

# Literary Elements

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## Literary Terms

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*List compiled by Laura Bokesch, Library Media Teacher*

"Structure" includes all the elements in a story. The final objective is to see the story as a whole and to become aware of how the parts are put together to produce a unified effect.

### ELEMENTS OF PLOT

All fiction is based on conflict and this conflict is presented in a structured format called **PLOT**.

#### **Exposition**

The introductory material which gives the setting, creates the tone, presents the characters, and presents other facts necessary to understanding the story.

#### **Foreshadowing**

The use of hints or clues to suggest what will happen later in the story.

#### **Inciting Force**

The event or character that triggers the conflict.

#### **Conflict**

The essence of fiction. It creates plot. The conflicts we encounter can usually be identified as one of four kinds. (Man versus...Man, Nature, Society, or Self)

#### **Rising Action**

A series of events that builds from the conflict. It begins with the inciting force and ends with the climax.

#### **Crisis**

The conflict reaches a turning point. At this point the opposing forces in the story meet and the conflict becomes most intense. The crisis occurs before or at the same time as the climax.

#### **Climax**

The climax is the result of the crisis. It is the high point of the story for the reader. Frequently, it is the moment of the highest interest and greatest emotion. The point at which the outcome of the conflict can be predicted.

**Falling Action**

The events after the climax which close the story.

**Resolution (Denouement)**

Rounds out and concludes the action.

**CHARACTERIZATION****MAJOR CHARACTERS**

Almost always round or three-dimensional characters. They have good and bad qualities. Their goals, ambitions and values change. A round character changes as a result of what happens to him or her. A character who changes inside as a result of what happens to him is referred to in literature as a DYNAMIC character. A dynamic character grows or progresses to a higher level of understanding in the course of the story.

<b>Protagonist</b> The main character in the story	<b>Antagonist</b> The character or force that opposes the protagonist.	<b>Foil</b> A character who provides a contrast to the protagonist.
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**MINOR CHARACTERS**

Almost always flat or two-dimensional characters. They have only one or two striking qualities. Their predominant quality is not balanced by an opposite quality. They are usually all good or all bad. Such characters can be interesting or amusing in their own right, but they lack depth. Flat characters are sometimes referred to as STATIC characters because they do not change in the course of the story.

**POINT OF VIEW****First Person**

The narrator is a character in the story who can reveal only personal thoughts and feelings and what he or she sees and is told by other characters. He can't tell us thoughts of other characters.

**Third-Person Objective**

The narrator is an outsider who can report only what he or she sees and hears. This narrator can tell us what is happening, but he can't tell us the thoughts of the characters.

**Third-Person Limited**

The narrator is an outsider who sees into the mind of one of the characters.

**Omniscient**

The narrator is an all-knowing outsider who can enter the minds of more than one of the characters.

**CONFLICT**

**Conflict is the essence of fiction. It creates plot. The conflicts we encounter can usually be identified as one of four kinds.**

**Man versus Man**

Conflict that pits one person against another.

**Man versus Nature**

A run-in with the forces of nature. On the one hand, it expresses the insignificance of a single human life in the cosmic scheme of things. On the other hand, it tests the limits of a person's strength and will to live.

**Man versus Society**

The values and customs by which everyone else lives are being challenged. The character may come to an untimely end as a result of his or her own convictions. The character may, on the other hand, bring others around to a sympathetic point of view, or it may be decided that society was right after all.

**Man versus Self**

Internal conflict. Not all conflict involves other people. Sometimes people are their own worst enemies. An internal conflict is a good test of a character's values. Does he give in to temptation or rise above it? Does he demand the most from himself or settle for something less? Does he even bother to struggle? The internal conflicts of a character and how they are resolved are good clues to the character's inner strength.

Often, more than one kind of conflict is taking place at the same time. In every case, however, the existence of conflict enhances the reader's understanding of a character and creates the suspense and interest that make you want to continue reading.

**FORESHADOWING**

**An author's use of hints or clues to suggest events that will occur later in the story. Not all foreshadowing is obvious. Frequently, future events are merely hinted at through dialogue, description, or the attitudes and reactions of the characters.**

**Foreshadowing frequently serves two purposes. It builds suspense by raising questions that encourage the reader to go on and find out more about the event that is being foreshadowed. Foreshadowing is also a means of making a narrative more believable by partially preparing the reader for events which are to follow.**

**IRONY**

**Irony is the contrast between what is expected or what appears to be and what actually is.**

**Verbal Irony**

The contrast between what is said and what is actually meant.

