail.

See Protagonist for more information.

### 7. Aphorism

A brief statement which expresses an observation on life, usually intended as a wise observation. Benjamin Franklin's "Poor Richard's Almanac" contains numerous examples, one of which is *Drive thy business; let it not drive thee.* which means that one should not allow the demands of business to take control of one's moral or worldly commitments.

### 8. Apostrophe

A figure of speech wherein the speaker speaks directly to something nonhuman. In these lines from John Donne's poem "The Sun Rising" the poet scolds the sun for interrupting his nighttime activities:

Busy old fool, unruly sun,  
Why dost thou thus,  
Through windows, and through curtains call on us?

### 9. Aside

A device in which a character in a drama makes a short speech which is heard by the audience but not by other characters in the play. In William Shakespeare's "Hamlet," the Chamberlain, Polonius, confronts Hamlet. In a dialogue concerning Polonius' daughter, Ophelia, Polonius speaks this aside:

How say you by that? Still harping on my daughter.  
Yet he knew me not at first; 'a said I was a fishmonger.  
'A is far gone. And truly in my youth I suffered much extremity for love,  
very near this. I'll speak to him again.-

### 10. Assonance

The repetition of vowel sounds in a literary work, especially in a poem. Edgar Allen Poe's "The Bells" contains numerous examples. Consider these from stanza 2:

Hear the mellow wedding bells-  
and

From the molten-golden notes,

The repetition of the short e and long o sounds denotes a heavier, more serious bell than the bell encountered in the first stanza where the assonance included the i sound in examples such as *tinkle, sprinkle, and twinkle.*

### 11. Autobiography\*

The story of a person's life written by himself or herself. William Colin Powell's "My American Journey" is an example. Ernest Hemingway's Nick Adams stories, of which "Big Two-Hearted River" is a sample, are considered autobiographical.

## 12. **Ballad\***

A story in poetic form, often about tragic love and usually sung. Ballads were passed down from generation to generation by singers. Two old Scottish ballads are "Sir Patrick Spens" and "Bonnie Barbara Allan." Coleridge's, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is a 19th century English ballad.

## 13. **Biography\***

The story of a person's life written by someone other than the subject of the work. Katherine Drinker Bowen's "Yankee from Olympus" which details the life and work of the great jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. is an example. A biographical work is supposed to be rigorously factual. However, since the biographer may be biased for or against the subject of the biography, critics, and sometimes the subject of the biography himself or herself, may come forward to challenge the trustworthiness of the material.

## 14. **Blank Verse**

A poem written in unrhymed iambic pentameter. Consider the following from "The Ball Poem" by John Berryman:

What is the boy now, who has lost his ball,  
What, what is he to do? I saw it go  
Merrily bouncing, down the street, and then  
Merrily over-there it is in the water!

See Iamb and Foot and Meter for more information.

## 15. **Cacophony/Euphony**

Cacophony is an unpleasant combination of sounds. Euphony, the opposite, is a pleasant combination of sounds. These sound effects can be used intentionally to create an effect, or they may appear unintentionally. The cacophony in Matthew Arnold's lines "And thou, who didst the stars and sunbeams know,/Self-school'd, self-scann'd, self-honor'd, self-secure,/Didst tread on earth unguess'd at," is probably unintentional.

## 16. **Carpe Diem**

A Latin phrase which translated means "Seize (Catch) the day," meaning "Make the most of today." The phrase originated as the title of a poem by the Roman *Horace* (65 B.C.E.-8B.C.E.) and caught on as a theme with such English poets as Robert Herrick and Andrew Marvell. Consider these lines from Herrick's "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time":

Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,  
Old Time is still a-flying:  
And this same flower that smiles today,  
To-morrow will be dying.

## 17. **Catastrophe**

The scene in a tragedy which includes the death or moral destruction of the protagonist. In the catastrophe at the end of Sophocles' "Oedipus the King," Oedipus, discovering the tragic truth about his origin and his deeds, plucks out his eyes and is condemned to spend the rest of his days a wandering beggar. The catastrophe in Shakespearean tragedy occurs in Act 5 of each drama, and always includes the death of the protagonist. Consider the fates of Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, King Lear, and Othello.

