

Definitions of Some Literary Techniques, Elements, and Rhetorical Devices

- 1. Alliteration**- Repeating and playing upon the same letter—figure of speech in which consonants at the beginning of words is repeated.
EX: She sells seashells by the seashore.
- 2. Allusion**- An implied reference to a person, another piece of literature, or work of art. When something is implied, it is not stated directly; instead, a connection is based on what was said.
EX: Was the ticking package, so expensively wrapped with ribbon and bright paper, a Trojan gift? When the teacher pulled out her favorite red pen in order to grade the students' quizzes, she jokingly commented, "Say hello to my little friend!"
- 3. Analogy**- A comparison based on a similarity between situations that are otherwise dissimilar or unfamiliar.
EX: As the proud mom saw her son drive away to college, she thought about how a mother bird might feel when her offspring leave the nest for the last time in order to make their way in the world.
- 4. Aphorism**—a universal truth (at times humorous) stated in a terse manner.
EX: Even death is not to be feared by one who has lived wisely. ~Buddha
Honk if you love peace and quiet.
- 5. Apostrophe**- The speaker in a literary work addresses an inanimate object, an idea, or an absent person.
EX: In the poem "Chicago" by Carl Sandburg, the speaker says to the city, "they tell me you are crooked."
- 6. Assonance**- The repetition of accented vowel sounds in a series of words. EX: Try to light the fire.
- 7. Author's Purpose**- An author's intent in writing a piece of literature. Authors typically write to accomplish one or more of the following purposes: 1. To Persuade 2. To Inform 3. To Explain 4. To Entertain 5. To Describe
- 8. Characterization**- The methods the writer uses to reveal the personality of a character. There are two types of characterization:
 - #1. Flat or Static Character**- The character does not undergo any significant changes at the end of a story. There is no real substance to the character; he/she is one-dimensional.
EX: Zaroff in "The Most Dangerous Game" believed, even to his death, that hunting humans was not wrong.
 - #2. Round or Dynamic Character**- There are varied traits to the character. Character has a real personality and undergoes significant changes at the end of the story.
EX: Sanger Rainsford's outlook in "The MD Game" changes in the story from a heartless hunter of animals to a sympathetic one, once he knew himself how it felt to be hunted.
- 9. Cliché**--an expression that has been overused to the extent that it loses its original meaning or novelty. EX: Every cloud has a silver lining. Time heals all wounds.
No sense crying over spilt milk. Read between the lines.
- 10. Complication**- A series of difficulties that lead to the central action in a narrative.
EX: In "The MD Game" by Richard Connell, the main character, Sanger Rainsford creates a complication by falling off the yacht and ending up on Zaroff's crazy island.

11. Conflict- The struggle between opposing forces in a literary work. There are 3 external conflicts and 1 internal:

1. **Man vs. Man** (external) - In "The MD Game", Rainsford and Zaroff fight to the death.
2. **Man vs. Nature** (external) - Rainsford has to survive in the jungle of Ship-Trap Island in order to keep away from the hunter Zaroff.
3. **Man vs. Society** (external) - Zaroff, his servant Ivan, and his pack of blood-thirsty hounds relentlessly pursue Rainsford in the jungle.
4. **Man vs. Himself** (internal) - Rainsford had to constantly tell himself to "keep his nerve" while being hunted by Zaroff or it may be his death.

12. Epiphany- The sudden intuitive recognition of the meaning or the essence of something.

EX: In the motion picture version of "The MD Game", Rainsford stated that he knew what it felt like to be "hunted like a wild animal" after he had been subjected to the same treatment.

13. Exposition: An author's introduction of characters, setting, or situation at the beginning of a literary work.

EX: In Edgar Allen Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death", he opens his story with very straight forward exposition:

"The *Red Death* had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal- the redness and the horror of blood."

14. Flashback- A scene relived in a character's memory which is usually triggered by one of the 5 senses. It tells the reader what happened in the past.

EX: The aroma of the pan dulce took Paloma back ten years to when she was five years old and spent her days with her grandmother, Jovita. She recalled how she was awakened by the cock-a- doodle do of Pablo, their old rooster and the smell of fresh, baked pan dulce from the corner panaderia. Paloma let herself linger in that memory for a moment. She soon realized that if she didn't hurry, she would miss the bus and be late for school.

15. Foreshadowing- The use of hints or clues by the author in order to prepare readers for events that will happen later in the story.

EX: The darkness and coldness of the house convinced Sophie that trouble awaited everybody, but her skeptical friends refused to listen to her warnings!

16. Genre- A category of a literary work characterized by a particular form or style.

EX: Novel, Short Story, Poetry, Drama, Non-Fiction, Essay, and Epic are SOME examples of genre.

17. Hyperbole- An exaggeration used for effect and not meant to be taken literally.

EX: It took an eternity for the file to download.

18. Idiom- A phrase that has a special meaning different from its standard or dictionary meaning.

EX: I was burning the midnight oil.	I stayed up very late last night.
Let's shake a leg.	Let's hurry up.

