

Literary Terms

To have a meaningful conversation about literature, it is important to understand the following terms:

Fiction:

Fiction is prose **writing that comes from an author's imagination**—whether the author made the whole idea up or based it on real events.

Narrator

A narrator is the teller of a story.

Point of View

The **perspective from which a story is told is called its point of view**. When a story is told from the **first-person point of view**, the narrator is a character in the story and uses first-person pronouns, such as *I*, *me*, and *we*. In a story told from the **third-person point of view**, on the other hand, the narrator is not a character; he or she uses third-person pronouns, such as *he*, *she*, and *it*.

Plot

The **sequence of events in a story is called the story's plot**. The plot is the writer's plan for what happens, when it happens, and to whom it happens.

Plot Line, or Stages of Fiction:

Traditional works of fiction generally follow a pattern that includes the following stages:

- **Exposition (characters and setting)**
- **Complications (conflict, rising action)**
- **Climax**
- **Resolution**

Exposition

Exposition sets the stage for a story. Characters are introduced, the setting is described, and the conflict begins to unfold.

Setting

A story's **setting is the time and place** in which the action of the story happens.

Characters

Characters are the people, animals, or imaginary creatures that take part in the action of a story.

Usually, a short story centers on events in the life of **main character**. Generally, there are also one or more **minor characters** in the story.

Conflict

Generally, a plot is built around a **conflict—a problem or struggle** involving two or more opposing forces. A conflict can be as serious as a boy's attempt to cope with a lie he told or as frivolous as a boy's game of marbles with aliens.

Protagonist and Antagonist

The **protagonist of a work of fiction is the story's main character**—the one that arouses the most interest and sympathy in the reader. **The protagonist usually struggles or competes against an antagonist**, who might be another character, a force of nature or society, or a force within the protagonist.

Complications

As the story continues, the plot becomes more complex. While the **characters struggle to find solutions to the conflict**, suspense and a feeling of excitement and energy build. This is also called the **rising action** of the story.

Climax

The **climax is the point of greatest interest or suspense in the story. It is the turning point, when the action reaches a peak and the outcome of the conflict is decided.**

The climax may occur because of a decision the characters reach or because of a discovery or an event that changes the situation. The climax usually results in a change in the characters or a solution to the conflict.

Resolution

The **resolution occurs at the conclusion of the story.** It is how the **conflict is resolved.** Loose ends are tied up, and the story comes to a close.

Theme

The theme of a story is the main message the writer conveys to the reader. This message might be a lesson about life or a belief about people and their actions. In most cases, the theme is not stated directly; it is like a hidden message that the reader must decode.

As you discuss literature, however, you will find that different readers can discover different themes in the same story. The following suggestions will help you unlock a theme:

- Review what happened to the main character. Did he or she change during the story: What did he or she learn about life?
- Skim the story of key phrases and sentences—statements that go beyond the action of the story to say something important about life or people.
- Think about the story's title. Does it have a special meaning that could lead you to the main idea of the work?

What are Literary Devices?

Introduction

Commonly, the term *Literary Devices* refers to the typical structures used by writers in their works to convey their message(s) in a simple manner to his or her readers. When employed properly, the different literary devices help readers to appreciate, interpret and analyze a literary work.

Two Kinds of Literary Devices

Literary Devices have two aspects. They can be treated as either *Literary Elements* or *Literary Techniques*. It will be convenient to define them separately.

Literary Elements have an inherent existence in literary pieces and are extensively employed by writers to develop a literary piece e.g. plot, setting, narrative structure, characters, mood, theme, moral etc. Writers simply cannot create his desired work without including *Literary Elements* in a thoroughly professional manner.

Literary Techniques, on the contrary, are structures usually a word or phrases in literary texts that writers employ to achieve not merely artistic ends but also readers a greater understanding and appreciation of their literary works. Examples are: metaphor, simile, alliteration, hyperbole, allegory, etc.

To have a better understanding of *Literary Devices*, it is useful to look at their definition and examples:

Common Literary Elements

1. Plot: It is the logical sequence of events that develops a story.
2. Setting: It refers to the time and place in which a story takes place.
3. Protagonist: It is the main character of story, novel or a play e.g. Hamlet in the play Hamlet
4. Antagonist: It is the character in conflict with the Protagonist e.g. Claudius in the play Hamlet.
5. Narrator: A person who tells the story.
6. Dialogue: Where characters of a narrative speak to one another.
7. Conflict: It is an issue in a narrative around which the whole story revolves.
8. Mood: A general atmosphere of a narrative.
9. Theme: It is the central idea or concept of a story.

Common Literary Techniques

1. Imagery: It is the use of figurative language to create visual representations of actions, objects and ideas in our mind in such a way that they appeal to our physical senses. For example:

- *The room was dark and gloomy.* -The words “dark” and “gloomy” are visual images.
- *The river was roaring in the mountains.* – The word “roaring” appeals to our sense of hearing.

2. Simile and Metaphor: Both compare two distinct objects and draw similarity between them. The difference is that Simile uses “as” or “like” and Metaphor does not. For example:

- *“My love is like a red red rose” (Simile)*
- *He is a very cunning old fox. (Metaphor)*

3. Hyperbole: It is deliberate exaggeration of actions and ideas for the sake of emphasis. For example:

- *Your bag weighs a ton!*
- *I have got a million issues to look after!*

4. Personification: It gives a thing, an idea or an animal human qualities. For example:

- *The flowers are dancing beside the lake.*
- *Have you seen my new car? She is a real beauty!*

5. Alliteration: It refers to the same consonant sounds in words coming together. For example:

- Better butter always makes the batter better.
- She sells seashells at the seashore.

6. Allegory: It is a literary technique in which an abstract idea is given a form of characters, actions or events. For example:

- “Animal Farm”, written by George Orwell, is an example allegory using the actions of animals on a farm to represent the overthrow of the last of the Russian Tsar Nicholas II and the Communist Revolution of Russia before WWII. In addition, the actions of the animals on the farm are used to expose the greed and corruption of the Revolution.