

Allegory

A work that functions on a symbolic level

Convention

A traditional aspect of literary work such as a soliloquy in a Shakespearean play or tragic hero in a Greek tragedy.

Soliloquy

A speech in a play which is used to reveal the character's inner thoughts to the audience.

Parody

A comic imitation of a work that ridicules the original

Tone

The author's attitude toward his subjects

Paradox

A set of seemingly contradictory elements which nevertheless reflects an underlying truth

enjambment

A technique in poetry that involves the running on of a line or stanza. It enables the poem to move and to develop coherence as well as directing the reader with regard to form and meaning.

caesura

a break or pause within a line of poetry indicated by punctuation and used to emphasize meaning

elegy

a poem that laments the dead or a loss

couplet

two lines of rhyming poetry; often used by Shakespeare to conclude a scene or an important passage.

comic relief

The inclusion of a humorous character or scene to contrast with the tragic elements of a work, thereby intensifying the next tragic event.

aside

Words spoken by an actor intended for the audience but not by other characters on the stage

syntax

the grammatical structure of prose and poetry

tercet

A three line stanza

Sonnet

a 14 line poem with a prescribed rhyme scheme in iambic pentameter

Romanticism

A style or movement of literature that has its foundation and interest in freedom, adventure, idealism and escape.

Euphony

The pleasant mellifluous presentation of sounds in a literary work.

Diction

the author's choice of words

subplot

a secondary plot that explores ideas different from the main storyline.

epigram

a brief witty poem

epic

a lengthy elevated poem that celebrates the exploits of a hero

satire

a mode of writing based on ridicule, which criticizes the foibles and follies of society without necessarily offering a solution

allusion

a reference contained in a work

setting

the time and place of a literary work

Sestet

a six-line stanza, usually paired with an octave to form a Petrarchan sonnet.

villanelle

A highly structured poetic form that comprises six stanzas, five tercets, and a quatrain. The poem repeats the first and third lines throughout the poem.

Meter

a pattern of beats in poetry

ode

a formal, lengthy poem that celebrates a particular subject

rhyme

the duplication of final syllable sounds in two or more lines

motif

the repetition or variations of an image or idea in a work which is used to develop theme or characters

rhythm

the repetitive pattern of beats in poetry.

lyric poem

A type of poetry characterized by emotion, personal feelings and brevity; a large and inclusive category of poetry that exhibits rhyme, meter and reflective thought.

rhyme scheme

the annotations of the pattern of the rhyme

irony

an unexpected twist or contrast between what happens and what was intended or expected to happen.

idyll

a type of lyric poem which extols the virtues of an ideal place or time.

plot

a sequence of events
in a literary work

quatrain

a four line stanza

onomatopoeia

works that sounds like that
sound they represent

parallel plot

a secondary story line that
mimics and reinforces the
main plot.

fable

a simple symbolic story usually
employing animals as
characters

flashback

a device that enables a writer to refer back to past thoughts, events or episodes.

iamb

a metrical foot consisting of an unaccented syllable followed by an accented one; the most common poetic foot in the English language.

parable

A story that operates on more than one level and usually teaches a moral lesson

form

the shape or structure of a literary work

antagonist

the force or character that opposes the main character, the protagonist

apostrophe

direct address in
poetry

aubade

a love poem set at dawn which
bids farewell to the beloved

ballad

a simple narrative poem, often incorporating
dialogue that is written in quatrains, generally
with a rhyme scheme of a b c d.

blank verse

unrhymed iambic
pentameter

cacophony

a harsh and discordant sound
in a line or passage of literary
work

character

one who carries out the action of the plot in literature

climax

the turning point of action or character in a literary work, usually the highest moment of tension

conflict

a clash between opposing forces in a literary work, such as man vs. man

connotation

the interpretive level of a word based on its associated images rather than its literal meaning

denotation

the literal or dictionary meaning of a word

monologue

a speech given by
one character

Narrative poem

a poem that tells a
story

octave

an eight-line stanza, usually
combined with a sestet in a
Petrarchan sonnet

point of view

the method of
narration in a work

oxymoron

an image of
contradictory terms

resolution

the denouement of a literary work

protagonist

the hero or main character of a literary work, the character the audience sympathizes with

pathos

the aspects of a literary work that elicit pity from the audience

rhetorical question

a question that does not expect an explicit answer. It is used to pose an idea to be considered by the speaker or audience

personification

the assigning of human qualities to inanimate objects or concepts

synecdoche

a figure of speech that utilizes a part as a representative of the whole

theme

the underlying ideas that the author illustrates through characterization, motif, language, plot, etc.

sestina

a highly structured poetic form of 39 lines, written in iambic pentameter. It depends upon the repetition of six words from the first stanza in each of six stanzas.

style

the unique way an author presents his ideas

simile

an indirect comparison that used the words "like" or "as" to link differing items in comparison

symbol

something in a literary work that stands for something else.

subtext

implied meaning of a work or section of a work

spondee

a poetic foot consisting of two accented syllables

stage directions

the specific instructions a play write includes in concerning sets, characterization, delivery, etc.

dactyl

a foot of poetry consisting of a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables.

dramatic monologue

a type of poem that presents a conversation between a speaker and an implied listener

understatement

the opposite of exaggeration

stanza

a unit of a poem, similar in rhyme, meter and length to other units in the poem.

denouement

the conclusion or tying up of loose ends in a literary work; the resolution of the conflict and plot

tragic hero

a basically good person of noble birth or exalted position who has a fatal flaw or commits an error in judgment which leads to his downfall.

structure

the organization and form of a work

metaphor

a direct comparison between dissimilar things

figurative language

the body of devices that enables the writer to operate on levels other than the literal one.

foot

a metrical unit in poetry; a syllabic measure of a line; iamb, trochee, anapest, dactyl and spondee

image

a verbal approximation of a sensory impression, concept or emotion.

exposition

background information
presented in a literary work

free verse

poetry without a defined form,
meter or rhyme scheme

foreshadowing

hints of future events in a
literary work

impressionism

writing reflects a personal
image of a character, event or
concept,

imagery

the total effect of related
sensory images in a work of
literature.