30 Literary Terms to Know

(This info was compiled from https://literaryterms.net/,
where, if you're interested, you can also find
all sorts of other good terms to know and learn about.)

In the table below are 30 literary terms that are good to know when it comes to analyzing works in my IB English 11 class. Each listing is a hyperlink to a site with much more information about each term, and below the table, you can find an annotated list with the basic definitions and examples for each of the terms.

[Note: Students will be quizzed on these terms at the beginning of the school year in IB English 11, and the highlighted definitions below are the ones to be used for said quiz.]

1. Allegory

An allegory (AL-eh-goh-ree) is a story within a story. It has a "surface story" and another story hidden underneath. For example, the surface story might be about two neighbors throwing rocks at each other's homes, but the hidden story would be about war between countries. Some allegories are very subtle, while others (like the rock-throwing example) can be more obvious.

In most allegories, the hidden story has something to do with politics, religion, or morality — complex subjects that are difficult to understand directly. Many authors find it easier to think through these issues by translating them into allegories, which are easier to understand (and more fun to read) than dense philosophical arguments.

Example

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is one of literature's most famous allegories. The surface story is about a group of farm animals who rise up, kick out the humans, and try to run the farm themselves. The hidden story, however, is about the Russian Revolution, and each of the characters represents some figure from that revolution. The pigs represent Communist leaders like Stalin, Lenin, and Trotsky, the dogs represent the KGB, the humans represent capitalists, the horses represent the working class, etc.

2. Allusion

Allusion (pronounced ah-LOO-zhun) is basically a reference to something else. It's when a writer mentions some other work, or refers to an earlier part of the current work.

In literature, it's frequently used to reference cultural works (e.g. by alluding to a Bible story or Greek myth). Allusion also exists in other art forms – musicians, for example, frequently "allude" to melodies used by other musicians.

Example

Ah, Krusty – this is your Waterloo! (Sideshow Bob, *The Simpsons*)

This is an allusion to the Battle of Waterloo, where Napoleon Bonaparte suffered a crushing defeat from which he would never recover. Using this allusion, Sideshow Bob suggests that he is about to bring down Krusty just as Napoleon was brought down at Waterloo.

3. Alter Ego

An alter ego (pronounced awl-ter ee-goh) is a secondary self. The fascination behind an alter ego is in its secrecy—it's almost always a second identity or life that is being hidden from a person or character's friends, family, and others around them. Of Latin origin and stemming from the Greek *állos egó,* the term is believed to have been coined by the author Cicero, who described it as "a second self, a trusted friend."

When a character lives more than one life, having a secret identity or taking on more than one personality, that alternate personality is their alter ego—for instance, think of Spider-Man, who is the alter ego to Peter Parker. He is just a normal guy by day, but secretly has supernatural powers that he uses to fight crime. In many cases the characters are in control of their alter egos, but in other cases (that focus more on the psychological aspects of the alter ego), they may not even be aware that it exists.

Example

In Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club,* the narrator and main character has the alter ego without initially being aware of it. The narrator, a simple man with a boring life, develops the alter

ego Tyler Durden, an extremist and activist who leads people to do all kinds of things that the narrator himself would never be brave enough to do on his own. Throughout the novel, the narrator often asks,

If I could wake up in a different place, at a different time, could I wake up as a different person?

This quote is telling for the audience and for the narrator himself—in reality, his own question is answered by the existence of his alter ego. He does wake up in different places and different times as an entirely different person. But, he doesn't realize it until the damage is done and he has unconsciously created a life of mayhem for himself through his own alter ego.

4. Anecdote

An anecdote (pronounced an-ik-doht) is a very short story that is significant to the topic at hand; usually adding personal knowledge or experience to the topic. Basically, anecdotes are stories. Like many stories, anecdotes are most often told through speech; they are spoken rather than written down.

The term "anecdote" originally comes from the Greek phrase *ἀνέκδοτα* , meaning "things unpublished."