## 18. **Character**

A person, or any thing presented as a person, e. g., a spirit, object, animal, or natural force, in a literary work. In a cartoon scene, firemen may be putting out a fire which a coyote has deliberately started, while a hydrant observes the scene fearfully. The firemen, the coyote and the hydrant would all be considered characters in the story. If a billowy figure complete with eyes, nose, and mouth representing the wind thwarts the efforts of the firemen, the wind, too, qualifies as a character. Animals who figure importantly in movies of live drama are considered characters. Mr. Ed, Lassie, and Tarzan's monkey Cheetah are examples.

## 19. **Characterization\***

The method a writer uses to reveal the personality of a character in a literary work: Methods may include (1) by what the character says about himself or herself; (2) by what others reveal about the character; and (3) by the character's own actions.

## 20. **Classicism**

A movement or tendency in art, music, and literature to retain the characteristics found in work originating in classical Greece and Rome. It differs from Romanticism in that while Romanticism dwells on the emotional impact of a work, classicism concerns itself with form and discipline.

## 21. **Climax\***

The decisive moment in a drama, the climax is the turning point of the play to which the rising action leads. This is the crucial part of the drama, the part which determines the outcome of the conflict. In Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" the climax occurs at the end of Marc Antony's speech to the Roman public. In the climax to the film "Star Wars," the empire's death star is ready to destroy the rebel base. Luke Skywalker and rebel pilots attack the base, and after the deaths of some rebel pilots, Skywalker successfully fires his missile into the death star's vulnerable spot and destroys the death star, saving the rebel forces.

See Plot for more information.

## 22. Comedy\*

A literary work which is amusing and ends happily. Modern comedies tend to be funny, while Shakespearean comedies simply end well. Shakespearean comedy also contains items such as misunderstandings and mistaken identity to heighten the comic effect. Comedies may contain lovers, those who interfere with lovers, and entertaining scoundrels. In modern Situation Comedies, characters are thrown into absurd situations and are forced to deal with those situations, all the while reciting clever lines for the amusement of a live or television or movie audience.

## 23. Conclusion\*

Also called the "Resolution" the conclusion is the point in a drama to which the entire play has been leading. It is the logical outcome of everything that has come before it. The conclusion stems from the nature of the characters. Therefore, the decision of Dr. Stockmann to remain in the town at the conclusion of "An Enemy of the People" is consistent with his conviction that he is right and has been right all along.

...I'll be hanged if we are going away! We are going to stay where we are, Katherine . . . This is the field of battle ...this is where the fight will be. This is where I shall triumph!

See Plot for more information.

## 24. Conflict

In the plot of a drama, conflict occurs when the protagonist is opposed by some person or force in the play. In Henry Ibsen's drama "An Enemy of the People" Dr. Thomas Stockmann's life is complicated by his finding that the public baths, a major source of income for the community, are polluted. In trying to close the baths, the doctor comes into conflict with those who profit from them, significantly, his own brother, the mayor of the town.

Another example occurs in the film "Star Wars." Having learned that Princess Leia is being held prisoner by the evil Darth Vader, Luke Skywalker sets out to rescue her. In doing so, he becomes involved in the conflict between the empire and the rebels which Leia spoke of in her holograph message in the drama's exposition. Since Luke is the protagonist of "Star Wars," the conflict in the drama crystallizes to that between Luke and Darth Vader.

See Antagonist, Exposition, and Plot for more information.

## 25. Connotation and Denotation

The denotation of a word is its dictionary definition. The word wall, therefore, denotes an upright structure which encloses something or serves as a boundary. The connotation of a word is its emotional content. In this sense, the word wall can also mean an attitude or actions which prevent becoming emotionally close to a person. In Robert Frost's "Mending Wall," two neighbors walk a property line each on his own side of a wall of loose stones. As they walk, they pick up and replace stones that have fallen. Frost thinks it's unnecessary to replace the stones since they have no cows to damage each other's property. The neighbor only says "Good fences make good neighbors." The wall, in this case, is both a boundary (denotation) and a barrier that prevents Frost and his neighbor from getting to know each other, a force prohibiting involvement (connotation).

## 26. Consonance

The repetition of consonant sounds with differing vowel sounds in words near each other in a line or lines of poetry. Consider the following example from Theodore Roethke's "Night Journey:"

We rush into a rain  
That rattles double glass.

The repetition of the r sound in *rush*, *rain*, and *rattles*, occurring so close to each other in these two lines, would be considered consonance.

