

Literature Glossary

AS and A level

Form
Allegory A story with a hidden meaning in which specific characters and events symbolise more general moral issues of human life.
Comedy A work which explores human failings in a light-hearted manner, but in which the central character(s) triumph over afflictions. Comedies end happily.
Existentialism An idea made famous by Jean Paul Sartre in which the world has no meaning and each person is alone and completely responsible for the actions which define their character. Existentialism often involves choices made by characters that define them.
Genre The term refers to the type of literature as defined by its contents and style. Generic features help establish expectations of what follows.
Gothic A literary genre which comprises a series of frightening and often apparently supernatural events and mysterious circumstances. The settings of gothic literature are usually dark and moody.
Realism The attempt by writers to mimic real life. The subject matter and details of realism are lifelike. The narrative focus of realism is on character motivation/psychology. NB: Realism is not to be confused with the more general term realist/realistic, which refers to pragmatic thinking of someone who faces the truth.
Romanticism A style of literature prevalent during the late 18th and early 19th centuries; it foregrounded the importance of the imagination and the emotions.
Tragedy A narrative with a serious theme, involving the downfall of a great person who suffers as a result of a flaw in either their character or circumstance.
Parody Conscious imitation of a writer's style, or of the features of a particular genre, exaggerated for comic effect.
Satire Humour or exaggeration designed to expose/mock human vice or folly. It is therefore 'humour with a bite'.
Structure:
Anti-climax An abrupt change where our expectations of what will happen next are disappointed or deflated.
Catharsis The purging/cleansing of emotion, especially pity and fear. The term is most often used to describe audience response to the tragic hero's downfall in drama.
Chronological If a story is told in the order in which events actually occurred, they are said to be presented in chronological order. If not, the narrative is non-chronological.
Climax This usually occurs near the end of the narrative and describes the most intense or significant point, where tension or conflict is at its strongest. It marks a decisive moment, where rising action becomes falling action . Also known as a crisis point.
Closure This word refers to a particular kind of ending where difficulties and sufferings are resolved and we are left with a sense that a new beginning is possible. It describes the sense of completion this brings for the reader. NB: Some writers consciously resist closure – creating instead ambiguity or open-ended narratives with unanswered questions.
Epilogue A section of a narrative which comments on what has happened in the main

body of the narrative. It occurs after the **climax** and can disclose the fates of characters. It is usually set some time into the future. In drama, it involves an actor stepping forward to address the audience directly. (Also known as a post-script.)

Exposition The opening of a narrative which introduces us to its characters and their circumstances.

Falling action This occurs right after the **climax**, when the main problem of the story resolves. It is one of the elements of the plot of the story, while others are **exposition**, **rising action**, **climax** and **resolution**. It 'wraps up' the narrative, resolves its 'loose ends' and leads towards the closure.

Flashback An interruption in the narrative's forward movement which takes us back in time and which explains previous events or a character's current motivation.

Foreshadowing Events which hint about things that happen later in the narrative. This helps to build expectations of future events.

Fragmented narrative Where events of a story are mixed up, forcing readers/audiences to piece them together to make sense of them. Fragmented narratives frequently move forwards and backwards in time.

Juxtaposition Where opposing ideas, events or characters are placed alongside one another to highlight their contrasting features. Characters, events, sections, chapters or scenes can all be juxtaposed.

Multiple narratives Where several different stories are told.

Prologue An introduction presented separately from the main narrative and which introduces its key themes.

Repetition The recurrence of an event, symbol or motif – for emphasis.

Resolution The final part of a narrative, where elements are drawn together and explained or dealt with. It occurs after the narrative's **climax**. (Also known as 'denouement'.)

Rising action A series of events that lead towards the **climax** of the narrative. It begins after the **exposition**.

Tension The sense that something is about to happen – a nervous anticipation or excitement as characters or readers or both wait for something to happen. Writers create tension by hinting that something will occur, but also delaying its onset.

Time span The duration of the events of a story as described in terms of real time.

Turning point The time in the narrative when a crucial decision is made or when an event changes things significantly.

Style:

The word used to describe the way in which a writer makes their work distinctive from others. This can be described as conversational, dense, artificial, formal, informal, and depends on word choice, sentence type and structure, as well as content.

Alliteration A collection of words that begin with the same consonant sound.

Allusion An indirect reference to a person, place, or to another literary work, including the Bible or mythology. The reader is expected to know, and recognise the allusion made.

Ambiguity Something which can be read in more than one way. While the word can signify poor phrasing which leads to confusion, writers can be deliberately ambiguous. Where this is the case, the different interpretations of a word or an event adds depth/complexity to the narrative.

Extended metaphor A comparison between two things that continues throughout a sentence/paragraph/chapter/whole work.

Hyperbole Deliberate exaggeration for emphasis.



<p>Image Words that appeal directly to any one of the five senses, not just the visual. Images can make us feel, taste, smell hear or taste, as well as see.</p>
<p>Irony Irony always refers to a gap between what is said and what is meant, where the words spoken or written are the opposite of what is really meant. NB: It is different from sarcasm, where the difference is always derogatory/cruel. The effects of irony are more complex. In addition to this verbal irony, situational irony refers to the difference between a character's understanding of a situation/person and the reader's/audience's. (See also dramatic irony.)</p>
<p>Metaphor An object compared to something else and where the two things share similar characteristics. In metaphors (as opposed to a simile), the comparison is less obvious, but more direct, since it is not signalled by the use of the word 'like' or 'as'.</p>
<p>Mood The 'feel' or atmosphere of a place.</p>
<p>Motif A recurrent symbol related to theme.</p>
<p>Narrative The word describes how a story is told, not the nature of the story itself, i.e. it concerns who tells the story, and how/in what order events are told/how much information is revealed or withheld.</p>
<p>Onomatopoeia A word which describes a specific sound and which itself re-creates that sound.</p>
<p>Pathetic fallacy A description of nature that reflects a character's mood/situation.</p>
<p>Personification Where a characteristic that normally only describes a person is used to define an inanimate object. E.g.: the trees whispered.</p>
<p>Repetition The recurrence of a word, phrase or symbol for emphasis.</p>
<p>Simile An object compared to something else and where the two things share similar characteristics. In similes (as opposed to a metaphor), the comparison is more obvious, and signalled by the use of the word 'like' or 'as'.</p>
<p>Symbol Something visible or concrete which, by association, represents an invisible or abstract quality</p>
<p>Tone This is the word which describes someone's voice – either a character's or the writer's – how they 'sound' when read out loud. Tone essentially reveals the relationship - what a writer thinks of either the reader or what is being described.</p>