Example

A very famous anecdote in literature is from *Swann's Way* of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* novels, when he recalls a specific time that he ate a madeleine cookie. Below is a small selection from this memory:

Many years had elapsed during which nothing of Combray, save what was comprised in the theatre and the drama of my going to bed there, had any existence for me, when one day in winter, as I came home, my mother, seeing that I was cold, offered me some tea, a thing I did not ordinarily take. I declined at first, and then, for no particular reason, changed my mind. She sent out for one of those short, plump little cakes called 'petites madeleines,' which look as though they had been moulded in the fluted scallop of a pilgrim's shell.

Proust uses this anecdote in part of an ongoing discussion on memory and remembrance of the past. For him, this particular childhood moment represents one of his strongest and most intense memories, particularly of those tied to senses.

5. Antagonist

In a story, the antagonist (pronounced an-TAG-oh-nist) is the opposite of the protagonist, or main character. Typically, this is a villain of some kind, but not always! It's just the opponent of the main character, or someone who gets in their way.

Every story has at least one protagonist, but not all stories have an antagonist! In some cases, the protagonist is simply struggling against impersonal forces like nature, circumstance, social strictures, or addiction. In these cases, there is no antagonist in the story. However, a story can have any number of antagonists getting in the protagonist's way.

Example

Inspector Javert (Les Misérables)

Inspector Javert stands in a moral grey area throughout the story, but he might still be seen as a hero antagonist. He appears to be a good man in general, but he is overly attached to his moral absolutes and adamantly pursues the protagonist, Jean Valjean, in order to arrest him for theft.

6. Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism (pronounced ann-throw-poe-MORF-ism) is giving human traits or attributes to animals, inanimate objects or other non-human things. It comes from the Greek words *anthropo* (human) and *morph* (form).

This could be very obvious: for example, a rock shaped like a human being would be considered anthropomorphic. But anthropomorphism is usually more figurative than that.

Example

Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* uses countless symbolic anthropomorphisms. In the novel, the ancient gods are all real, but have come into competition with modern gods, which are the anthropomorphic forms of technology, media, etc. There are also gods from other eras, such as one representing railroads. These anthropomorphic symbols, and the relationships between them, allow Gaiman to make a statement about modern lives and values through his story.

7. Antithesis

"Antithesis" literally means "opposite" – it is usually the opposite of a statement, concept, or idea. In literary analysis, an antithesis is a pair of statements or images in which the one reverses the other. The pair is written with similar grammatical structures to show more contrast. Antithesis (pronounced an-TITH-eh-sis) is used to emphasize a concept, idea, or conclusion.

Example

All the joy the world contains has come through wanting happiness for others. All the misery the world contains has come through wanting pleasure for yourself. (Shantideva, The Way of the Bodhisattva)

The antithesis here comes with some pretty intense parallel structure. Most of the words in each sentence are *exactly the same* as those in the other sentence. ("All the ___ the world contains has come through wanting _____ for _____.") This close parallel structure makes the antithesis all the more striking, since the words that *differ* become much more visible.

Another interesting feature of this antithesis is that it makes "pleasure" and "happiness" seem like opposites, when most of us might think of them as more or less synonymous. The quote makes happiness seem noble and exalted, whereas pleasure is portrayed as selfish and worthless.

8. Archetype

An archetype (ARK-uh-type) is an idea, symbol, pattern, or character-type in a story. It's any story element that appears again and again in stories from cultures around the world and symbolizes something universal in the human experience.

Archetypes are always somewhat in question. After all, no one has studied *every* culture in the world – that would be impossible – so we never know for sure whether something is truly *universal*.

Example

In the *Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit* books, both Bilbo Baggins and Frodo Baggins are classic Hero archetypes. They start out as ordinary Hobbits living under the hill, but hear a call to adventure when Gandalf and the Dwarves come to the door. Over the course of the journey, they must fight dragons and dark lords (both examples of the Nightmare Beast archetype), before returning to The Shire as transformed individuals.

9. Bildungsroman

Also known as a "coming-of-age story," a *bildungsroman* is a tale in which the main character transforms from child to adult, or at least takes some major steps in that direction. Typically, a bildungsroman follows some kind of growth or education – the character doesn't just grow up on her own, but has to go through a difficult experience in order to come out the other side with greater strength and wisdom.