Since a poem is generally much shorter than a short story or novel, the poet must be economical in his/her use of words and devices. Nothing can be wasted; nothing in a well-crafted poem is there by accident. Therefore, since devices such as consonance and alliteration, rhyme and meter have been used by the poet for effect, the reader must stop and consider what effect the inclusion of these devices has on the poem.

## 27. Couplet

A stanza of two lines, usually rhyming. The following by Andrew Marvell is an example of a rhymed couplet:

Had we but world enough and time,  
This coyness, lady, were no crime.

See Stanza for more information.

## 28. Denouement\*

Pronounced Day-noo-ma, the denouement is that part of a drama which follows the climax and leads to the resolution.

## 29. Dialogue

In drama, a conversation between characters. One interesting type of dialogue, stichomythia, occurs when the dialogue takes the form of a verbal duel between characters, as in the following between Hamlet and his mother, Gertrude.

(William Shakespeare's "Hamlet" - Act 3, scene 4)

QUEEN: Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

HAMLET: Mother, you have my father much offended.

QUEEN: Come, Come, you answer with an idle tongue.

HAMLET: Go, Go, You question with a wicked tongue.

## 30. Diction\*

An author's choice of words. Since words have specific meanings, and since one's choice of words can affect feelings, a writer's choice of words can have great impact in a literary work. The writer, therefore, must choose his words carefully. Discussing his novel "A Farewell to Arms" during an interview, Ernest Hemingway stated that he had to rewrite the ending thirty-nine times. When asked what the most difficult thing about finishing the novel was, Hemingway answered, "Getting the words right."

### **31. Didactic Literature**

Literature designed explicitly to instruct as in these lines from Jacques Prévert's "To Paint the Portrait of a Bird."

Paint first a cage  
with an open door  
paint then  
something pretty  
something simple  
something handsome  
something useful  
for the bird

### **32. Dramatic Monologue**

In literature, the occurrence of a single speaker saying something to a silent audience. Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" is an example wherein the duke, speaking to a non-responding representative of the family of a prospective new duchess, reveals not only the reasons for his disapproval of the behavior of his former duchess, but aspects of his own personality as well.

### **33. Elegy\***

A lyric poem lamenting death. These lines from Joachim Du Bellay's "Elegy on His Cat" are an example:

I have not lost my rings, my purse,  
My gold, my gems-my loss is worse,  
One that the stoutest heart must move.  
My pet, my joy, my little love,  
My tiny kitten, my Belaud,  
I lost, alas, three days ago.

### **34. Epic\***

In literature generally, a major work dealing with an important theme. "Gone with the Wind," a film set in the antebellum (pre-Civil War) and Civil War South, is considered an epic motion picture. In poetry, a long work dealing with the actions of gods and heroes. John Milton's "Paradise Lost" is a book length epic poem consisting of twelve subdivisions called books. Homer's "The Iliad" and "The Odyssey" are epic poems, the former concerning the Greek invasion of Troy; the latter dealing with the Greek victory over the Trojans and the ten-year journey of Odysseus to reach his island home.

### **35. Epigraph**

A brief quotation which appears at the beginning of a literary work. The following is the epigraph from T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock. Quoted from Dante Alighieri's epic poem "The Inferno," the speaker, Guido di Montefeltrano, believing Dante to be another soul condemned to Hell, replies thus to a question:

If I believed my answer were being given  
to someone who could ever return to the world,  
this flame (his voice is represented by a moving flame) would shake no more.  
But since no one has ever returned  
alive from this depth, if what I hear is true,  
I will answer you without fear of infamy.

The epigraph here reveals one of the themes of the poem, Prufrock's urgent desire not to be revealed.

### **36. Epithet**

In literature, a word or phrase preceding or following a name which serves to describe the character. Consider the following from Book 1 of Homer's "The Iliad:"

Zeus-loved Achilles, you bid me explain  
The wrath of far-smiting Apollo.

### **37. Euphemism**

A mild word or phrase which substitutes for another which would be undesirable because it is too direct, unpleasant, or offensive. The word "joint" is a euphemism for the word prison. "W. C." is a euphemism for bathroom.

### **38. Exposition\***

In drama, the presentation of essential information regarding what has occurred prior to the beginning of the play. In the exposition to William Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," two servants of the house of Capulet discuss the feud between their master and the house of Montague, thereby letting the audience know that such a feud exists and that it will play an important role in influencing the plot.

