

LITERARY TERMS

For AP ENGLISH LITERATURE

1. Allegory-The representation of abstract ideas or principles by characters, figures, or events in narrative, dramatic, or pictorial form.
2. Alliteration-The repetition of the same consonant sound at the beginning of several words in a line of poetry. ie. Marilyn Monroe
3. Ambiguity-When an author leaves out details/information or is unclear about an event so the reader will use his/her imagination to fill in the blanks.
4. Anaphora-Repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive lines in a poem.
5. Anecdote-A short story or joke told at the beginning of a speech to gain the audience's attention.
6. Antagonist-The protagonist's adversary.
7. Anti-climatic-When the ending of the plot in poetry or prose is unfulfilling or lackluster.
8. Apostrophe- When a character speaks to a character or object that is not present or is unable to respond
9. Assonance-The repetition of the same vowel sound in a phrase or line of poetry.
10. Blank verse-Name for unrhymed iambic pentameter. An iamb is a metrical foot in which an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed syllable. In iambic pentameter there are five iambs per line making ten syllables.
11. Climax-The turning point in the plot or the high point of action.
12. Colloquial language-Informal, conversational language. Colloquialisms are phrases or sayings that are indicative of a specific region.
13. Connotation-An idea or meaning suggested by or associated with a word or thing, ie. Bat=evil.
14. Convention-An understanding between a reader and a writer about certain details of a story that does not need to be explained.
15. Consonance-The repetition of consonant sounds in a phrase or line of poetry. The consonant sound may be at the beginning, middle, or end of the word.
16. Couplet-Two rhyming lines in poetry.
17. Deus ex machina-Term that refers to a character or force that appears at the end of a story or play to help resolve conflict. Word means "god from a machine." In ancient Greek drama, gods were lowered onto the stage by a mechanism to extricate characters from a seemingly hopeless situation. The phrase has come to mean any turn of events that solve the characters' problems through an unexpected and unlikely intervention.
18. Diction-Word choice or the use of words in speech or writing.
19. Denouement (day-new-mon)-The final resolution or clarification of a dramatic or narrative plot.
20. Doppelganger-The alter ego of a character-the suppressed side of one's personality that is usually unaccepted by society. ie. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson- Mr. Edward Hyde (hide) is Dr. Jekyll's evil side
21. Elegy-A poem or song composed especially as a lament for a deceased person.
22. Emotive language-Deliberate use of language by a writer to instill a feeling or visual.
23. Enjambment-The continuation of reading one line of a poem to the next with no pause, a run-on line.
24. Epic-An extended narrative poem in elevated or dignified language, celebrating the feats of a legendary or traditional hero.
25. Epilogue-A short poem or speech spoken directly to the audience following the conclusion of a play, or in a novel the epilogue is a short explanation at the end of the book which indicates what happens after the plot ends.
26. Epiphany-Sudden enlightenment or realization, a profound new outlook or understanding about the world usually attained while doing everyday mundane activities.
27. Epistolary-Used to describe a novel that tells its story through letters written from one character to another.
28. Euphemism-The act of substituting a harsh, blunt, or offensive comment for a more politically accepted or positive one. (short=vertically challenged)
29. Euphony-A succession of words which are pleasing to the ear. These words may be alliterative, utilize consonance, or assonance and are often used in poetry but also seen in prose.

30. Expansion-Adds an unstressed syllable and a contraction or elision removes an unstressed syllable in order to maintain the rhythmic meter of a line. This practice explains some words frequently used in poetry such as th' in place of the, o'er in place of over, and 'tis or 'twas in place of it is or it was.
31. Fable-A usually short narrative making an edifying or cautionary point and often employing as characters animals that speak and act like humans.
32. Feminine ending-Term that refers to an unstressed extra syllable at the end of a line of iambic pentameter.
33. Figurative language-Speech or writing that departs from literal meaning in order to achieve a special effect or meaning. Speech or writing employing figures of speech.
34. Flashback- When a character remembers a past event that is relevant to the current action of the story
35. Flat character-A literary character whose personality can be defined by one or two traits and does not change over the course of the story. Flat characters are usually minor or insignificant characters.
36. Foil-A character that by contrast underscores or enhances the distinctive characteristics of another.
37. Folklore-The traditional beliefs, myths, tales, and practices of a people, transmitted orally.
38. Foot: The metrical length of a line is determined by the number of feet it contains.
 - Monometer: One foot
 - Dimeter: Two feet
 - Trimeter: Three feet
 - Tetrameter: Four feet
 - Pentameter: Five feet
 - Hexameter: Six feet
 - Heptameter: Seven feet