Example

Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* is definitely a bildungsroman. The story covers young David's experiences from childhood into maturity, as he learns about discipline, perseverance, independence, and love.

10. Characterization

Characterization is a writer's tool, or "literary device" that occurs any time the author uses details to teach us about a person. This is used over the course of a story in order to tell the tale.

Aristotle first defined characterization in the 15th century, speaking of the importance of plot over character in *Poetics*, "Tragedy is representation, not of men, but of action and life." What he means here is that "tragedy" (or drama, meaning a story) is not centered on the thoughts, and histories, and dreams of the characters. The story is centered on what happens to them (the plot), so writers employ characterization to relay information about those thoughts, histories, and dreams, without drifting away from the action.

Example

In *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge tells a charity collector that, if the poor would rather die (than go to poor-houses), they'd better do it, and "decrease the surplus population." This line tells us a lot about how Scrooge sees both other people and his own good fortune. *[Note from Mr. Lochamy: Although the preceding example of characterization is not wrong/bad, for my class I'd like us to focus on aspects of the text other than character dialogue when analyzing characterization whenever possible. Writing about the kind of example we see above will feel limiting, resulting in your reader feeling like you're just decoding from the text what the average reader would likely infer. If you were to include a piece of evidence like this in your argument, it would be very important to pair it with other compelling evidence as well–perhaps couching it in structures like patterns and or comparisons, etc.]*

11. Climax

Climax is the highest point of tension or drama in a narratives' plot. Often, climax is also when the main problem of the story is faced and solved by the main character or protagonist. The phrase climax is derived from the Greek word *klimax* meaning "ladder." Reading a story is like climbing a ladder, with the climax at the top. The basic elements of plot are as follows:

- Exposition: Characters and setting are established and the conflict, or problem, is introduced.
- Rising action: The conflict begins to affect the characters, complicating their lives.
- Climax: The conflict is faced during the main, most dramatic event of the story.

- Falling action: The story begins to slow down, showing results of the climax.
- Resolution: The story is tied up and concluded.

Example

In the novel *Life of Pi*, Yann Martel tells the story of a boy who named Pi loses his entire family in a shipwreck and must survive on a lifeboat with wild animals, including a Bengal tiger. Pi struggles, but in the process, realizes the power of the will to live:

I grew weary of my situation, as pointless as the weather. But life would not leave me.

The climax of the story comes when his boat at last lands in Mexico and he is rescued:

I struggled to shore and fell upon the sand. I looked about. … This beach, so soft, firm and vast, was like the cheek of God, and somewhere two eyes were glittering with pleasure and a mouth was smiling at having me there.

Pi's physical struggle has ended, and he has gained personal and spiritual strength, having survived the ordeal.

12. Comic Relief

Even in an intense, dramatic movie, you can find moments of humor. Maybe a character is facing an impossible epic quest, but makes witty comments to lighten the mood. Or maybe two characters are suffering through a difficult divorce, but one of them cracks a joke to cut the tension. It's just like in real life – we often make jokes to ease the burden of difficult circumstances. In storytelling, this is called *comic relief*.

It's important to remember the *relief* part of comic relief. In a funny movie, for example, there's no need for comic relief – there's just regular comedy. Comic relief is when the comedy takes place in a story that's dramatic, tragic, or serious overall, not comedies.

Example

The world of *The Hunger Games* is extremely bleak and there's very little hope or happiness to be found anywhere. This is especially true for tributes in the training center, who are facing almost certain death in the arena. But one of the tributes, Finnick, makes a joke out of the whole thing. At one point, he tells Katniss that he's going to show her "the best knot to know in the arena," then ties a noose and pretends to hang himself with it. This macabre joke is a pretty literal example of gallows humor.

13. Connotation

A connotation is a feeling or idea that a word has, in addition to its literal or main meaning (the denotation). Often, a series of words can have the same basic definitions, but completely different connotations—these are the emotions or meanings implied by a word, phrase, or thing.

