

action: what happens in a NARRATIVE, also called the **story**. Both are different from PLOT.

allegory: “extended METAPHOR in which objects, persons, and actions are equated with meanings that lie outside the NARRATIVE itself” (Holman). A NARRATIVE ANALOGY. Ex. Aesop’s FABLES, Jesus’s PARABLES, *Pilgrim’s Progress*.

analogy: “A comparison of two things, alike in certain aspects; particularly [when] something unfamiliar is explained or described by comparing it to something more familiar” (Holman). Ex. ALLEGORY and FABLE.

ambiguity, ambiguous: [1] an expression with two or more possible meanings; [2] an expression whose meaning is unclear (Melani).

character: a person in a story, usually an artistic creation of the author, even if based on a historical person.

characterization: “the creation of imaginary persons so that they seem lifelike” (Holman), especially the *methods* an author uses to create such persons or reveal personality. “She was a miser” is *direct characterization*. “She emptied the bowl of sugar packets into her alligator-leather purse” is *indirect characterization*. (Usage: “characterized indirectly by...”)

comedy: “Compared with TRAGEDY, comedy is a lighter form of drama that aims primarily to amuse” (Holman). Usually a happy ending.

context: “Matter that surrounds a word or text in question” (Holman). The background necessary to understand the meaning of a phrase, a POEM, or even a longer work.

convention: a customary, standard feature of a GENRE, or of a period in literary history. (Some theater conventions: the characters cannot see the audience watching them; if a character speaks directly to the audience she cannot lie, and the other characters cannot hear what she is saying.)

diction: choice of words (vocabulary) and their arrangement (SYNTAX) (Holman). Diction can affect the formality of an expression, its suggestive meaning, its TONE, and so on. It may be a recognizable element of a writer’s STYLE.

drama: a story presented by actors for an audience.

ellipsis: “the omission of one or more words that, while essential to a grammatic structure, are easily supplied” by the reader (Holman). Example: “You do your job, I mine.” Usage: “an *elliptical* phrase or style.”

epic: “a long [NARRATIVE]... that celebrates the achievements of mighty heroes and heroines, usually in founding a nation or developing a culture, and uses elevated language [usually poetry] in a high, grand style,” (Booth & Mays). *Folk (primary) epic:* one “of unknown authorship, assumed to be the product of communal composition.” *Art (literary, secondary) epic:* one of known authorship, “supposed to be more sophisticated and more consciously moral in purpose than the folk epic” (Holman). *Mock epic:* uses epic CONVENTIONS for SATIRE, to ridicule society or characters (Booth & Mays).

fable: a short ALLEGORICAL NARRATIVE that teaches a moral, often with talking animals. (Cf. ALLEGORY, PARABLE)

fiction: “NARRATIVE, [usually] PROSE, about... imagined CHARACTERS and ACTION” (Booth & Mays) (cf. NONFICTION)

figurative language, figure, figure of speech: “language which departs from the standard construction, order, and significance of works in order to achieve special meaning

or effect” (Abrams). Language that expresses something more, less, or different from its ordinary meaning. Common examples: METAPHOR, SIMILE, personification, oxymoron, overstatement, understatement, IRONY.

form: The structure of a work. In poetry, the type of RHYTHMIC unit (iamb, anapest, etc.), line length (trimeter, tetrameter, etc.), RHYME scheme, stanza design, a sonnet’s octave and sestet, and so on.

genre: a type or category of work; a grouping by form, technique, subject matter (Holman): NOVEL, *sonnet*, etc.

hero: a superpowered, aristocratic, divine, or semidivine being whose adventures are celebrated in literature. See also EPIC. HEROIC VERSE or POEM refers to the form and style a culture uses for its HEROIC literature.

imagery, image: “any sensory detail or evocation” (Booth & Mays). “representation of sensory experience” (Holman). Images invoke vision, hearing, taste, smell, texture, heft, cold, pain, etc. FIGURES may create imagery.

irony: “a significant difference between what is expected or understood and what actually happens or is meant” (Booth & Mays); “the recognition of a reality different from appearance” (Holman). *Verbal irony:* an expression whose intended meaning is not the literal meaning. Often sarcastic in TONE. *Situational irony:* an event that reverses or fulfils expectations in an unexpected way (Booth & Mays). *Dramatic irony:* when the audience knows something that a character needs to know but does not.

literature: “writing that rewards re-reading” (attrib. C. S. Lewis); “writing [that gives] pleasure which arises not only from the things said, but from the way in which they are said” (Stopford Brooke, quoted in Booth & Mays).

metaphor: a FIGURE in which word that normally means one thing is applied to (or substituted for) something else in order to suggest a similarity. Ex. “I hit a brick wall” to mean “I had to stop working because of an unsolvable problem.” Unlike a SIMILE, which asserts that one thing is *like* another (asserts similarity), a metaphor asserts that one thing *is* another (asserts identity). May be analyzed by TENOR AND VEHICLE.

meter: “the recurrence in poetry of a RHYTHMIC pattern.” Can be measured by the number of accents (stresses) in a line, by alternating weak and strong syllables, by syllable counts, or by a combination of these (Holman).

mode: “broad categories of treatment of material, such as romance, comedy, tragedy, or satire” (Holman). RHETORICAL MODES are comparison, analysis, NARRATIVE, classification, definition.

myth: “a literary genre in which numinous symbols are constellated in NARRATIVE form” (Avis 116). A story, whether historical or fictional, that reflects higher spiritual or psychological meanings.

narrator: “who is telling the story.... Unlike drama, in which events are acted out in front of an audience, fiction is always mediated or represented to us by someone else, a narrator” (Booth & Mays). Usage: NARRATIVE, *narration*.

narrative: a story. Events told through speech or writing.

