

AP English Literature Term List

Orem High School, Mr. Ellingford

Adapted and paraphrased from *A Handbook to Literature*, Seventh Edition, William Harmon and C. Hugh Holman editors, 1996.

Allegory: A story that acts as an extended metaphor. Characters, objects, and actions in the story have additional meanings separate from and outside of the story itself. An allegory is different from a symbol because a symbol presents additional levels of meaning that are centered on a single character, object or action, and the symbol is only a part of the story (although it may be a very important part). In an allegory, these additional levels of meaning *are* the story.

Alliteration: The repetition of the same consonant or vowel sound at the beginning of several closely placed words. The sound can also be included within the words as well as at the beginning.

Example: The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
 And murmuring of innumerable bees.

 -“Come Down, O Maid”, Alfred Lord Tennyson

Allusion: A brief reference to a historical or literary figure, event, or object.

Example: No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;

 -“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, T. S. Eliot

Assonance: The use of the same or similar vowel sounds in the stressed syllables of several closely placed words that end with different consonant sounds.

Example: Hear the mellow wedding bells.

 - “The Bells”, Edgar Allan Poe

Caesura: A pause or break in a line of poetry.

Example: We have but faith: we cannot know;
 For knowledge is of things we see;

 - “In Memoriam”, Alfred Lord Tennyson

Characterization: The way an author creates and develops the characters in the story. This includes appearance, personality, behavior, beliefs, and relationships with other characters.

Direct Characterization: The narrator explains the character to the reader.

Indirect Characterization: The reader infers what the character is like through his actions and the reactions of other characters.

Conflict: A struggle between a character and another opposing force. There are four types of conflict.

Person vs. Self: The character struggles within herself to make a decision, reach a conclusion, or overcome a part of herself.

Person vs. Person: The character struggles against the will or actions of another character.

Person vs. Society: The character struggles against a group or society.

Person vs. Nature: The character struggles against natural forces or elements outside of human creation or control.

Comedy: Drama that is meant to amuse the audience through wit, humor, subtlety, and character.

Connotation: Any meaning a word conveys, emotional or social, that is in addition to its official meaning. The additional meaning may be personal, limited to a group, or universal. (Don't confuse this with slang, when a word takes on an entirely new meaning in informal speaking.)

Example: Consider these two sentences. "He was a zealous promoter of the cause." "He was a fanatical promoter of the cause." The words "zealous" and "fanatical" mean essentially the same thing and are listed as synonyms in a thesaurus. However, "zealous" is generally seen as a positive enthusiasm, while "fanatical" is generally seen as negative. Another example of synonymous words with different connotations is "giggle", "chuckle", "chortle", and "guffaw".

Diction: The author's choice and use of words in a text. This is roughly analogous to word choice.

Denotation: The formal or official meaning of a word, separate from any other associations or acquired meanings.

Dramatic Monologue: A poem in which a single character gives a speech, usually to an known but silent listener, that reveals something about himself as he is in a dramatic or significant situation.

In Medias Rez: Starting a story in the middle and giving necessary exposition as the story unfolds (through dialogue, flashback, narration, etc.).

Enjambment: The continuation of a thought or clause from one line of poetry to another.

Example: It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
 Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?

 -"God's Grandeur", Gerard Manley Hopkins

Epic Poem: A long narrative poem written in a formal style that involves important characters whose actions highlight the deeds of the protagonist and form the framework for culturally and historically significant events.

Figurative Language: The use of language in a non-literal, non-normative way. Figurative language includes things such as metaphor, simile, hyperbole, and synecdoche, among others.

Foil: A character in a story who contrasts with another character, making the latter's attributes clearer and more distinctive, much like adding salt to a recipe brings out the flavors of the other ingredients.

Foreshadowing: Information given in a text that prepares the reader for future parts of the text. This information may be subtle or overt. Some examples of foreshadowing include the creation of a mood that hints at upcoming events or the presence or appearance of objects or facts not previously known.

Hyperbole: An exaggeration to amuse or to reinforce or heighten effect.

Example: You should study this list of terms at least a million times to make sure that
 know each one well.

Image: A description of an experience, object, or person using sensory details, usually more than one. Images are sometimes called concrete details. They are the building blocks of poetry.

Example: Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
 To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
 Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
 And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?

-“Ode to a Grecian Urn”, John Keats

Irony: When reality is different from what it appears to be or what is anticipated.

Verbal Irony: Much like sarcasm, when what is said differs from what is actually meant, but usually not as harsh or abrasive.

Dramatic Irony: When the reader or viewer or a text or performance knows something that the characters themselves do not.