For example, "This clothing is affordable!" versus "This clothing is cheap!" Here, "affordable" sounds much better than "cheap," because the word cheap also implies low quality.

Example

In the Christmas comedy movie *Elf*, Buddy the Elf gets himself into a lot of trouble because of his lack of understanding of the word "elf "in everyday American society, as can be seen from the following scene:

Buddy: I didn't know you had elves working here!
Miles: Oh, well, you're, you're hilarious, My Friend.
Walter: He doesn't, uh… Get back to the story, please.
Miles: All right, okay. [Clears throat] So, on the cover, about the title…
Buddy: Does Santa know that you left the workshop?
Miles: You know, we're all laughing our heads off…
Buddy: Did you have to borrow a reindeer to get down here?
Walter: Buddy, go back to the basement.
Miles: Hey, Jackweed. I get more action in a week than you've had in your entire life. I've got houses in L.A., Paris & Vail, each one with a 70-Inch plasma screen. So I suggest you wipe that stupid smile off your face before I come over and smack it off! You feeling strong, my friend? Call me elf one more time!
Buddy: [Whispering] He's an angry elf.
[Miles runs across the table to charge at Buddy.]

For Buddy, being an elf is his dream—he is a human with love and affection for "elf culture"- he has always wanted to be a "normal" Christmas Elf. So, when he sees Guy—a man with dwarfism—he foolishly calls him an elf. For Guy, being called an elf is incredibly belittling and insulting; for Buddy, it's the most positive thing possible—he doesn't understand that its use is inappropriate in this situation, since it was part of everyday language in the North Pole.

14. Denouement

The denouement (Dey-noo-mahn) is the very end of a story, the part where all the different plotlines are finally tied up and all remaining questions answered. It happens right after the *climax*, the most exciting point in the story, and it shows the aftermath of that climax, giving the reader some hints as to what will happen next. The denouement is usually the very last thing your audience sees, so it has to be well-written or the story will seem unsatisfying.

Example

Then all collapsed, and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago. (Herman Melville, Moby-Dick)

Moby-Dick is a dark tale of vengeance, violence, and madness, so it's fitting that it should have a dark denouement. At the climax, Ahab gets a rope caught around his neck and is pulled viciously out of his ship and into the bloody sea. A moment later, the entire ship gets caught in a whirlpool and dragged down below the waves, killing everyone aboard. The denouement doesn't ease or relax this tension; instead it seems to say: "Ahab and his crew died, but the ocean didn't care: the ocean was here long before human beings, and will be here long after we are gone."

15. Deuteragonist

You probably know about the *protagonist* – the main character in any story, the one everything revolves around. The deuteragonist is the secondary character, right behind the protagonist in importance.

The deuteragonist may be on the protagonist's side: for example, a love interest or sidekick. Or the deuteragonist can be a villain, like the protagonist's main rival. The deuteragonist could also be a neutral character. All that matters is that they're the second most important character.

Example

Lady Macbeth is the deuteragonist of *Macbeth*. The main character is her husband, whose slow descent into bloody madness is the central arc of the play. But all along Lady Macbeth is driving the action from behind the scenes, filling her husband's head with ambition and controlling many of the major events.

16. Dialect

A *dialect* (pronounced DIE-uh-lect) is any particular form of a language spoken by some group of people, such as southern English, Black English, Appalachian English, or even standard English. In literature, "dialect" means a form of writing that shows the accent and way people talk in a particular region. Because of this, it can sometimes risk being offensive to the people you're imitating, but lots of great authors have used dialect in their work, and if you do it carefully it can give a lot of color and realism to a novel, poem, or story.

Writing dialect is mainly about representing people's speech in the way it really *sounds*, for example spelling "governor" as "gubnah." This also includes writing sentences with the

unusual grammar of the dialect, such as "Ah ain' seen nuh'in, gubnah" (*I ain't seen nothing, governor*).

Example

"Ya'll nee'n try ter 'scuse yo'seffs. Ain' Miss Pitty writ you an' writ you ter come home?" (Margaret Mitchell, Gone with the Wind).