**Irony of Situation**

This refers to a happening that is the opposite of what is expected or intended.

**Dramatic Irony**

This occurs when the audience or reader knows more than the characters know.

## TOPE/MOOD

### Tone

The author's **attitude**, stated or implied, toward a subject. Some possible attitudes are pessimism, optimism, earnestness, seriousness, bitterness, humorous, and joyful. An author's tone can be revealed through choice of words and details.

### Mood

The climate of **feeling** in a literary work. The choice of setting, objects, details, images, and words all contribute towards creating a specific mood. For example, an author may create a mood of mystery around a character or setting but may treat that character or setting in an ironic, serious, or humorous tone

## SYMBOLISM

A person, place or object which has a meaning in itself but suggests other meanings as well. Things, characters and actions can be symbols. Anything that suggests a meaning beyond the obvious.

Some symbols are conventional, generally meaning the same thing to all readers. For example: bright sunshine symbolizes goodness and water is a symbolic cleanser.

## THEME

The main idea or underlying meaning of a literary work. A theme may be stated or implied. Theme differs from the subject or topic of a literary work in that it involves a statement or opinion about the topic. Not every literary work has a theme. Themes may be major or minor. A major theme is an idea the author returns to time and again. It becomes one of the most important ideas in the story. Minor themes are ideas that may appear from time to time.

It is important to recognize the difference between the theme of a literary work and the subject of a literary work. The subject is the topic on which an author has chosen to write. The theme, however, makes some statement about or expresses some opinion on that topic. For example, the subject of a story might be war while the theme might be the idea that war is useless.

Four ways in which an author can express themes are as follows:

1. Themes are expressed and emphasized by the way the author makes us feel. By sharing **feelings of the main character** you also share the ideas that go through his mind.
2. Themes are presented in **thoughts and conversations**. Authors put words in their character's mouths only for good reasons. One of these is to develop a story's themes. The things a person says are much on their mind. Look for **thoughts that are repeated** throughout the story.
3. Themes are suggested through the characters. The main character usually illustrates the most important theme of the story. A good way to get at this theme is to ask yourself the question, **what does the main character learn** in the course of the story?

4. The **actions or events** in the story are used to suggest theme. People naturally express ideas and feelings through their actions. One thing authors think about is what an action will "say". In other words, how will the action express an idea or theme?

**IMAGERY:** Language that appeals to the senses. Descriptions of people or objects stated in terms of our senses.

### **FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE**

Whenever you describe something by comparing it with something else, you are using figurative language. Any language that goes beyond the literal meaning of words in order to furnish new effects or fresh insights into an idea or a subject. The most common figures of speech are simile, metaphor, and alliteration.

#### **Simile**

A figure of speech which involves a direct comparison between two unlike things, usually with the words like or as. Example: The muscles on his brawny arms are strong as iron bands.

#### **Metaphor**

A figure of speech which involves an implied comparison between two relatively unlike things using a form of be. The comparison is not announced by like or as. Example: The road was a ribbon of moonlight.

#### **Alliteration**

Repeated consonant sounds occurring at the beginning of words or within words. Alliteration is used to create melody, establish mood, call attention to important words, and point out similarities and contrasts. Example: wide-eyed and wondering while we wait for others to waken.

#### **Personification**

A figure of speech which gives the qualities of a person to an animal, an object, or an idea. It is a comparison which the author uses to show something in an entirely new light, to communicate a certain feeling or attitude towards it and to control the way a reader perceives it. Example: a brave handsome brute fell with a creaking rending cry-- the author is giving a tree human qualities.

#### **Onomatopoeia**

The use of words that mimic sounds. They appeal to our sense of hearing and they help bring a description to life. A string of syllables the author has made up to represent the way a sound really sounds. Example: Caarackle!

#### **Hyperbole**

An exaggerated statement used to heighten effect. It is not used to mislead the reader, but to emphasize a point. Example: She's said so on several million occasions