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  exposition  Complications- events that are added  to build on the tension  Climax-the point of the highest  tension/turning point  Falling 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 implied  Situational-when a scene or story ends that opposite way one would expect | We know Macbeth will kill Duncan-Duncan is blissfully unaware  This 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 dog  she 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, bitter  The 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 lighthearted  Or 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. |