Gone with the Wind is a famous example of an offensive use of dialect. In this novel, all of the characters are from the American South, so they should all speak with a certain roughly similar regional "accent." However, in the book only the black characters speak in dialect, thus giving the impression that the white accent is normal while the black accent is strange. That's already a little offensive, but it gets worse: the black dialect isn't even very accurate; in many ways it's more a bunch of clichés than an accurate representation of how people in that community spoke at the time.

17. Doppelganger

Doppelganger (DOPP-el-gang-er) comes from a German word meaning "double-walker." It's a twin or double of some character, usually in the form of an evil twin.

There are countless evil twins in soap operas and other TV melodramas. They sometimes impersonate a main character or cause confusion among the love interests. Although this plot device has become a bit of a cliché, it is an excellent example of the doppelganger concept.

Example

In some Arthurian legends, there's a character called Gwenhwyfach (your guess is as good as mine on the pronunciation), who is also known as the "False Guinevere." She is Queen Guinevere's twin sister, and a bitter enemy of the Knights of the Round Table. In one story, she even manages to cause a catastrophic battle as a way off trying to get back at her sister.

18. Dramatic Irony

Irony is when you get the opposite of what you expect, especially if the result is humorous or striking in some way. ***Dramatic* irony, however, is slightly different:** it's when the audience knows something the characters don't — so the characters might get an unexpected outcome, but for the audience it's not unexpected at all.

Example

Disney's *Mulan* is pretty much entirely based on dramatic irony. We know that Mulan is a woman who has disguised herself as a man and joined the army. But the other characters around her have no idea, and there are almost constant jokes based on this deception: for example, the songs "Be a Man" and "A Girl Worth Fighting For."

19. Dystopia

A dystopia (diss-TOE-pee-yuh) is a horrible place where everything has gone wrong. Whereas *utopia* means a perfect paradise, *dystopia* means exactly the opposite. The term generally implies a fictional setting, but sometimes people will refer to real places as "dystopic."

Example

There will be no loyalty, except loyalty towards the Party. There will be no love, except the love of Big Brother. There will be no laughter, except the laugh of triumph over a defeated enemy. There will be no art, no literature, no science. There will be no curiosity, no enjoyment of the process of life. All competing pleasures will be destroyed. But always…always, at every moment, there will be the thrill of victory, the sensation of trampling on an enemy who is helpless. If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face — forever. (George Orwell, 1984)

George Orwell's *1984* is the classic statist dystopia. In this imagined future, the government has abolished individual freedom and identity, and dedicated themselves to a hateful ideology of violence and domination. This book, written in 1949, explores the ideology of totalitarianism and the threat it poses to individual rights. It has formed the model for every statist dystopia since its publication.

20. Epilogue

An epilogue (pronounced 'Eh-pih-log') is an optional final chapter of a story, such as in a play or book, and which may serve a variety of purposes—concluding or bringing closure to events, wrapping up loose ends, reporting the eventual fates of characters after the main story, commenting on the events that have unfolded, and or setting up a sequel. It can appear as a speech (especially in a play), a series of scenes, or an essay by the narrator. The opposite of this is a prologue, which comes at the beginning of a play or book, and introduces the story.

Example

Before the days of the superimposed paragraph on film, explaining the futures of each character, epilogues were made popular by the playwrights of the Greek and Elizabethan

stage. An actor would step forward to thank the audience for attending, or to give the viewers some sense of closure. In comedy, this would be used to assure audiences of the long, happy lives ahead of the heroes, and in tragedy, it would summarize the downfall and causes thereof, most famously in *Romeo and Juliet:*

A glooming peace this morning with it brings;

The sun for sorrow will not show his head.

Go hence to have more talk of these sad things,

Some shall be pardoned, and some punished,

For never was a story of more woe

Than this of Juliet, and her Romeo.

21. Extended Metaphor

An extended metaphor is a metaphor that is developed in great detail. The amount of detail can vary from that of a sentence or a paragraph, to encompassing an entire work. In an extended metaphor, the author takes a single metaphor and employs it at length, using various subjects, images, ideas and situations. They are commonly used in poetry, as well as prose.

