Basic Literary Terminology

**Allegory:** when an abstract concept is explained with the aid of a physical object or idea

Examples: *Animal Farm*, a novel by George Orwell, is about talking farm animals. It is an allegory for the political struggle between Western forces and Stalin’s communist regime.

**Parody:** when a text imitates the style of another work or author

Examples: The movie *10 Things I Hate About You* is a parody of Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew*.

*Bored of the Rings* is a novel that parodies the popular fantasy series called *Lord of the Rings*.

**Character Development**

**Protagonist:** the main character

**Antagonist:** the rival or opponent to the main character; the antagonist usually creates conflict for the protagonist

**Archetype:** a model or standard character; something that other copies are based on

There are several examples of archetypes, including:

Repeating symbolism: a long journey, an orphaned prince raised in poverty, twins separated at birth

Repeating themes: revenge, the inevitability of death, the power of love to overcome obstacles

Repeating characters: an evil witch, a wise old man, the caring parental figure, star-crossed (unlucky) lovers

Colors: Green usually symbolizes life (the color of plants) or fortune (the color of money).

- Blue is a symbol for sadness. It also symbolizes water and peacefulness.
- White: A symbol for purity
- Black: a symbol for darkness or evil
- Red: a symbol for anger, blood, or passion

Repeating images: a flower, an animal (such as a lion to represent courage), blood, water, ashes, etc.

**Foil:** a character who contrasts another character (usually the protagonist)

Adapted from literary-devices.com
**Thematic Terms**

**Allusion:** a figurative reference to a previous historical event or another literary work

**Anthropomorphism:** giving human-like qualities to an animal or object

**Connotation:** associations that people make with words

   Examples: *Connotations of winter include cold, dark, snow, sad, relaxing, etc.*
   
   *Connotations of a computer might include convenient, fast, popular, etc.*

**Denotation:** the dictionary term or literal meaning of a word

**Flashback/Flashforward:** referring to an event or memory that happens either before the current timeline of the story, or later on in the story

**Foreshadowing:** providing a hint of what will happen next in the story

Examples: Someone loading his gun might foreshadow that he is going to kill someone.

**Hyperbole:** when an author uses strong or over-the-top language to emphasize or exaggerate something

A lot of English idioms are hyperboles:

   - *I am so hungry I could eat a horse.*
   - *I have a ton of stuff to do.*

**Literary hyperboles:**

   - *The town had been sleeping for centuries.*
   - *There was enough knowledge in that man’s head to fill an entire library.*

**Inference:** “to make an inference” means to draw conclusions from what is implied in the text

**Imagery:** using words to create “mental images” for the reader

**Juxtaposition:** to place an idea, character, or theme parallel to another

   Examples: *youth and old age, good and evil, greed and generosity*

**Motif:** a recurring symbol, object or theme

   Examples: In Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, violence and hallucinations are recurring motifs.

**Personification:** Similar to anthropomorphism, but it usually attributes living qualities or emotions to abstract ideas.

Adapted from literary-devices.com
Examples: The book jumped out of my hands. (the book is personified, since it cannot jump)

An incoming storm might foreshadow future trouble in the story.

**Comparisons:**

**Analogy:** a parallel comparison between two things

Examples of analogies: *An author referring to a book as his or her “child”*

*A politician referring to the government as his “playground”*

You also might see specific language used for analogies, such as:

*A mother is to her child as an author is to her book.*

*Scissors are to cut as a scale is to weigh.* (the object and its corresponding action)

**Simile:** A simile is similar to a metaphor, but it makes a comparison using the word “like,” “as,” or “such as”

Examples: She ate like a voracious bear, tearing apart the meat with her teeth.

The sun was like a giant copper penny in the sky.

**Metaphor:** A metaphor is not the same as an analogy or simile. It is a direct comparison between two things.

Examples of metaphor from Shakespeare:

Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops."
*Rom. and Jul., iii. 5.*

Here, the “day” is compared to someone standing on his or her toes.

**Metonym:** using another related word to refer to a concept instead of using its correct, formal word

Examples: Using “the crown” to talk about the monarchy.

Using “Capitol Hill” to talk about the U.S. Congress.

**Poetry**

**Onomatopoeia**

**Rhyme:** using words with the same vowel sounds

Adapted from literary-devices.com
Common rhyme schemes (patterns of rhymes):

ABAB CDCD

ABBA CDDC

**Theater Vocabulary:**
Ad lib/improvise: to invent dialogue or act out a scene without planning it beforehand

Examples: “Improv comedy” is usually created in response to audience suggestions and reactions.

Backdrop: the background of the stage

Denouement: the end, finale, or conclusion

**Forms of speech:**

**Dialogue:** the term used for speech or talking in a play

**Monologue:** a speech given by a single actor to the audience

**Soliloquy:** a speech given by a single actor to him or herself

**Scenery:** the visual setting created for the stage

**Set:** similar to scenery and backdrop, it includes things like props, backdrops, lighting, furniture etc.

Adapted from literary-devices.com