

IHS Literature and the Arts Literary Terms Dictionary

- **Allegory:** an allegory is a narrative in which the characters often stand for abstract concepts. An allegory generally teaches a lesson by means of an interesting story.
- **Alliteration:** the repetition of initial consonant sounds used especially in poetry to emphasize and link words as well as to create pleasing, musical sounds. Example—the **f**air **b**reeze **b**lew, the white **f**oam **f**lew
- **Allusion:** reference to someone or something that is known from history, literature, religion, politics, sports, science, or another branch of culture. An indirect reference to something (usually from literature, etc.).
- **Ambiguity:** deliberately suggesting two or more different, and sometimes conflicting, meanings in work. An event or situation that may be interrupted in more than one way--this is done on purpose by the author.
- **Analogy:** a relationship of resemblance or equivalence between two situations, people, or objects especially when used as a basis for explanation.
- **Antagonist:** the character or force that opposed the protagonist (it can be a character, an animal, a force, or a weakness of the character.)
- **Anti-hero:** A protagonist of a story who embodies none of the qualities typically assigned to traditional heroes and heroines. Not to be confused with the antagonist of a story, the anti-hero is a protagonist whose failings are typically used to humanize him or her and convey a message about the reality of human existence.
- **Archetype:** A resonant figure or mythic importance, whether a personality, place, or situation, found in diverse cultures and different historical periods. Archetypes differ from allegories because they tend to reference broader or commonplace (often termed “stock”) character types, plot points, and literary conventions. Paying attention to archetypes can help readers identify what an author may posit as “universal truths” about life, society, human interaction, etc. based on what other authors or participants in a culture may have said about them.
- **Assonance:** the repetition of vowel sounds in nearby words. It is used to reinforce meanings of words or to set the mood. Example—mad as a hatter.

- **Characterization:** refers to the techniques employed by writers to develop characters. 1) The writer may use physical description. 2) Dialogue spoken by the character and by other characters reveals character traits. 3) A character's action may also be revealing. 5) A character's thoughts and feelings are also a means of characterization.
- **Cliché:** a word or phrase, often a figure of speech that has become lifeless because of overuse.
- **Conflict:** the struggle between two opposing forces that is the basis of the plot. 1) internal conflict character struggling with him/her self, 2) external conflicts-character struggling with forces outside of him/her self. For example, nature, god, society, another person, technology, etc.
- **Connotation:** the associations and emotional overtones that have become attached to a word or phrase, in addition to its strict dictionary definition
- **Diction:** a speaker or writer's choice of words
- **Figurative Language:** language that has meaning beyond the literal meaning: also know known as "figures of speech."
- **Flashback:** a scene that interrupts the normal chronological sequence of events in a story to depict something that happened at an earlier time.
- **Foreshadowing:** important hints that an author drops to prepare the reader for what is to come, and help the reader anticipate the outcome.
- **Genre:** A kind of literature. For instance, comedy, mystery, tragedy, satire, elegy, romance, and epic are all genres
- **Hyperbole:** a figure of speech that uses an incredible exaggeration or overstatement, for effect.
- **Imagery:** words or phrases that appeal to the reader's senses. The use of language to evoke a picture or a concrete sensation of a person, a thing, a place, or an experience.
- **Irony:** a contrast between appearances and reality
 - *Verbal irony: a writer says one thing, but means something entirely different.
 - *Situational irony: occurs when something happens that is entirely different from what is expected.

*Dramatic irony: occurs when the reader knows information that the characters do not.

- **Metaphor:** a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two unlike things without the use of such specific words of comparison such as like or as.
- **Mood:** the feeling or atmosphere that a writer creates for the reader. Sensory images and figurative language contribute to the mood of a selection, as do the sound and rhythm of the language.
- **Narrator:** the person from whose point of view events are conveyed.
Types of narrative: The narrator is the voice telling the story or speaking to the audience. However, this voice can come from a variety of different perspectives, including:
 - First person: A story told from the perspective of one or several characters, each of whom typically uses the word “I.” This means that readers “see” or experience events in the story through the narrator’s eyes.
 - Second person: A narrative perspective that typically addresses that audience using “you.” This mode can help authors address readers and invest them in the story.
 - Third person: Describes a narrative told from the perspective of an outside figure who does not participate directly in the events of a story. This mode uses “he,” “she,” and “it” to describe events and characters.
 1. In third person omniscient point of view, the narrator is all-knowing about the thoughts and feelings of the characters.
 2. The third person limited point of view deals with a writer presenting events as experienced by only one character. This type of narrator does not have full knowledge of situations, past or future events.
 3. In third person objective the story conveys only the external details of the characters—never their thoughts or inner motivations.
- **Onomatopoeia:** The use of words that imitate sounds. Examples would be hiss, buzz, swish, and crunch.
- **Oxymoron:** a figure of speech in which two contradictory words or phrases are combined in a single expression, giving the effect of a condensed paradox: “wise fool,” “cruel kindness,” “bitter-sweet.”
- **Parable:** a relatively short story that teaches a moral, or lesson about how to lead a good life.

- **Parody:** a work that is an imitation of another work for the purpose of criticism or humorous effect or for flattering tribute.
- **Personification:** a figure of speech in which an object, animal, or concept is given human feelings, thoughts, or attitudes
- **Plot:** The sequence of events that occur through a work to produce a coherent narrative or story.
- **Point of View:** the vantage point, or stance from which a story is told, the eye and mind through which the action is perceived (first person point of view, third person point of view, omniscient point of view, objective point of view.) (See also Narrator).
- **Protagonist:** the central character in a story: the one who initiates or drives the action. The protagonist faces a problem and must undergo some conflict to solve it.
- **Pun:** a form of wit, not necessarily funny, involving a play on a word with two or more meanings
- **Satire:** a literary technique in which foolish ideas or customs are ridiculed for the purpose of improving society.
- **Setting:** the time and place in which the action of a story occurs.
- **Simile:** a figure of speech in which two seemingly unlike things are compared. The comparison is made explicit by the use of a word or phrase such as: like, as, than, similar to, resembles, or seems.
- **Stream of consciousness:** A mode of writing in which the author traces his or her thoughts verbatim into the text. Typically, this style offers a representation of the author's exact thoughts throughout the writing process and can be used to convey a variety of different emotions or as a form of pre-writing.
- **Style:** Comprised of an author's diction, syntax, tone, characters, and other narrative techniques, "style" is used to describe the way an author uses language to convey his or her ideas and purpose in writing. An author's style can also be associated to the genre or mode of writing the author adopts, such as in the case of a satire or elegy with would adopt a satirical or elegiac style of writing.
- **Suspense:** the tension or excitement felt by the reader as he or she becomes involved in the story.

- **Symbol:** a person, place, thing or event that stands for something larger than itself. It is usually something literal that stands for something figurative. Symbols typically recur throughout a narrative and offer critical, though often overlooked, information about events, characters, and the author's primary concerns in telling the story.
- **Theme:** the insight about human life that is revealed in a literary work.
- **Tone:** A way of communicating information (in writing, images, or sound) that conveys an attitude. Authors convey tone through a combination of word-choice, imagery, perspective, style, and subject matter. By adopting a specific tone, authors can help readers accurately interpret meaning in a text.