In the exposition to the film "Star Wars," Luke Skywalker sees a 3D holograph projection of the Princess Leia warning that she is a prisoner of Darth Vader and begging for help.

See Plot for more information.

### 39. Fable

A brief tale designed to illustrate a moral lesson. Often the characters are animals as in the fables of Aesop.

### 40. Falling Action\*

The falling action is the series of events which take place after the climax. In Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar," Cinna, the poet, is mistaken for Cinna, the conspirator, and killed; Antony and Octavius argue, Brutus and Cassius argue, the battle at Philippi is agreed upon, and the ghost of Caesar appears to Brutus. In Ibsen's, "An Enemy of the People," Dr. Thomas Stockmann has been declared an enemy of the people and he and his family and supporters are harrassed by the townspeople. The Stockmanns decide to leave the town. However, events occur which change Dr. Stockmann's mind about leaving. The falling action of a drama leads to the conclusion  
See Plot for more information.

### 41. Figurative Language\*

In literature, a way of saying one thing and meaning something else. Take, for example, this line by Robert Burns, *My luv is a red, red rose*. Clearly Mr. Burns does not really mean that he has fallen in love with a red, aromatic, many-petalled, long, thorny-stemmed plant. He means that his love is as sweet and as delicate as a rose. While, figurative language provides a writer with the opportunity to write imaginatively, it also tests the imagination of the reader, forcing the reader to go below the surface of a literary work into deep, hidden meanings.

### 42. Figure of Speech\*

An example of figurative language that states something that is not literally true in order to create an effect. Similes, metaphors and personification are figures of speech which are based on comparisons. Metonymy, synecdoche, synesthesia, apostrophe, oxymoron, and hyperbole are other figures of speech.

### 43. Flashback\*

A reference to an event which took place prior to the beginning of a story or play. In Ernest Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," the protagonist, Harry Street, has been injured on a hunt in Africa. Dying, his mind becomes preoccupied with incidents in his past. In a flashback Street remembers one of his wartime comrades dying painfully on barbed wire on a battlefield in Spain.

### 44. Foil

A character in a play who sets off the main character or other characters by comparison. In Shakespeare's "Hamlet" Hamlet and Laertes are young men who behave very differently. While Hamlet delays in carrying out his mission to avenge the death of his father, Laertes is quick and bold in his challenge of the king over the death of his father. Much can be learned about each by comparing and contrasting the actions of the two.

### 45. Foreshadowing

In drama, a method used to build suspense by providing hints of what is to come. In Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," Romeo's expression of fear in Act 1, scene 4 foreshadows the catastrophe to come:

I fear too early; for my mind misgives  
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars  
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date  
With this night's revels and expire the term  
Of a despised life closed in my breast  
By some vile forfeit of untimely death.  
But He that hath the steerage of my course,  
Direct my sail! On, lusty gentlemen.

### 46. Free Verse

Unrhymed Poetry with lines of varying lengths, and containing no specific metrical pattern. The poetry of Walt Whitman provides us with many examples. Consider the following lines from "Song of Myself."

I celebrate myself and sing myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.  
I loaf and invite my soul,  
I lean and loaf at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.

### 47. Genre

A literary type or form. Drama is a genre of literature. Within drama, genre include tragedy, comedy and other forms.

### 48. Hyperbole

A figure of speech in which an overstatement or exaggeration occurs as in the following lines from Act 2, scene 2 of Shakespeare's "Macbeth." In this scene, Macbeth has murdered King Duncan. Horrified at the blood on his hands, he asks:

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand? No. This my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
Making the green one red.

Literally, it does not require an ocean to wash blood from one's hand. Nor can the blood on one's hand turn the green ocean red. The hyperbole works to illustrate the guilt Macbeth feels at the brutal murder of his king and kinsman.

See Understatement to study the opposite of hyperbole.

#### **49. Imagery**

A word or group of words in a literary work which appeal to one or more of the senses: sight, taste, touch, hearing, and smell. The use of images serves to intensify the impact of the work. The following example of imagery in T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,"

When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherized upon a table.

uses images of pain and sickness to describe the evening, which as an image itself represents society and the psychology of Prufrock, himself.

#### **50. Inference**

A judgment based on reasoning rather than on direct or explicit statement. A conclusion based on facts or circumstances. For example, advised not to travel alone in temperatures exceeding fifty degrees below zero, the man in Jack London's "To Build a Fire" sets out anyway. One may infer arrogance from such an action.

