

Fiction Terms

Allegory: A symbolic narrative in which the surface details imply a secondary meaning. Allegory often takes the form of a story in which the characters represent moral qualities.

Antagonist: A character or force against which another character struggles.

Character: An imaginary person that inhabits a literary work. Literary characters may be major or minor, static (unchanging) or dynamic (capable of change).

Characterization: The means by which writers present and reveal character. Although techniques of characterization are complex, writers typically reveal characters through their speech, dress, manner, and actions.

Climax: The turning point of the action in the plot of a play or story.

Complication: An intensification of the conflict in a story or play. Complication builds up, accumulates, and develops the primary or central conflict in a literary work.

Connotation: The associations called up by a word that goes beyond its dictionary meaning. Poets, especially, tend to use words rich in connotation.

Denotation: The dictionary meaning of a word. Writers typically play off a word's denotative meaning against its connotations, or suggested and implied associational implications.

Denouement: The resolution of the plot of a literary work.

Diction: The selection of words in a literary work. A work's diction forms one of its centrally important literary elements, as writers use words to convey action, reveal character, imply attitudes, identify themes, and suggest values.

Falling action: In the plot of a story or play, the action following the climax of the work that moves it towards its denouement or resolution.

Flashback: An interruption of a work's chronology to describe or present an incident that occurred prior to the main time frame of a work's action. Writers use flashbacks to complicate the sense of chronology in the plot of their works and to convey the richness of the experience of human time.

Foil: A character who contrasts and parallels the main character in a play or story.

Foreshadowing: Hints of what is to come in the action of a play or a story.

Irony: A contrast or discrepancy between what is said and what is meant or between what happens and what is expected to happen in life and in literature. In verbal irony, characters say the opposite of what they mean. In irony of circumstance or situation, the opposite of what is expected occurs. In dramatic irony, a character speaks in ignorance of a situation or event known to the audience or to the other characters.

Metaphor: A comparison between essentially unlike things without an explicitly comparative word such as *like* or *as*.

Narrator: The voice and implied speaker of a fictional work, to be distinguished from the actual living author.

Parable: A brief story that teaches a lesson often ethical or spiritual.

Personification: The endowment of inanimate objects or abstract concepts with animate or living qualities.

Point of view: The angle of vision from which a story is narrated. See *Narrator*. A work's point of view can be: **first person**, in which the narrator is a character or an observer, respectively; **objective**, in which the narrator knows or appears to know no more than the reader; **omniscient**, in which the narrator knows everything about the characters; and **limited omniscient**, which allows the narrator to know some things about the characters but not everything.

Protagonist: The main character of a literary work.

Rising action: A set of conflicts and crises that constitute the part of a play's or story's plot leading up to the climax.

Satire: A literary work that criticizes human misconduct and ridicules vices, stupidities, and follies.

Setting: The time and place of a literary work that establish its context.

Simile: A figure of speech involving a comparison between unlike things using *like*, *as*, or *as though*.

Theme: The idea of a literary work abstracted from its details of language, character, and action, and cast in the form of a generalization.

Tone: The implied attitude of a writer toward the subject and characters of a work.

Understatement: A figure of speech in which a writer or speaker says less than what he or she means; the opposite of exaggeration.