Example

Life of Pi by Yann Martel

In this book, a shipwrecked boy (Pi) finds himself on a lifeboat in the company of a zebra, a hyena, an orangutan and, most notably a tiger. The bulk of the novel is told in an extended metaphor, describing the voyage of these unlikely boat-mates. Near the end, however, the boy retells the story of the crossing with human characters instead of animals. The hyena is the ship's cook, the zebra is one of the sailors, and the orangutan is Pi's mother. The tiger is a man named Richard Parker. The reader is left to decide which story is actually true.

22. Irony

Irony (pronounced 'eye-run-ee') is when there are two contradicting meanings of the same situation, event, image, sentence, phrase, or story. In many cases, this refers to the difference between expectations and reality.

For example, if you go sight-seeing anywhere in the world today, you will see crowds of people who are so busy taking cell-phone pictures of themselves in front of the sight that

they don't actually look at what they came to see with their own eyes. This is ironic, specifically, *situational irony*. This one situation has two opposing meanings that contradict expectations: (1) going to see a sight and prove that you were there (2) not enjoying the thing you went to see.

Example

Edgar Allen Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado* is full of verbal and situational irony, including the name of the main character. He's called Fortunato (Italian for "fortunate"), in spite of the fact that he's extremely unlucky throughout the story.

23. Juxtaposition

Juxtaposition (pronounced juhk-stuh-puh--zish--uh-n) is the placement of two or more things side by side, often in order to bring out their differences. Imagine a man walking a well-groomed dog on a pink leash on one hand and a rough Rottweiler on a spiked collar on the other hand. The juxtaposition could be shocking, humorous, or just plain strange. Regardless, this literary term calls attention to two distinctly different things by placing them right beside one another, or juxtaposing them.

Example

A **foil** is a character who has qualities that are opposite or contrasting to another character in a creative piece. **Foils are used to highlight the uniquely different characteristics in one another.** If foils sound like juxtaposition, it is because they are a specific type of juxtaposition. Just as squares may be considered rectangles but rectangles may not be considered squares, all foils are juxtapositions, but not all juxtapositions are foils. A juxtaposition may be between characters in the form of a foil, but it may also be between places, things, or ideas. Here are a few examples of foils versus juxtapositions:

Foils:

God and Satan

Juxtaposition:

Heaven and hell

In this classic example, God and Satan symbolize good and bad, and exhibit purely opposite characters. Heaven and hell, symbolic of paradise versus suffering, are equally opposite but are settings rather than characters. For this reason, they would be considered a juxtaposition rather than foils.

24. Motif

A motif is a symbolic image or idea that appears frequently in a story. Motifs can be symbols, sounds, actions, ideas, or words. Motifs strengthen a story by adding images and ideas to the theme present throughout the narrative.

The word motif (pronounced moh-teef) is derived from the French phrase *motif* meaning "pattern."

Example

Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* examines life under a totalitarian government as told by a woman who is living enslaved as a handmaid. Although numerous themes are used, the theme of freedom—what that means in a democracy versus dictatorship, for women versus men, for those free versus those enslaved—is one of the largest:

- *"There is more than one kind of freedom," said Aunt Lydia. "Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it."*
- *A rat in a maze is free to go anywhere, as long as it stays inside the maze.*
- *They seemed to be able to choose. We seemed to be able to choose, then. We were a society dying of too much choice.*
- *We were the people who were not in the papers. We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print. It gave us more freedom.*

25. Nemesis

A nemesis (pronounced NEH-meh-siss) is an enemy, often a villain. A character's nemesis isn't just any ordinary enemy, though – the nemesis is the *ultimate* enemy, the arch-foe that overshadows all the others in power or importance.

When a character is the nemesis of the hero, that character is the villain. Similarly, the villain's nemesis is the hero. However, a nemesis isn't necessarily a main character like a hero or villain – they could be a side character who happens to be the nemesis of some other side character.