#### **51. Irony**

Irony takes many forms. In irony of situation, the result of an action is the reverse of what the actor expected. Macbeth murders his king hoping that in becoming king he will achieve great happiness. Actually, Macbeth never knows another moment of peace, and finally is beheaded for his murderous act. In dramatic irony, the audience knows something that the characters in the drama do not. For example, the identity of the murderer in a crime thriller may be known to the audience long before the mystery is solved. In verbal irony, the contrast is between the literal meaning of what is said and what is meant. A character may refer to a plan as brilliant, while actually meaning that (s)he thinks the plan is foolish. Sarcasm is a form of verbal irony.

#### **52. Metaphor**

A figure of speech wherein a comparison is made between two unlike quantities without the use of the words "like" or "as." Jonathan Edwards, in his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," has this to say about the moral condition of his parishioners:

There are the black clouds of God's wrath now hanging directly over your heads, full of the dreadful storm and big with thunder;

The comparison here is between God's anger and a storm. Note that there is no use of "like" or "as" as would be the case in a simile

See Simile for more

#### **53. Metonymy**

A figure of speech in which a word represents something else which it suggests. For example in a herd of fifty cows, the herd might be referred to as fifty head of cattle. The word "head" is the word representing the herd.

#### **54. Mood**

The atmosphere or feeling created by a literary work, partly by a description of the objects or by the style of the descriptions. A work may contain a mood of horror, mystery, holiness, or childlike simplicity, to name a few, depending on the author's treatment of the work.

#### **55. Myth**

An unverifiable story based on a religious belief. The characters of myths are gods and goddesses, or the offspring of the mating of gods or goddesses and humans. Some myths detail the creation of the earth, while others may be about love, adventure, trickery, or revenge. In all cases, it is the gods and goddesses who control events, while humans may be aided or victimized. It is said that the creation of myths were the method by which ancient, superstitious humans attempted to account for natural or historical phenomena. In Homer's, "The Odyssey," the Greek hero, Odysseus, is thwarted in his attempt to reach home by an angry Poseidon, god of the sea and patron of Troy. the Trojan horse, the trick the Greeks used to gain entrance into the city of Troy when a ten-year siege had failed, was the plan of Odysseus' creation. Poseidon, in his anger, kept Odysseus from reaching home for ten years after the war ended.

#### **56. Narrative Poem**

A poem which tells a story. Usually a long poem, sometimes even book length, the narrative may take the form of a plotless dialogue as in Robert Frost's "The Death of the Hired Man." In other instances the narrative may consist of a series of incidents, as in Homer's "The Iliad" and "The Odyssey," John Milton's "Paradise Lost."

#### **57. Novel\***

A fictional prose work of substantial length. The novel narrates the actions of characters who are entirely the invention of the author and who are placed in an imaginary setting. The fact that a so-called historical or biographical novel uses historically real characters in real geographical locations doing historically verifiable things does not alter the fictional quality of the work. Nor does it qualify a work labeled a novel by the author as a historical text.

#### **58. Ode**

A poem in praise of something divine or expressing some noble idea. In "Ode on a Grecian Urn," English poet John Keats expresses his appreciation of the beauty and agelessness of a work by a Grecian artisan:

Thou still unravished bride of quietness,  
Thou foster child of silence and slow time,  
Sylvan historian who canst thus express

A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:  
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape  
Of deities or mortals, or of both  
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?

#### **59. Onomatopoeia**

A literary device wherein the sound of a word echoes the sound it represents. The words "splash," "knock," and "roar" are examples. The following lines end Dylan Thomas' "Fern Hill:"

Out of the whinnying green stable  
On to the fields of praise.

The word "whinnying" is onomatopoeic. "Whinny" is the sound usually selected to represent that made by a horse.

#### **60. Oxymoron**

A combination of contradictory terms, such as used by Romeo in Act 1, scene 1 of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet:"

Why then, O brawling love! O loving hate!  
O heavy lightness, serious vanity;  
Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms!  
Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health!

#### **61. Parable**

A brief story, told or written in order to teach a moral lesson. Christ's tale of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 30-7) is an example.