nonfiction: “PROSE works that describe actual, as opposed to imaginary or FICTIONAL, CHARACTERS and events” (Booth & Mays). Poetry is also nonfiction, as are essays, history, and other PROSE not about people or events.

novel: a long PROSE FICTION NARRATIVE. Developed from ROMANCE, but depicts “real life and manners” (Clara Reeve, in Holman), not passion and adventure for their own sake.

parable: “an illustrative story teaching a lesson” (Holman). (Cf. ALLEGORY, ANALOGY, FABLE)

paraphrase: the same ideas expressed in new language. Studying a poem often begins with a prose paraphrase.

plot: “the artistic arrangement of . . . events” in a NARRATIVE (Kennedy & Gioia), “the way the author sequences and paces the events so as to shape our response and interpretation” (Booth & Mays). Not the same as ACTION or STORY.

poetry, poem, poetic: “imaginative writing . . . characterized by” [1] “compression and compactness” [2] “allowance for AMBIGUITY” [3] strong emphasis on sensory experience through IMAGERY [4] special “qualities and effects of words and word order” [5] “especially vivid, often FIGURATIVE, language” [6] “controlled patterns of RHYTHM and SYNTAX” (often using METER and RHYME) (Booth & Mays). Prose often shows poetic qualities.

point of view: “the vantage point from which an author presents a story” (Holman). A *first-person narrator* is a CHARACTER in the story. A *third-person narrator* is a storytelling VOICE that does not participate in the ACTION. If a third-person narrator reports only what characters say and do, it is *objective*. If a third-person narrator also reveals the thoughts of a character, it is *limited all-knowing* or *limited omniscient*; if it moves between characters and reveals their thoughts and feelings, it is simply *all-knowing* or *omniscient*. The VOICE is the “verbal quality of NARRATION” and the FOCUS is the “visual angle” that directs our “gaze” (Booth & Mays).

prose: writing that is not in verse FORM.

rhetoric: “the presentation of ideas in clear, persuasive language” (Holman). *Rhetorical* MODE, device, STYLE, etc.

rhyme: (see SOUND DEVICES.) RHYME SCHEME: “a pattern of end rhymes in a poem, often noted by small letters, such as *abab* or *abba*” (Booth & Mays).

rhythm: “the modulation of weak and strong (or stressed and unstressed) elements in the flow of speech” (Booth & Mays). A regular rhythm pattern in poetry is called METER.

romance: a FICTION NARRATIVE involving “extravagant characters, . . . exotic places, . . . heroic events, passionate love, or mysterious or supernatural experiences” (Holman).

setting: the place (*physical setting*) and the time (*temporal setting*) of the events. *General setting:* “Chicago’s Southside, somewhere between World War II and the present” (Hansberry). *Particular setting:* “The [family] living room . . . morning dark . . .” (Hansberry) (Booth & Mays).

short story: a short PROSE FICTION NARRATIVE. cf. NOVEL.

simile: “a FIGURE in which a similarity between two objects is directly expressed” (Holman), using “like,” “as,” or other comparative phrase (“resembles,” “in the manner of”). Asserts similarity, unlike METAPHOR, which asserts identity. May be analyzed by TENOR AND VEHICLE.

sound devices: reinforcement of meaning or effect through the sound of the language itself. Some examples:

- *alliteration:* repetition of initial sounds (*fair friend*)
- *assonance:* repetition of the same or similar vowel sounds within words (*absolute rat trap*)
- *consonance:* repetition of the same or similar consonant sounds within words (*lazy old soul*)
- *cacophony:* harsh, discordant sounds (“with throats unslaked” – Coleridge)
- *euphony:* pleasant sounds (“Ah Sleep! It is a gentle thing / Beloved from pole to pole” – Coleridge)
- *onomatopoeia:* “echoic” or imitative sounds (clang, tweet, burp, hiss, thump, hoot, pop, flop, rattle, squeak)
- *rhyme:* repetition of final accented vowels and all that follows (“illégál béagle”)

story: the events of a NARRATIVE; what happens; the ACTION. Not the same thing as PLOT.

style: “a distinctive manner of expression” (Booth & Mays); habits of language and thinking that distinguish one writer from another. This may include DICTION, IMAGERY, sentence complexity, TONE —anything distinctive.

symbol: “a person, object, image, word, or event that evokes a range of additional meaning beyond and usually more abstract than its literal significance” (Meyer). A person, thing, or event in a work of art that suggests meanings beyond the literal. Sunshine may suggest nurturing, happiness, insight, or honesty, depending on CONTEXT.

syntax: “the rule-governed arrangement of words in a sentence.” With vocabulary, it comprises DICTION (Holman). “He loves me” and “Me he loves” mean the same thing grammatically, but syntax changes emphasis.

tenor and vehicle: terms to analyze a METAPHOR or SIMILE. The idea being expressed is the *tenor* and the image used to convey the idea is the *vehicle* (Richards). Ex. *tenor* “angry” expressed by *vehicle* “spitting nails”

theme: “A central idea” (Holman); what a work of art says about the human condition.

tone: “the attitudes toward the subject and toward the audience implied by a literary work” (Holman); “especially [as] revealed through DICTION” (Booth & Mays).

topic: the subject of a written work. It differs from THEME: the topic of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is a guerilla band in the Spanish Civil War, but its themes comment on the value of heroism, what constitutes a life well lived, love *versus* duty, and so on. See THEME.

tragedy: a DRAMATIC MODE dealing with the sense that humans are doomed “to suffer, fail, and die, and that the measure of a person’s life is to be taken by how he or she faces that inevitable failure” (Holman). (cf. COMEDY)

vehicle: (see TENOR AND VEHICLE)

verse: sense [6] of POETRY. Also a POETIC stanza or line.

voice: (see POINT OF VIEW)

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