Example

Mythology and religion are filled with nemeses. In the Zoroastrian religion of Persia, for example, the god of goodness and light (Ahura Mazda) is eternally opposed by the god of evil and darkness (Aura Mainyu).

26. Parody

A parody is a work that's created by imitating an existing original work in order to make fun of or comment on an aspect of the original. Parodies can target celebrities, politicians, authors, a style or trend, or any other interesting subject.

The term parody (pronounced par--uh-dee) is derived from the Greek phrase *parodia* which referred to a type of poem which imitated the style of epic poems but with mockery and light comedy.

Example

Pride and Prejudice with Zombies *by Seth Grahame-Smith:*

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a zombie in possession of brains must be in want of more brains.

Pride and Prejudice *by Jane Austen:*

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

Grahame-Smith provides readers who enjoy zombie stories with a tweaked parodic version of Austen's classic.

27. Protagonist

Protagonist (pronounced pro-TAG-oh-nist) is just another word for "main character." The story circles around this character's experiences, and the audience is invited to see the world from his or her perspective. Note that the protagonist is not necessarily a "good guy." Although most of the time the protagonist is some kind of hero, sometimes we see the whole story from the perspective of a villain.

Most stories have only one protagonist, but it's entirely possible to have a story that weaves together multiple different perspectives. In such a story, the different narrative threads should all get tied together in the end.

Example

Sherlock Holmes straddles the line between hero and anti-hero. He uses cocaine, which makes him seem somewhat edgy and dangerous to modern audiences (although Victorian readers would not have been fazed by this). In addition, he sometimes oversteps his role as a detective by letting perpetrators go free if he sympathizes with their actions, and threatening them with death rather than arrest. Watson, in these books, is the narrator, and, some readers would argue, the protagonist as well – but at most he is a *supporting*

28. Satire

The formal definition of satire is "the use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices." It's an extremely broad category. The "or" in the definition is key – most satires are humorous, ironic, *and* exaggerated, but they only have to be *one* of these things to count as satire.

There are two important things to remember about satire:

- It makes fun of a person, idea, or institution
- Its purpose is not just to entertain, but also to inform or make people think.

Example

The Devil's Dictionary by Ambrose Bierce is a scathing collection of satirical definitions. Many tackle ideas that society holds to be important, such as prayer, marriage, and friendship; all are portrayed in a darkly humorous light. A few notable examples include:

Love, noun. A temporary insanity curable by marriage.

and

Patience, noun. A minor form of despair, disguised as a virtue.

29. Trope

The word trope can refer to any type of figure of speech, theme, image, character, or plot element that is used many times. Any kind of literary device or any specific example can be a trope. Most often the word is used to refer to tropes that are widespread such as irony, metaphor, juxtaposition, and hyperbole, or themes such as 'the noble savage' or 'the reluctant hero.' It must be used multiple times to be a 'trope' but it is also possible talk about something that's a trope in only one novel or one author's works if it is used many times.

Example

The trope of "mounting threat" is common in myths, video games, and movies alike. Over the course of the game, say, you face harder and harder bosses until the final boss, who is the most dangerous and frightening of all. Similarly, you fight on rougher and rougher terrain – after starting out in a sleepy woodland village, you climb a rocky mountain to face the final boss in the crater of an active volcano. An example of this trope from mythology is Beowulf, who fights the monster Grendel, then Grendel's mother, and then the dragon in increasingly threatening circumstances.

30. Verisimilitude

Aside from being fun to say, *verisimilitude* (pronounced 'VAIR-ih-sih-MILL-ih-tude') simply means 'the quality of resembling reality.' A work of art, or any part of a work of art, has verisimilitude if it seems realistic. The word verisimilitude is derived from the Latin words *verum* and *similis* meaning "truth" and "similar." A verisimilitudinous story has details, subjects, and characters that seem similar or true to real life.

Example

Jim Carrey earned a Golden Globe for his performance as the late American comedian Andy Kaufman. The film is known for the verisimilitude shown by Carrey, as he accurately imitated the real-life entertainer, and by the film, as it stayed true to most details of his real life. Carrey must have studied Kaufman thoroughly to achieve the performance.