19. Inversion-- the reversal of the syntactically correct order of subjects, verbs, and objects in a sentence.

EX: Shocked, I was.	How amazing this is.
"Powerful you have become, the dark side I sense in you." ~Yoda	
"Patience you must have, my young Padawan." ~Yoda	

20. Irony- The opposite of what is intended. There are 3 types of irony:

a. Verbal Irony- A twist on words, opposite of the speaker's meaning (also known as sarcasm).

EX: Watching the rain's violent downpour, Edgar stated, "Great day for a picnic, right?"

b. Dramatic Irony- The reader knows something the character does not.

EX: In Abraham Lincoln's "The Gettysburg Address", he expresses that "The world will little note nor long remember what we say here" without knowing that his 3 minute speech WILL in fact be remembered and studied.

c. Irony of Situation- An unexpected activity takes place that is the opposite of what the characters and audience expects.

EX: The unexpected ending of "The Necklace" by Guy de Maupassant surprises characters and the audience when it is revealed that the diamond necklace is, in fact, a fake.

21. Juxtaposition-- placing two concepts, characters, ideas, or places near or next to each other so that the reader will compare and contrast them.

EX: **Beggars** can't be **choosers**.

Better late than **never**.

You can't teach an **old dog** **new** tricks.

All's well in **love** and **war**.

22. Metaphor- A comparison of two unlike things, but does **not** use *like* or *as*. There are two types of metaphors:

a. Explicit (or Stated) Metaphor- Randy was a prowling tiger on the football field when the referee blew the game-starting whistle.

b. Implicit (or Implied) Metaphor- When the referee blew the whistle to begin the football game, Randy was on the prowl and ready to scratch, roar, and claw his way to the end zone.

23. Metonymy- Where one word is replaced by another word with which it is associated.

EX: Wall Street announced a drop in interest rates for new home owners. (*Wall Street* replacing investors)

The White House announced a press conference for 4 o'clock. (*White House* standing for the president)

The Crown had absolute power in the middle ages. (*The Crown* substituting for Queen Elizabeth I)

24. Mood- The emotional quality or atmosphere of a literary work.

EX: Edgar Allan Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death" uses graphic details of disease and death to establish a mood of horror.

25. Motivation- The reason or reasons behind a character's action; it is what induces a character to do what he/she does. A character's motivation can be driven **intellectually, emotionally, or physically**.

EX: In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, **love** motivates the title characters to their demise.

In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, **ambition** (desire for power) motivates the title character and his wife to murder the king.

26. Onomatopoeia- The use of a word or phrase that imitates or suggests the sound of which it describes.

EX: In William Shakespeare's drama *Macbeth*, the three witches in the play recite a spell which goes: "Bubble, bubble, toil and trouble."

27. Oxymoron- A figure of speech consisting of only two contradictory words.

EX: jumbo shrimp	old news	wise fool
hateful love	hot ice	resident alien
found missing	civil war	act naturally

28. Paradox- A situation or statement that seems to be impossible or contradictory, but nevertheless true.

Unlike an oxymoron, a paradox is written in statement form.

EX: Begin with the end in mind.	If you want to kiss the sky, better learn how to kneel.
Freedom is not free.	Health food makes me sick!
The only constant in life is change.	We have no choice but to believe in free will.

29. Parallelism--the usage of repeating words and forms to give pattern and rhythm to a passage in literature; it often either juxtaposes contrasting images or ideas so as to show their stark difference, or joins similar concepts to show their connection.

EX: "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion." —**Dalai Lama**

"Success is getting what you want. Happiness is wanting what you get." —**Dale Carnegie**

"Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."
—**John F. Kennedy**

30. Personification- A figure of speech in which an animal, object, force of nature, or idea is given human qualities.

EX: Time stood still.

Love enfolded us in her arms.

The dark, angry clouds moved its gray hands over the town and immersed us in heavy precipitation.

31. Plot- The sequence of events in a literary work. Plot is presented in the following order:

Exposition- introduces the story's characters, setting, and/or conflicts

Rising Action- adds complications to the story's conflicts or problems leading to the climax or turning point, which is the moment of highest emotional pitch

Falling Action- the logical result of the climax which presents the final outcome

32. Polysyndeton--figure of speech in which several conjunctions are used to join connected clauses in places where they are not contextually necessary.

EX: "The dinner was so good; I ate the chicken, and the salad, and the turkey, and the wild rice, and the bread, and the mashed potatoes, and the cranberry sauce."

33. Pun- A humorous play on words; using a word that sounds like another word, but has a different meaning.

EX: Teaching is a work of heart.

I wanted to be a baker, but I couldn't raise the dough!

Marriage is a wife sentence.

When two houses fell on the *pachuco*, he yelled, "Get off me, homes!"

34. Point of View- The part the narrator plays in the story and uses any limits placed on his/her knowledge.

1st Person Point of View- Narrator is the character in the story. The reader only knows what the narrator is thinking.

EX: When I was done in the kitchen, I went outside to have a large, icy, Diet Dr. Pepper.

2nd Person Point of View- When the narrator addresses the reader by using such words as *you*, *your*, or *you're*. 2nd person POV is most commonly seen in self-help books or literature with instructions.

