

# Glossary of Literary Terms

**Alliteration:** The repetition of initial consonant sounds in two or more consecutive or neighboring words.

**Allusion:** A reference to something outside the work in which it is found.

**Antagonist:** The opponent of the main character, or protagonist.

**Anthropomorphism:** When animals or inanimate objects are portrayed as people.

**Character:** An imaginary person in a work of fiction.

**Character development:** The method used by an author to develop a character.

**Character trait:** A distinguishing characteristic, or quality, of a character.

**Characterization:** The method used by the author to give readers information about a character; a description or representation of a person's qualities or peculiarities.

**Climax:** The moment in a story when the action reaches its greatest conflict.

**Conflict:** The struggle within a character, between characters, between a character and society, or between a character and a force of nature.

**Connotation:** The associations that are suggested or implied by a word that go beyond its dictionary meaning.

**Denotation:** The dictionary meaning of a word.

**Denouement:** The part of the plot where the main dramatic conflict is worked out; the plot may or may not have a happy ending. (Also called resolution.)

**Dialect:** A variety of a language that is distinguished from the standard form by pronunciation, grammar, and/or vocabulary.

**Dialogue (dialog):** Conversation between two or more characters.

**Exposition:** The beginning of a work of fiction; the part in which readers are given important background information.

**Falling action:** The action that comes after the climax and before the resolution.

**Figurative language:** Description of one thing in terms usually used for something else. Simile and metaphor are examples of figurative language.

**Flashback:** Insertion of an earlier event into the normal chronological sequence of a narrative.

**Foil:** A character with traits opposite to those of the main character.

**Foreshadowing:** The use of clues to give readers a hint of events yet to occur.

**Genre:** A category of literature.

**Historical fiction:** Fiction represented in a setting true to the history of the time in which the story takes place.

**Hyperbole:** An exaggeration used for effect.

**Idiom:** An expression whose meaning cannot be determined by its literal expression.

**Image:** A mental picture.

**Imagery:** The use of language that appeals to the senses and produces mental images; the use of figures of speech or vivid descriptions to produce mental images.

**Irony (situational):** An outcome contrary to what was or might have been expected.

**Irony (verbal):** The use of words to express the opposite of their literal meaning.

**Metaphor:** A figure of speech that compares two unlike things without the use of *like* or *as*.

**Mood:** The feeling that the author creates for the reader.

**Narrator:** The voice and implied speaker who tells the story.

**Onomatopoeia:** The use of words that mimic the sounds they represent.

**Oxymoron:** A figure of speech made up of seemingly contradictory parts.

**Paradox:** A statement or situation that seems contradictory but reveals a truth.

**Personification:** The bestowing of human qualities on inanimate objects, ideas, or animals. (See the difference between personification and anthropomorphism.)

**Plot:** The ordered structure, or sequence, of causal events in a story.

**Point of view:** The perspective from which a story is told; the relation of the narrator to the story.

**Protagonist:** The main character.

**Pun:** A humorous play on words that are similar in sound but different in meaning.

**Realistic fiction:** True-to-life fiction; people, places, and happenings are similar to those in real life.

**Resolution:** The part of the plot where the main dramatic conflict is worked out; the plot may or may not have a happy ending. (Also called denouement.)

**Rising action:** Events in a plot that occur after the exposition but before the climax.

**Sarcasm:** A form of verbal irony in which a person says the opposite of what he or she means.

**Satire:** A literary work that pokes fun at individual or societal weaknesses.

**Sequencing:** The placement of story elements in a narrative order, usually chronological.

**Setting:** The time and place in which the main story events occur.

**Simile:** A figure of speech that clearly compares two unlike things through the use of *like* or *as*.

**Stereotype:** A character whose personality traits represent a group rather than an individual.

**Style:** The author's manner of writing, including grammatical structures, type of vocabulary, and the use of figurative language and other literary techniques.

**Suspense:** Quality that causes readers to wonder what will happen next; apprehension about what will happen.

**Symbolism:** The use of an object, character, or idea to represent something else.

**Theme:** The main idea of a literary work; the message the author wants to convey.

**Tone:** The attitude of the author towards his or her writing.

**Understatement:** To state something less strongly than the facts would indicate.