#### **62. Paradox**

A situation or a statement that seems to contradict itself, but on closer inspection, does not. These lines from John Donne's "Holy Sonnet 14" provide an example:

That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me,

The poet paradoxically asks God to knock him down so that he may stand. What he means by this is for God to destroy his present self and remake him as a holier person.

#### **63. Parallel Structure**

A repetition of sentences using the same structure. This line from Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address provides an example:

The world will little not nor long remember what we say here,  
but it can never forget what they did here.

#### **64. Parody**

A literary work that imitates the style of another literary work. A parody can be simply amusing or it can be mocking in tone, such as a poem which exaggerates the use of alliteration in order to show the ridiculous effect of overuse of alliteration. (See Satire for related information.)

#### **65. Pathetic Fallacy**

A fallacy of reason in suggesting that nonhuman phenomena act from human feelings, as suggested by the word "pathetic" from the Greek *pathos*; a literary device wherein something nonhuman found in nature—a beast, plant, stream, natural force, etc.—performs as though from human feeling or motivation. In Jack London's *To Build a Fire*, "The cold of space," London writes, "smote the unprotected tip of the planet, . . ." The word "smote" suggests nature deliberately striking the northern tip of the earth with severe cold.

The poetry of William Wordsworth is replete with instances of pathetic fallacy—weeping streams, etc.

*Suggested by Richard Battin, Managing Editor - The News-Sentinel - Fort Wayne, Indiana. Definition agonized over by Sam McClintic and Tom Campbell, Bell High School.*

#### **66. Personification**

A figure of speech in which something nonhuman is given human characteristics. Consider the following lines from Carl Sandburg's "Chicago:"

Stormy, husky, brawling,  
City of the big shoulders:

Carl Sandburg description of Chicago includes shoulders. Cities do not have shoulders, people do. Sandburg personifies the city by ascribing to it something human, shoulders. "Justice is blind." is another example.

#### **67. Plot\***

The structure of a story. The sequence in which the author arranges events in a story. The structure of a five-act play often includes the rising action, the climax, the falling action, and the resolution. The plot may have a protagonist who is opposed by antagonist, creating what is called, conflict. A plot may include flashback or it may include a subplot which is a mirror image of the main plot. For example, in Shakespeare's, "King Lear," the relationship between the Earl of Gloucester and his sons mirrors the relationship between Lear and his daughters.

#### **68. Point of View**

A piece of literature contains a speaker who is speaking either in the first person, telling things from his or her own perspective, or in the third person, telling things from the perspective of an onlooker. The perspective used is called the Point of View, and is referred to either as first person or third person. If the speaker knows everything including the actions, motives, and thoughts of all the characters, the speaker is referred to as omniscient (all-knowing). If the speaker is unable to know what is in any character's mind but his or her own, this is called limited omniscience.

### **69. Protagonist**

The hero or central character of a literary work. In accomplishing his or her objective, the protagonist is hindered by some opposing force either human (one of Batman's antagonists is The Joker), animal (Moby Dick is Captain Ahab's antagonist in Herman Melville's "Moby Dick"), or natural (the sea is the antagonist which must be overcome by Captain Bligh in Nordhoff and Hall's "Men Against the Sea," the second book in the trilogy which includes "Mutiny on the Bounty").

See Antagonist for more information.

### **70. Pun**

A play on words wherein a word is used to convey two meanings at the same time. The line below, spoken by Mercutio in Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," is an example of a pun. Mercutio has just been stabbed, knows he is dying and says:

Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man.

Mercutio's use of the word "grave" renders it capable of two meanings: a serious person or a corpse in his grave.

### **71. Quatrain**

A four-line stanza which may be rhymed or unrhymed. A heroic quatrain is a four line stanza rhymed abab. John Donne's "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" is a poem of nine heroic quatrains: The following is the first stanza of the poem:

As virtuous men pass mildly away  
And whisper to their souls, to go,  
Whilst some of their sad friends do say,  
The breath goes now, and some say, no:

See Stanza for more information.

### **72. Resolution\***

The part of a story or drama which occurs after the climax and which establishes a new norm, a new state of affairs—the way things are going to be from then on. Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" climaxes with the death of the two lovers. Their deaths resolve the feud between the two families. In the play's resolution, Lords Capulet and Montague swear to end their feud and build golden monuments to each other's dead child.

In the resolution of the film "Star Wars," Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, and Chewbacca are given medals by Princess Leia for destroying the death star and defeating the empire. See Plot for more information.

