

LITERARY TERMS AND DEVICES

Alliteration:	the repetition of a speech sound (typically a consonant) at the beginning of a word in a sequence of nearby words <u>Example:</u> "I am your son, <i>amá</i> , seeking / the security of shadows," -- Luis J. Rodríguez
Allusion:	a reference to a familiar mythological, historical, literary person, place, or event <u>Example:</u> I have feet that put Steven Spielberg's ET to shame. They are a tangle of toes held together by bunions.
Characterization:	the method an author uses to reveal or describe characters and their various personalities, through the characters' thoughts, speech, actions, etc.
Concrete Detail:	the use of specific words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) to create vivid word pictures that appeal to one of the five senses <u>Example:</u> "The dress I wore was lavender taffeta." -- Maya Angelou, <i>I Know why the Caged Bird Sings</i>
Connotation:	the meaning or feeling a word suggests that goes beyond its literal (denotative) meaning <u>Example:</u> <i>Scrawny</i> and <i>slender</i> are both synonyms for <i>thin</i> ; however, <i>scrawny</i> has a more negative connotation, while <i>slender</i> has a more positive connotation.
Contrast:	a striking difference between two things; the author has placed them together to imply a meaning <u>Example:</u> Pastoral scene of the gallant south/ The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh/ Then the sudden smell of burning flesh -- Abel Meeropol, "Strange Fruit"
Dialogue:	the conversation carried on by the characters in a literary work
Diction:	an author's choice of words based on their correctness, clearness, or effectiveness <u>Example:</u> Hashim <i>plopped</i> down on the couch. The verb <i>plopped</i> is more specific and descriptive than <i>sat</i> .
Flashback:	a technique in which a writer interrupts a story to go back and explain an earlier time or event for the purpose of making something in the present more clear <u>Example:</u> In <i>The Outsiders</i> , readers first meet Ponyboy as he leaves a movie theater and is jumped by gang members. Later, the author goes back and explains Ponyboy's background.
Figurative Language:	language which is metaphorical, not meant to be taken literally; figurative language changes the literal meaning, to make a meaning fresh or clearer, to express complexity, to capture a physical or sensory effect, or to extend meaning; figurative language is also called "figures of speech" (See the definitions for <i>hyperbole</i> , <i>metaphor</i> , <i>simile</i> , <i>personification</i> , <i>metonymy</i> , <i>synecdoche</i> , and <i>understatement</i> for examples of figures of speech.)
Foreshadowing:	a technique of giving hints of what is to come later in a story <u>Example:</u> In <i>Of Mice and Men</i> , Steinbeck foreshadows the tragic end when George, before reaching the ranch, gives Lennie instructions about what to do if there is trouble.
Hyperbole:	a figure of speech that uses exaggeration and overstatement <u>Example:</u> "I have seen this river so wide it had only bank." -- Mark Twain, <i>Life on the Mississippi</i>
Imagery:	the use of words to create a certain picture in the reader's mind; imagery is usually based on sensory details and often evokes a particular mood or feeling <u>Example:</u> "The sky was dark and gloomy, the air was damp and raw, the streets were wet and sloppy." -- Charles Dickens, <i>The Pickwick Papers</i>
Internal Monologue:	a technique revealing the inner thoughts and feelings of a character; internal monologues may be signaled by "He/She/I thought," "He/She/I was thinking," "He/She/I imagined," etc. <u>Example:</u> "How long could Momma hold out? What new indignity would they think of to subject her to? Would I be able to stay out of it? What would Momma really like me to do?" -- Maya Angelou, <i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i>
Irony	using a word or phrase to mean the exact opposite of its literal or normal meaning; there are three kinds of irony:
(Dramatic):	occurs when the reader or the audience knows more than the characters or actors <u>Example:</u> The audience knows Juliet is only drugged when Romeo believes she is dead.

(Situational):	occurs when there is a great difference between the purpose of a particular action and the result <u>Example:</u> A shipboard scene of reconciliation and hope for an estranged couple ends with the camera pulling back to reveal a life preserver stenciled “SS <i>Titanic</i> .”
(Verbal):	a figure of speech where the author says one thing but means just the opposite <u>Example:</u> “But then I was lucky enough to come down with the disease of the moment in the Hamptons, which was Lyme disease.” -- Kurt Vonnegut, <i>Fates Worse Than Death</i>
Metaphor:	a figure of speech that compares two unlike things without using the words like or as <u>Example:</u> “Perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor, the enemy of the people.” -- Anne Lamott, <i>Bird by Bird</i>
Metonymy:	a figure of speech that substitutes one word for another related word <u>Example:</u> The White House has decided to create more public service jobs. (White House is substituted for president.)
Personification:	a figure of speech that gives a nonhuman thing human characteristics <u>Example:</u> “And what I remember next is how the moon, the pale moon with its one yellow eye...stared through the pink plastic curtains.” -- Sandra Cisneros, “One Holy Night”
Plot:	the action or sequence of events in a story; the five basic elements in a plot line are exposition, rising action (complications), climax (crisis), falling action, and resolution (denouement)
Repetition:	the repeating of a word, a phrase, or an idea for emphasis or for rhythmic effect <u>Example:</u> “We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.”
Sensory Detail:	details that are experienced through the senses; they help readers to see, feel, smell, taste, and hear what is being described <u>Example:</u> “A tall, hawk-faced woman, her hair cropped off just below the ears, peered suspiciously at us. The sour smell of disinfectant came rushing toward me; behind the woman I could see a line of girls in blue filing silently up a staircase... I shivered.” -- Ruth Reichl, <i>Tender at the Bone</i>
Setting:	the time and place in which the action of a literary work occurs
Simile:	a figure of speech that compares two seemingly unlike things using like or as <u>Example:</u> “She stood in front of the altar, shaking like a freshly caught trout.” -- Maya Angelou, <i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i>
Style:	the distinctive writing techniques used by an author; an author’s style includes diction, sentence and paragraph length, use and amount of dialogue, types of figurative language preferred, amount of repetition, types of verbs and adjectives, form and narrative technique, complexity of wording, etc. <u>Example:</u> Hemingway is known for using simple words and sparse, journalistic-type description. “Nick was hungry. He did not believe he had ever been hungrier. He opened and emptied a can of pork and beans and a can of spaghetti into the frying pan.” -- Ernest Hemingway, “Big Two-Hearted River”
Symbol:	a concrete object used to represent an idea or emotion <u>Example:</u> The dove symbolizes peace. The hourglass symbolizes time passing.
Synecdoche:	a figure of speech that uses part of something to represent the whole <u>Example:</u> All hands on deck. (Hands represent the whole person.)
Theme:	the statement about life a particular work is trying to get across to the reader; in most cases, the theme will be implied rather than directly stated
Tone:	the apparent emotional state, or “attitude,” of the speaker/narrator voice, as conveyed through the language of the piece; the tone may be serious, humorous, satiric, etc. <u>Example:</u> By comparing the seamstresses to librarians and architects, the speaker in Cathy Song’s poem “The Grammar of Silk” helps create a respectful tone.
Understatement:	a figure of speech that emphasizes an idea by talking about it in a restrained manner <u>Example:</u> “He [our dog] turned out to be a good traveler, and except for an interruption caused by my wife’s falling out of the car, the journey went very well.” -- E.B. White, “A Report in Spring”