Metaphor: A comparison between two things in which the similarity between the two is implied and not directly stated.

Example: That time of year thou mayst in me behold
 When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
 Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
 Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang –

Sonnet 73, William Shakespeare

Metonymy: Substituting a thing closely related to a word with the word itself.

Example: “The Pentagon released a statement today about national security.” A building cannot release a statement; the Pentagon is a building closely associated with the leaders of the armed forces and stands in their place to represent them.

Meter: The rhythm of a piece of poetry. The rhythm is determined by the number of syllables in a line and the number and placement of accents in the line. The smallest unit of rhythm is called a foot, and there are six basic types of feet and seven basic arrangements of these feet, all of which we’ll discuss later in class.

Motif: A recurring word, phrase, image, object, or action that creates unity throughout a text and may also reinforce its theme.

Onomatopoeia: Words that sound the same as the things they mean.

Example: “Buzz”, “Snap”, “Hiss”, “Sizzle”

Personification: Giving human characteristics to animals, ideas, feelings, or inanimate objects.

Example: “Ah, William, we're weary of weather,”
 said the sunflowers, shining with dew.

“Two Sunflowers Move in the Yellow Room”, William Blake

Plot: The pattern of events in a story. Plot is more than a simple diagram of the story (although a diagram is helpful for seeing the pattern) – it is the relationship between the parts and how they fit together. Traditionally, plot has been subdivided into parts: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action or

dénouement, and resolution. These parts sometimes overlap, and varying definitions are used depending on whether the work is a play or another kind of prose.

Poetry: Literature that is written with a regular rhythm and is usually expressive, imaginative, and relevant to the life and experience of the reader or listener.

Point of View: The perspective from which a narrative is told.

First Person: The narrator speaks in the first person and the reader can only know or experiences things that this character knows, thinks, feels, and experiences.

Third Person Limited: The narrator speaks in the third person, but the focus is on only one character, and the reader can only know or experience things that this character knows, thinks, feels, and experiences.

Third Person Omniscient: The narrator speaks in the third person and can know and explain anything that happens in the story and what the characters in it know, think, feel, and experience.

Third Person Objective: The narrator speaks in the third person and can know and explain anything that happens in the story externally but does not or cannot comment on what a character is thinking or feeling; no internal information about characters is available.

Prose: Literature that is not written with a regular rhythm. Although it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between prose and poetry, prose usually includes novels, novellas, short stories, plays, and essays.

Setting: The place in which a piece of literature is set, the time in which it occurs, the special circumstances that make it unique or different from our own world, and the culture in which it takes place.

Simile: A comparison between two things in which the similarity between the two is directly stated, usually using the words “as” or “like”.

Example: “The very mist on the Essex marshes was like a gauzy and radiant fabric.”

Heart of Darkness, Joseph Conrad

Soliloquy: A speech given when a character is alone, and meant to share with the reader or viewer what is happening in that character’s thoughts and feelings.

Stanza: A set of two or more lines in a poem, grouped by their arrangement on the page or the subject that they express.

Symbol: Something that is itself but also represents or stands for something else. A flag is a piece of cloth that can be seen, felt, and experienced through the senses, but it also represents a country or community. In literature, symbols are usually used in this way, with something tangible also representing something abstract, on a different level of meaning.

Synecdoche: Substituting a part of the whole for the whole itself.

Example: “He’s got a nice set of wheels.” The speaker is referring to a car as a whole and not the wheels themselves.

Syntax: The way an author arranges words and phrases to create sentences. This is roughly analogous to sentence fluency.

Theme: The author's message about or commentary on life that applies to everyone, is based on events in the text, and is expressed as a statement. A theme is different from a moral because the first is declarative and the second is imperative.

Tone: The author's attitude towards his/her subject as expressed to the reader. The author creates tone through the use of diction (especially words with clear connotations), syntax, imagery, and the information given through exposition. Tone is sometimes used interchangeably with the term "mood".

Tragedy: Drama that is meant to show the darker aspects of human existence that occur through nature or their own flaws. It also can celebrate the heroic struggle against this darkness, although this struggle results in defeat of some kind.

Unreliable Narrator: A narrator in a first-person narrative who cannot be completely trusted to relay information accurately or to understand what is going on. This can also apply in a third-person narrative if narrator is another character addressing the reader directly.

Have you reckoned a thousand acres much? Have you reckoned
the earth much?
Have you practiced so long to learn to read?
Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin
of all poems,
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun....there are
millions of suns left,
You shall no longer take things at second or third hand....nor
look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres
in books,
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself.

- Walt Whitman
From "Song of Myself"