EX: When you know that you've had a rough day and feel like you never got out of the kitchen, take yourself outside and drink a large, icy, Diet Dr. Pepper!

3rd Person Limited Point of View- Narrator is outside of the story, but tells the story from a character's point of view (like a reporter)

EX: When she was done in the kitchen, she went outside to drink a large, icy, diet Dr. Pepper.

3rd Person Omniscient Point of View- Narrator sees into the minds of all of the characters.

EX: When she was done in the kitchen, she felt tired and a little melancholy; she thought to herself that going outside with a large, icy, Diet Dr. Pepper would do her some good.

35. Repetition- A figure of speech where sounds, words, or phrases, lines, or stanzas are repeated for emphasis in a poem, speech, or another piece of writing.

EX: In Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, he says *I have a dream* eight times, each time in connection with a different image.

36. Rhetorical Fragment--A sentence fragment that was purposely chosen by an author to emphasize a particular piece of information.

EX: **No shirt, no shoes, no service.**

He knew it was **not enough. Not enough.**

37. Simile- A figure of speech using *like* or *as* to compare seemingly unlike things.

EX: Once the referee blew the game-starting whistle, Randy looked like a prowling tiger on the football field.

38. Suspense- A feeling of curiosity, uncertainty, or even dread about what is going to happen next.

EX: In the movie *Jaws*, suspense is built every time the shark fin comes out of the water and that "cello" music is played to scare everybody.

39. Symbol- Any object, person, place, or experience that represents more than what it is.

EX: The U.S. flag symbolizes freedom

In "The Necklace" by Guy de Maupassant, the necklace embodied greed, vanity, and misery.

40. Theme- The central message of a literary work that the reader can apply to life. Some works can have an **explicit** (stated) theme or an **implicit** (implied) theme.

Explicit (stated) - theme is expressed directly. In "The Necklace", the author stated in the story "How strange and unpredictable life is. How little there is between happiness and misery."

Implicit (implied) - theme is **not** expressed directly. The reader has to come up with his/her own idea. In "The Boy Who Cried Wolf", an implicit theme could be: When an individual is caught lying all of the time, people may not believe that individual when he decides to tell the truth.

41. Tone- A reflection of a writer's or speaker's **attitude** towards a particular subject. A writer's tone may convey multiple attitudes. A separate handout will be provided of some tone words.

42. Understatement--something that is deliberately represented as having a lesser magnitude or importance than it really has; this is usually done for ironic effect.

EX: from *Romeo and Juliet* (Act 3, Scene 1) when Mercutio was stabbed by Tybalt--

BENVOLIO: What, art thou hurt?

MERCUTIO: Ay, ay, a scratch, a scratch. Marry (But), 'tis enough.



Figurative Language Chart

Figurative language is when you describe something by comparing it with something else

Term	Definition	Example
Alliteration	The repetition of usually initial consonant sounds in two or more neighboring words or syllables	The wild and woolly walrus waits and wonders when we'll walk by.
Assonance	A resemblance of sound in words or syllables	holy & stony and Fleet feet sweep by sleeping geese
Aphorism	A short statement expressing an observation or principle generally accepted as wise or true.	No pain, no gain If it ain't broke, don't fix it
Hyperbole	Big exaggeration, usually with humor	It took forever for the file to download
Idiom	A phrase that has a special meaning different from its standard or dictionary meaning.	Let's shake a leg. Let's hurry up.
Metaphor	A comparison of two unlike things, but does not use <i>like</i> or <i>as</i> .	Explicit (or Stated) Metaphor- Randy was a prowling tiger on the football field when the referee blew the game-starting whistle. Implicit (or Implied) Metaphor- When the referee blew the whistle to begin the football game, Randy was on the prowl and ready to scratch, roar, and claw his way to the end zone.
Onomatopoeia	The use of a word or phrase that imitates or suggests the sound of which it describes.	buzz, hiss, roar, woof
Personification	A figure of speech in which an animal, object, force of nature, or idea is given human qualities.	The dark, angry clouds moved its gray hands over the town and immersed us in heavy precipitation.
Simile	A figure of speech using <i>like</i> or <i>as</i> to compare seemingly unlike things.	Once the referee blew the game-starting whistle, Randy looked like a prowling tiger on the football field.

Some Types of Poetry

Sonnet	14-line poem, usually written in rhymed iambic pentameter in an established rhyme scheme
Lyric	Highly musical verse that expresses observations and feelings of a single speaker
Free Verse	Poetry not written in a regular rhythmical pattern or meter
Blank Verse	Poetry written in unrhymed iambic pentameter
Haiku	A 3-line verse form: the 1 st and 3 rd lines each have 5 syllables; the 2 nd line has 7 syllables
Ballad	A song-like poem that tells a story, often one dealing with adventure, romance, and/or death
Narrative	Poetry that tells a story
Limerick	A 5-line poem (which is usually funny): the 1 st , 2 nd , and 5 th lines rhyme and the 3 rd , 4 th lines rhyme
Elegy	A dignified poem mourning the death of someone