



Teaching the Classics: Glossary of Literary Terms

<i>Allegory</i>	A figurative story, in which the principal subject is depicted by another subject resembling it in its properties and circumstances; a symbolic representation; a narrative in which abstract ideas are personified; a sustained metaphor. (<i>i.e. The Chronicles of Narnia, Everyman</i>)
<i>Antagonist</i>	The villain of a story, or the character that impedes the progress of the protagonist towards his goal.
<i>Anti-hero</i>	The protagonist that fails to demonstrate the typical heroic qualities. Charlie Brown, for example.
<i>Archetype</i>	The original pattern after which a thing is made. A model or first form.
<i>Bard</i>	An oral storyteller.
<i>Catharsis</i>	An emotional release provided by an artistic or aesthetic experience.
<i>Character</i>	One of the people in a story.
<i>Characterization</i>	The creative act of describing and developing a fictional character.
<i>Climax</i>	The turning point of a story; the highest point of interest. The peak of tension.
<i>Close Reading</i>	Reading a second time paying attention to details.
<i>Comedy</i>	A dramatic composition of light and humorous character, typically with a happy ending.
<i>Conflict</i>	The problem that drives the plot of a story forward toward its conclusion.
<i>Connotation</i>	The implied meaning given to words by the author of a story, often through the emotional weight they carry.
<i>Context</i>	Text surrounding words that gives those words significance; Historical and cultural factors surrounding events that give those events significance.

<i>Criticism</i>	A philosophy of literature that encompasses well developed viewpoints on the proper way to read, understand, and interpret it.
<i>Dénouement</i>	The disentangling of the intricacies of the plot of a story. Also referred to as Falling Action.
<i>Dialogue</i>	Written conversation between two or more characters.
<i>Dramatic Monologue</i>	A type of poem in which the poet assumes a persona and delivers a speech, either thinking out loud to himself, or his portion of a conversation with an implied listener the nature of which is revealing of his ambitions, motives, or personal character.
<i>Exposition</i>	The introduction of a story, where the author presents his characters in their setting and hints at the central conflict that will drive the story forward.
<i>Fiction</i>	Narrative writing that is not factual. Examples include novel, short story, myth and fable.
<i>Figurative Meaning</i>	Meaning that lies beneath the surface. Implied meaning, serving as illustration.
<i>Figure</i>	A stock character within a story. Examples include the Christ-Figure, the Hero, the Villain, and the Everyman.
<i>Foil</i>	A character created to demonstrate the qualities of the hero through comparison and contrast.
<i>Foreshadowing</i>	Hints within the text of events that will take place in later in the story.
<i>Frame</i>	The external story or context in which the story takes place.
<i>Genre</i>	A type of literature, distinguished from other types by form, technique, and subject matter. Genres include fiction, non-fiction, science fiction, fantasy, romance, epic, and poetry.
<i>Hero</i>	A successful, strong protagonist; a “superman” whose virtuous qualities separate him from the other characters in a story.
<i>Irony</i>	A mode of speech or writing expressing a literal sense contrary to the meaning intended by the speaker.
<i>Literal Meaning</i>	The face value of words or ideas.

<i>Literary Device</i>	A verbal tool employed by an author to enhance the effect of his story. Examples include imagery, alliteration, metaphor and rhyme.
<i>Literary Period</i>	The historical era that was the scene of the development of a particular type of literary expression.
<i>Motif</i>	A theme or idea that appears repeatedly throughout a story and characterizes it.
<i>Non-Fiction</i>	Writing that is based in fact. Examples include biographies, news stories, encyclopedia articles, and research papers.
<i>Novel</i>	A long work of fiction.
<i>Novella</i>	A short novel, often satiric or moralizing in nature.
<i>Paradox</i>	An apparent contradiction.
<i>Persona</i>	The personality assumed by a poet; the voice in which a poet speaks.
<i>Personification</i>	A comparison in which human qualities are assigned to inanimate things.
<i>Plot</i>	The sequence of events in a story; the simple story line.
<i>Poem</i>	A verse composition, especially one characterized by economy of linguistic expression, vivid imagery, and intense emotional tone. Generally characterized by adherence to rules of structure and form, including rhythm and sometimes rhyme.
<i>Point of View</i>	The perspective from which a story is told. Examples include 1st person, 3rd person narrative, 3rd person omniscient, and 3rd person limited.
<i>Prose</i>	Writing that is not poetry. Examples include essays, novels, and literary criticism.
<i>Protagonist</i>	The hero (or anti-hero) in a story; the character whose quest forms the main idea of the plot.
<i>Pun</i>	A play on words, often resulting in humorous effects.
<i>Satire</i>	The use of irony, sarcasm, or ridicule to expose, denounce or deride a particular vice or folly. A literary composition in verse or prose in which such vices or abuses are held up to scorn, derision, or ridicule.

<i>Setting</i>	The place and time in which the action of the story occurs.
<i>Soliloquy</i>	A monologue delivered by a performer alone onstage, during which he reveals his innermost thoughts to the audience, but not to the other performers.
<i>Stock Characters</i>	Familiar characters used regularly and interchangeably in a wide variety of stories. Examples include the young lovers, the snake oil salesman, the court jester and the stiff butler.
<i>Symbolism</i>	The use in literature of an object to represent something else. The object usually carries both a figurative and literal meaning. In general, a symbol is a concrete thing that stands for an abstract idea. (i.e. a flag represents the ideals of a nation, patriotism, etc.)
<i>Theme</i>	The underlying idea the author hopes to communicate in his story; the author's message; the leading subject upon which the author writes. (Some universal themes include: Prejudice, Betrayal, Innocence, Pride and Humility, Ambition, Good vs. Evil, Coming of Age, Personal Honor, Loyalty, Survival, etc.)
<i>Tragedy</i>	A drama portraying the struggle of a strong-willed protagonist against fate. The downfall of the protagonist usually hinges upon his fatal flaw in his otherwise heroic character.
<i>Voice</i>	The tone of the author, as the product of his vocabulary and syntax.