General Course Literary Terms

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| Term | Definition | Example |
| Allegory | a story that offers both a literal and figurative interpretation. The story is symbolic on every level: characters, plot, theme | “Little Red Riding Hood”*The Odyssey* |
| Allusion- | a reference to something in history, literature, culture, society… | He had Napoleonic quality about him. |
| Alliteration- | repetition of consonant sounds | Beowulf boldly brandished his battle sword |
| Apostrophe- | addressing something that is dead, not human, or nor present | O Shy Sun, why won’t you shine on me? |
| Anachronism | The placing of a person, event, or thing outside of its historical era. Most often purposeful  | Shakespeare has a clock striking in the scene prior to Julius Caesar’s death-this is for effect only since Ancient Rome did not have striking clocks.  |
| Archetype | Narratives, designs, patterns, or character types often found in literature. |  A hero is typically strong, virtuous, and steadfast in his efforts |
| Assonance | repetition of vowel sounds | The May day made the fields sway in a spray of lilacs and a faint scent of hay.  |
| Connotation | the implied meaning of a word | That is “cool.” |
| Denotation- | the literal meaning of a word | That is “temperate, not warm”. |
| Diction | word choice | My mind pricked with anger-(the word “pricked” reveals author’s tone towards the person he/she is addressing here) |
| Elements of Plot | Exposition-the conflict, setting, and  conflict are introduced. Rising Action- the action builds on the expositionComplications- events that are added to build on the tensionClimax-the point of the highest  tension/turning pointFalling Action- immediately follows  climax-immediate consequences dénouement/resolution-the final  scene where the plot ends.  |  All stories have most or all of these elements. “Cliffhangers” end the pot at the climax-leaving readers wondering about the falling action and dénouement.  |
| Epithet  | A descriptive phrase used to describe a person or thing-often used in place of it.  | The Trojan warrior is an epithet for Odysseus.  |
| Figurative language | Language that is used in a non-literal way for added meaning and effect | Similes, metaphors, personification-many terms listed here are all examples  |
| Foreshadow | To hint at future events | The pounding rain that sounds like footsteps in A Tale of Two Cities foreshadows the storming of the Bastille.  |
| Genre | A term that denotes a type of literature or literary form  | Verse, epics, novels, short stories, dramas-these are all different forms of literature.  |
| Hyperbole- | a great exaggeration | There were a million people at the party. |
| Imagery | use of sensory details to describe something | I bit into the soft, ripe, fuzzy, juicy nectarine. |
| Irony | **Dramatic**-when the audience/readers know something the character doesn’t **Verbal/Literal-**when the literal meaning is the opposite of the impliedSituational-when a scene or story ends that opposite way one would expect | We know Macbeth will kill Duncan-Duncan is blissfully unawareThis shouldn’t be too difficult (he said before lifting up a car) If the good guys are killed in the beginning of the story… |
| Juxtaposition | An intentional placing close together or side by side, especially for comparison or contrast. | A comedic scene following a tragic one; a description of beauty in a scene of horror |
| Metaphor | **Implied**-when an indirect comparison is made between two different things Named-a direct comparison between two different things  | she barked at me-she is indirectly compared to a dogshe is a dog-direct comparison |
| Meter | A recognized pattern of beats and stresses in verse-rhythm  | “The curfew tolls the knell of parting day” The above line has a pattern of unstressed/stressed syllables.  |
| Mood | the feeling or atmosphere of a work  | Can be funny, sad, bitterThe Things they carried is mostly reflective and at times both funny and sad. |
| Motif | A specific element, event, things that reoccurs through a specific work for added meaning.  | Storms often occur throughout Dickens’ A Tale of Two Cities.  |
| Onomatopoeia- | writing out the sound something makes  | ssssss went the snake |
| Oxymoron  | contradictory terms are used in conjunction: | Deafening silence |
| Paradox | A statement that appears to be untrue or impossible, but upon reflection or in context is true.  | “I was a coward. I went to war.” This seems like a false statement, but O’Brien admits he went to war because he was too afraid to disappoint his family by not going. |
| pun | A play on a word’s multiple meaning  | “I am reading a book about anti-gravity. It’s impossible to put down.” |
| Personification | giving non human things human qualities | The wind whispered my name. |
| Repetition | repeating the same words, phrases, passages for emphasis | I was scared. I was lonely, I was responding without thinking. I was 19 years old. |
| Rhyme  | Repeating the same stressed vowel sounds.  | In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,it perched for vespers nine,and glimmered in the white moonshine. |
| Satire | poking fun at a social institution, person, ideology in hopes of changing it or at the least exposing its flaws. Satires can be fun and lightheartedOr Satires and be sarcastic, dark, disturbing, and bitter. | *Saturday Night Live*. Steven Colbert*Slaughterhouse 5, 1984*, even Jon Stewart’s Daily Show at times.  |
| Simile | a comparison of two different things by showing similarities (uses like, as, seems, appears…) | She is as any goddess would be. |
| Symbol | a tangible thing that represents an intangible one. Pay attention to how people treat symbols-it reveals how they feel about what is represents. | The flag represents freedom. I can burn the flag, spit on it, or wave it proudly. |
| Syntax | The order of words  | Some poets rearrange syntax to fit a rhyme scheme. |
| Tone | author’s attitude towards the subject matter | when Tim O’Brien compares the American government to a guy with a jelly-roll belly-you sense how he feels about the country’s war policy and the politicians who make it. |
| Understatement  | Deemphasizing something in hopes of drawing attention to it | Describing the firebombing in Dresdan, Germany (in WW2) as a “bad day.” It was worse than a bad day-it was a massacre. |