### **73. Rhyme**

In poetry, a pattern of repeated sounds. In end rhyme, the rhyme is at the end of the line, as in these lines from "Ars Poetica" by Archibald MacLeish:

A poem should be palpable and mute  
As a globed fruit  
Dumb  
As old medallions to the thumb

When one of the rhyming words occurs in a place in the line other than at the end, it is called Internal rhyme.

Eye rhyme is a form of rhyme wherein the look rather than the sound is important. "Cough" and "tough" do not sound enough alike to constitute a rhyme. However, if these two words appeared at the ends of successive lines of poetry, they would be considered eye rhyme.

Half rhyme occurs when the final consonants rhyme, but the vowel sounds do not (chill-Tulle; Day-Eternity).

### **74. Rhythm**

Recurrences of stressed and unstressed syllables at equal intervals, similar to meter. However, though two lines may be of the same meter, the rhythms of the lines may be different. For example, if one were to read the last two lines of Robert Frost's, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" with equal speed, the lines would be the same in meter and rhythm. However, if one were to read the last line more slowly (as it should be read), the meter would be the same but the rhythm different. This is because while the meter of a line is identified by the pattern within each foot, the rhythm is accounted for by larger units than individual feet.

### **75. Rising Action\***

The part of a drama which begins with the exposition and sets the stage for the climax. In a five-act play, the exposition provides information about the characters and the events which occurred before the action of the play began. A conflict often develops between the protagonist and an antagonist. The action reaches a high point and results in a climax, the turning point in the play. We discover in the exposition of Shakespeare's "Othello" that the Moor, Othello, has married the Venetian maid, Desdemona. Her father objects strenuously to the marriage. However, during those objections, a messenger informs the Venetian council that the Turks are on their way to invade the island of Cypress. Othello, who is sent with troops to defend the island, brings Desdemona with him, planning a honeymoon to coincide with his military mission.

One of Othello's officers, Iago, plants a seed of doubt about Desdemona's faithfulness in Othello's ear. This seed grows to the point where Othello becomes convinced that his wife is having an affair with his lieutenant, Michael Cassio. The play climaxes with the murder of Desdemona by Othello in a jealous rage. See Plot for more information.



#### **76. Satire**

A piece of literature designed to ridicule the subject of the work. While satire can be funny, its aim is not to amuse, but to arouse contempt. Jonathan Swift's "Gulliver's Travels" satirizes the English people, making them seem dwarfish in their ability to deal with large thoughts, issues, or deeds.

#### **77. Setting\***

The time and place in which a story unfolds. The setting in Act 1, scene 1 of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," for example, is a public square in Verona, Italy. A drama may contain a single setting, or the setting may change from scene to scene.

#### **78. Short Story\***

A short fictional narrative. It is difficult to set forth the point at which a short story becomes a short novel (novelette), or the page number at which a novelette becomes a novel. Here are some examples which may help in determining which is which: Ernest Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River" is a short story; John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men" is a novelette; and Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter" is a novel.

#### **79. Simile**

A figure of speech which takes the form of a comparison between two unlike quantities for which a basis for comparison can be found, and which uses the words "like" or "as" in the comparison, as in this line from Ezra Pound's "Fan-Piece, for Her Imperial Lord:" *clear as frost on the grass-bade*. In this line, a fan of white silk is being compared to frost on a blade of grass. Not the use of the word "as."

See Metaphor for more information.

#### **80. Soliloquy**

In drama, a moment when a character is alone and speaks his or her thoughts aloud. In the line "*To be, or not to be, that is the question*:" which begins the famous soliloquy from Act 3, scene 1 of Shakespeare's "Hamlet" Hamlet questions whether or not life is worth living, and speaks of the reasons why he does not end his life.

#### **81. Sonnet**

A lyric poem of fourteen lines whose rhyme scheme is fixed. The rhyme scheme in the Italian form as typified in the sonnets of Petrarch is abbaabba cdecde. The Petrarchian sonnet has two divisions: the first is of eight lines (the octave), and the second is of six lines (the sestet). The rhyme scheme of the English, or Shakespearean sonnet is abab cdcd efef gg. (See **Rhyme Scheme**) The change of rhyme in the English sonnet is coincidental with a change of theme in the poem. See **Theme**. The meter is iambic pentameter.

