

## Literary Terms

### General Literary Terms

- 1) Voice- The writer's unique use of language that allows a reader to hear a human personality in his/her writing. (examples: mother, dentist, old man) Also called narrator, point of view, or speaker
- 2) Tone- The *attitude* of the voice or the writer (examples: bitter, angry, playful, objective, etc.)
- 3) Theme- The "underlying" main idea of a piece of writing. The *life lesson or moral* to the story. Authors usually write with a purpose to teach you something!
- 4) Allusion- A brief reference to a person, place, event, or literary work that the audience can identify with.
- 5) Symbol- An object, action, or person that represents more than itself. For example, an inanimate object like a dying plant may *symbolize* an abstract feeling like depression.
- 6) Imagery- A mental "picture" suggested by words that call upon the five senses.
- 7) Genre - The general or specific category of literary work (examples: children's literature, [allegory](#), folklore, poetry, American literature, British Literature).

### Figurative Terms

- 8) Literal- Adhering to factual information, *can* really happen (ex: The chair is painted yellow.)
- 9) Figurative- Adhering to playful language, *cannot* really happen (ask yourself: Can this really happen?)
- 10) Simile- A comparison between two unlike things using as/like (example: Her eyes are *like* little glass marbles.)
- 11) Metaphor- A comparison between two unlike things using any form of the verb "to be" [is, was, were, are, am, etc.] (example: Her eyes *are* little glass marbles.)
- 12) Hyperbole- An exaggeration usually used to emphasize the amount of something (example: I could sleep for a week!)
- 13) Personification- Giving inanimate objects human characteristics (example: My father's violin sings to me every night.)
- 14) Synecdoche- When a part or aspect of something is used to represent the thing itself. (example: Can I borrow your wheels?)
- 15) Verbal Irony- When what is said is the opposite of what is really meant (basically sarcasm, but not always an insult!) (example: I tripped in the middle of the stage, real smooth!)

### Plot Terms

- 16) Plot- A series of events in a story or drama that bear a significant relationship to each other.
- 17) Exposition- Information supplied to readers that enables them to understand narrative action. Oftentimes, exposition establishes what has occurred before the narrative begins, or informs the reader about relationships among principle characters.
- 18) Conflict- The struggle of a protagonist, or main character, with forces that threaten to destroy

him or her whether **internally** or **externally**. The struggle creates suspense and is usually resolved at the end of the narrative.

19) Rising Action- The steps the protagonist takes toward solving his/her conflict.

20) Climax- The solution to the conflict—a poignant scene or development in a text.

21) Falling Action- The steps the protagonist takes after the climax leading up to the resolution.

22) Resolution- The last stage of plot development in which any remaining conflicts may be resolved and the characters move on (also known as the denouement).

23) Setting- The place, time, and social context in which a work occurs.

24) Dramatic Irony- Occurs when a reader knows something a character does not.

25) Genre- A type of literature. We say a poem, novel, play, or other literary work belongs to a particular genre if it shares at least a few conventions or standard characteristics with other works in that genre. *Maus I and II* is a memoir.

### **Character Terms**

26) Protagonist- The main character or hero in a narrative who is troubled by a conflict often caused by the antagonist.

27) Antagonist- The character or object in a narrative who stands in opposition to the protagonist. The conflict between the antagonist and protagonist often generates the action or plot of the story. Keep in mind that the antagonist doesn't always have to be a person. Also, the antagonist may change their motive by the end of the story/narrative.

28) Round-Dynamic Character- A character who changes and/or significantly matures throughout the course of a story.

29) Flat-Static Character- A one-dimensional easily described character who does not change throughout the course of a story.

30) Stock Character- A character who represents a stereotype based on age, occupation, race, gender, culture, region of the country, etc. (In *Maus*, the social typecasts demonstrate how foolish it is to classify a race based on nationality or ethnicity.)

31) Foil- A character who contrasts with another character (usually the protagonist) in order to highlight various features of the main character's personality. A foil usually has some important characteristics in common with the other character, such as superficial traits or personal history.