

Literary Terminology

theme	<i>an insight into the human condition offered by a work of literature</i>
characterisation	<i>the way an author presents a character's traits</i>
direct characterisation	<i>explicit description of a character's traits</i>
indirect characterisation	<i>the use of dialogue or a character's actions to define a character</i>
character development	<i>a permanent change in a character's traits or outlook</i>
epiphany	<i>the moment when a character experiences a defining insight into their life</i>
plot	<i>the sequence of incidents or events in a literary work</i>
conflict	<i>a clash of action, desires, values or goals between the protagonist and the</i>
protagonist	<i>the central character, the one who most clearly drives the plot development</i>
antagonist	<i>any person or external / internal force in conflict with the protagonist</i>
exposition	<i>first stage in traditional plot development: introduces setting / characters</i>
complication	<i>second stage: introduces central conflict</i>
climax	<i>the high point and moment of maximum tension in the plot</i>
resolution	<i>elucidates the events after the climax</i>
foreshadowing	<i>a suggestion of what will happen later in a work of fiction</i>
narrator	<i>a character created by the author to tell the story</i>
point of view	<i>the perspective from which a story is told</i>
first person	<i>when the narrator describes what happens to herself, using I or we</i>
third person	<i>when the narrator describes what happens to others, using he, she or they,</i>
omniscient third person	<i>as above, but has insights into all characters' thoughts and feelings</i>
unreliable narrator	<i>a narrator whose story cannot be trusted</i>

free indirect discourse	<i>when the thoughts of a character are blended into the narrative voice</i>
stream of consciousness	<i>a narrative style that mimics the flow of thoughts in a character's mind</i>
denotation	<i>central or fundamental meaning of a word, the referential meaning</i>
connotation	<i>emotive associations of a word, its extra layers of meaning</i>
tone	<i>like tone of voice, the emotive manifestation of the narrator's attitude</i>
imagery	<i>words used to help the reader imagine a sensual experience</i>
visual imagery	<i>stimulates the sense of sight</i>
auditory imagery	<i>stimulates the sense of sound</i>
synesthesia	<i>when an image appeals to two senses at the same time</i>
literal meaning	<i>the straightforward denotation of a piece of language</i>
figurative meaning	<i>meaning that is more than the literal denotation of the individual words</i>
figure of speech	<i>when words are used to create a certain effect, often figuratively</i>
simile	<i>direct comparison of two things, usually with as or like</i>
metaphor	<i>when a word that literally means one thing is applied to another</i>
symbol	<i>something that has both literal and figurative meaning</i>
personification	<i>a type of metaphor that gives human qualities to objects or ideas</i>
allusion	<i>a reference to shared cultural knowledge, e.g. a novel or a historical event</i>
oxymoron	<i>two words that seem to contradict each other</i>
irony	<i>a situation, or use of language, involving some kind of incongruity</i>
verbal irony	<i>saying one thing but meaning another</i>
situational irony	<i>when the actual result contradicts our expectations</i>
dramatic irony	<i>when the audience knows more than at least one character does</i>
alliteration	<i>repetition of consonants, usually at the beginning of words</i>
assonance	<i>repetition of vowels in the middle of words</i>