#### **Stanza**

A major subdivision in a poem. A stanza of two lines is called a couplet; a stanza of three lines is called a tercet; a stanza of four lines is called a quatrain. Robert Frost's "Acquainted with the Night," consists of four rhymed tercets followed by a rhymed couplet. The following illustrates the look of a stanza:

I have been one acquainted with the night.  
I have walked out in rain-and back in rain.  
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane  
I have passed by the watchman on his beat  
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

#### **82. Stereotype**

An author's method of treating a character so that the character is immediately identified with a group. A character may be associated with a group through accent, food choices, style of dress, or any readily identifiable group characteristic. Examples are the rugged cowboy, the bearded psychiatrist, and the scarred villain. A criticism leveled at TV drama is that those who produce such dramas use outdated or negative qualities of groups to stereotype individuals. Ignoring the group's positive qualities, they perpetuate and strengthen the group's negative image in the minds of viewers. Some examples are: the Jewish accountant, the corrupt politician, the Black gambler in a zoot suit, and the voice on the phone in a Middle Eastern accent associated with a bomb threat. A well-known tobacco company uses the stereotype of the rugged cowboy in its cigarette ads.

#### **83. Style\***

Many things enter into the style of a work: the author's use of figurative language, diction, sound effects and other literary devices. Ernest Hemingway's style derives, in part, from his short, powerful sentences. The style of the Declaration of Independence can be described as elegant.

#### **84. Suspense\***

Suspense in fiction results primarily from two factors: the reader's identification with and concern for the welfare of a convincing and sympathetic character, and an anticipation of violence. The following line from Elizabeth Spencer's "The Name of the Game" is an example of a suspense maker:

He was an innocent, this boy; the other boys were out to get him.

#### **85. Symbolism**

A device in literature where an object represents an idea. In Willaim Blake's "The Lamb," the speaker tells the lamb that the force that made him or her is also called a lamb:

Little lamb, who made thee?  
Little lamb, who made thee?  
Little lamb, I'll tell thee,  
Little lamb, I'll tell thee!  
He is called by thy name,  
For he calls himself a lamb;

The symbol of the lamb in the above lines corresponds to the symbolism of the lamb in Christianity wherein Christ is referred to as The Lamb of God.

#### **86. Theme**

An ingredient of a literary work which gives the work unity. The theme provides an answer to the question *What is the work about?* There are too many possible themes to recite them all in this document. Each literary work carries its own theme(s). The theme of Robert Frost's "Acquainted with the Night" is loneliness. Shakespeare's "King Lear" contains many themes, among which are blindness and madness. Unlike plot which deals with the action of a work, theme concerns itself with a work's message or contains the general idea of a work.

#### **87. Tone\***

Tone expresses the author's attitude toward his or her subject. Since there are as many tones in literature as there are tones of voice in real relationships, the tone of a literary work may be one of anger or approval, pride or piety-the entire gamut of attitudes toward life's phenomena. Here is one literary example: The tone of John Steinbeck's short novel "Cannery Row" is nonjudgemental. Mr. Steinbeck never expresses disapproval of the antics of Mack and his band of bums. Rather, he treats them with unflagging kindness.

#### **88. Tragedy\***

According to A. C. Bradley, a tragedy is a type of drama which is pre-eminently the story of one person, the hero. "Romeo and Juliet" and "Antony and Cleopatra" depart from this, however, and we may view both characters in each play as one protagonist.

The story depicts the trouble part of the hero's life in which a total reversal of fortune comes upon a person who formerly stood in high degree, apparently secure, sometimes even happy.

The suffering and calamity in a tragedy are exceptional, since they befall a conspicuous person, e. g., Macbeth is a noble at first, then a king; Hamlet is a prince; Oedipus is a king. Moreover, the suffering and calamity spread far and wide until the whole scene becomes a scene of woe. The story leads up to and includes the death (in Shakespearean tragedy) or moral destruction (in Sophoclean tragedy) of the protagonist.

#### **89. Understatement**

A statement which lessens or minimizes the importance of what is meant. For example, if one were in a desert where the temperature was 125 degrees, and if one were to describe thermal conditions saying "It's a little warm today." that would be an understatement. In Shakespeare's "Macbeth," Macbeth, having murdered his friend Banquo, understates the number of people who have been murdered since the beginning of time by saying "Blood hath been shed ere now." The opposite is hyperbole. See Hyperbole for more information.