



Literary Terms

Allegory – a story or tale with two or more levels on meaning – a literal level and one or more symbolic levels

Allusion – a reference to a well-known person, place, event, literary work, or work of art.

Aphorism – a general truth or observation about life, usually stated concisely and pointedly

Apostrophe – a figure of speech in which a speaker directly addresses an absent person or a personified quality, object, or idea.

Assonance – the repetition of vowel sounds in conjunction with dissimilar consonant sounds

Ballad – a songlike poem that tells a story, often dealing with adventure and romance

Blank Verse – poetry written in unrhymed iambic pentameter

Connotation – association that a work calls to mind in addition to the dictionary meaning of the word

Denotation—a words objective meaning, independent of other associations that the word brings to mind

Dramatic monologue – a poem or speech in which an imaginary character speaks to a silent listener

Elegy – a solemn and formal lyric poem about death, often one that mourns the passing of some particular person.

Epigram – a brief, pointed statement, in prose or in verse, often characterized by use of some rhetorical device or figure of speech.

Expressionism – an artistic movement of the early twentieth century, expressionist painters, sculptors, and writers emphasized the inner experience of the individual rather than the time frame or the physical objects of some absolute external reality.

Fable – A brief story, usually with animal characters, that teaches a lesson, or moral

Free Verse – poetry that lacks a regular rhythmical pattern or meter

Hyperbole – a deliberate exaggeration or overstatement

Iambic Pentameter – a line of poetry with five iambic feet, each containing one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable, it may be rhymed or unrhymed.

Idyll – a poem or part of a poem that describes and idealizes life.

Irony – a contrast between what is stated and what is meant, or between what is expected to happen and what actually happens.

Local Color – the use in literary work of characters and details unique to a particular geographic area

Lyric Poem – a melodic poem that expresses the observations and feelings of a single speaker

Metaphor – a figure of speech in which one thing is spoken of as though it were something else

Meter – a poem's rhythmical pattern. The pattern is determined by the number and types of stresses, or beats, in each line

Iamb – a foot with one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable, as in the word “around”

Troche – a foot with one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable, and in the word “broken”

Anapest – a foot with two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable and in the phrase “in a flash”

Dactyl – a foot with one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables, and in the word “argument”

Spondee – a foot with two stressed syllables, as in the word “airship”

Pyrrhic – a foot with two unstressed syllables, as in the last foot on the word “imagining”

Amphibrach – a foot with an unstressed syllable, one stressed syllable, and another stressed syllable, as in the word “ungainly”

Amphimacer – a foot with a stressed syllable, one unstressed syllable, and another stressed syllable as in “give and take”

Naturalism – was a literary movement among novelists at the end of the nineteenth century and the early decades on the twentieth century. They tended to view people as hapless victims of immutable natural laws

Ode – a long, formal lyric poem with a serious theme that may have a traditional stanza structure

Onomatopoeia – the use of words that imitate sounds

Oxymoron – a figure of speech that combines two opposing or contradictory ideas

Parable – a brief story, usually with human characters, that teaches a moral lesson

Paradox – a statement that seems to be contradictory, but that actually presents the truth

Parody – a humorous interpretation of a literary work. It exaggerates or distorts the characteristic features of the original

Personification – a figure of speech in which a nonhuman subject is given human characteristics

Realism – the presentation in art of the detail of actual life. Realism was also a literary movement that began during the nineteenth century and that stressed the actual as opposed to the imagined or the fanciful.

Refrain – a repeated line or group of lines in a poem or song

Regionalism – the tendency among certain authors to write about specific geographical areas

Romanticism – literary and artistic movement of the 19th century, one that arose in reaction against 18th century neoclassicism and that placed a premium on fancy, imagination, individuality, and exotica

Satire – writing that ridicules or criticizes individuals, ideas, institutions, social conventions, or other works of literature.

Simile – a figure of speech that makes a direct comparison between two subjects using like or as

Soliloquy – in a play or prose work is a long speech made by a character who is alone and who reveals his or her private thoughts and feelings to the audience

Sonnet – a 14 line lyric poem focused on a single theme

Stanza – a group of lines in a poem, considered as a unit

Stream of Consciousness – a narrative technique that presents thoughts as if they were coming directly from a character's mind

Synecdoche – a figure of speech in which a part of something is used to stand for the whole thing

Transcendentalism – an American literary and philosophical movement of the 19th century. The transcendentalists, who were based in New England, believed that intuition and the individual conscience “transcend” the experience and thus are better guides to truth than are the senses and logical reason

Vernacular – the ordinary language of people in a particular region

Villanelle – a 19 line poem with only two rhymes that follows a strict pattern popular in traditional French poetry.