The most common feet have two to three syllables, with one stressed.
39. Iamb-An iambic foot has two syllables. The first is unstressed and the second is stressed. The iambic foot is most common in English poetry.
40. Trochee-A trochaic foot has two syllables. The first is stressed and the second is unstressed.
41. Dactyl-A dactylic foot has three syllables beginning with a stressed syllable; the other two unstressed.
42. Anapest-An anapestic foot has three syllables. The first two are unstressed with the third stressed.
43. Foreshadowing- Clues in the text about incidents that will occur later in the plot, foreshadowing creates anticipation in the novel.
44. Free verse-Type of verse that contains a variety of line lengths, is unrhymed, and lacks traditional meter.
45. Genre-A category of artistic composition, as in music or literature, marked by a distinctive style, form, or content.
46. Gothic novel-A genre of fiction characterized by mystery and supernatural horror, often set in a dark castle or other medieval setting.
47. Heroine-A woman noted for courage and daring action or the female protagonist.
48. Hubris- Used in Greek tragedies, refers to excessive pride that usually leads to a hero's downfall.
49. Hyperbole-A figure of speech in which exaggeration is used for emphasis or comic/dramatic effect.
50. Illocution-Language that avoids meaning of the words. When we speak, sometimes we conceal intentions or side step the true subject of a conversation. Writing illocution expresses two stories, one of which is not apparent to the characters, but is apparent to the reader. For example, if two characters are discussing a storm on the surface it may seem like a simple discussion of the weather, however, the reader should interpret the underlying meaning-that the relationship is in turmoil, chaos, is unpredictable. As demonstrated the story contains an underlying meaning or parallel meanings.
51. Imagery-The use of vivid or figurative language to represent objects, actions, or ideas.
52. In medias res-A story that begins in the middle of things.
53. Inversion-In poetry is an intentional digression from ordinary word order which is used to maintain regular meters. For example, rather than saying "the rain came" a poem may say "came the rain". Meters can be formed by the insertion or absence of a pause.
54. Irony-When one thing should occur, is apparent, or in logical sequence but the opposite actually occurs. Example: A man in the ocean might say, "Water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink."

Dramatic Irony: When the audience or reader knows something characters do not know

Verbal Irony: When one thing is said, but something else, usually the opposite, is meant

Cosmic Irony: When a higher power toys with human expectations

55. Masculine ending-Stressed extra syllable at the end of a line.
56. Memoir-An account of the personal experiences of an author.
57. Meter-The measured arrangement of words in poetry, as by accentual rhythm, syllabic quantity, or the number of syllables in a line.
58. Metaphor-A figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison; this comparison does not use *like* or *as*.
59. Metonymy-The use of a word or phrase to stand in for something else which it is often associated. ie. Lamb means Jesus
60. Motif-A dominant theme or central idea.
61. Narrator-Someone who tells a story.
 - First person:** The narrator is a character in the story
 - Third person objective:** The narrator does not tell what anyone is thinking; the “fly on a wall”
 - Third person limited:** The narrator is able to tell the thoughts of one character
 - Third person omniscient:** The narrator is able to tell the thoughts of any character
62. Novella-A short novel usually under 100 pages.
63. Neutral language- Language opposite from emotive language as it is literal or even objective in nature.
64. Oblique rhyme-Imperfect rhyme scheme.
65. Ode-A lyric poem of some length, usually of a serious or meditative nature and having an elevated style and formal stanzaic structure. An ode celebrates something. John Keats is known for writing odes.
66. Onomatopoeia-The formation or use of words such as *buzz* or *murmur* that imitate the sounds associated with the objects or actions they refer to.
67. Paradox- Statement which seems to contradict itself. i.e. His old face was youthful when he heard the news.
68. Parody-A literary or artistic work that imitates the characteristic style of an author or a work for comic effect or ridicule. i.e. SNL or Weird Al Yankovich.
69. Personification-A figure of speech in which inanimate objects or abstractions are endowed with human qualities or are represented as possessing human form.
70. Poetic justice-The rewarding of virtue and the punishment of vice in the resolution of a plot. The character, as they say, gets what he/she deserves.
71. Prequel-A literary, dramatic, or cinematic work whose narrative takes place before that of a preexisting work or a sequel.
72. Prologue- An introduction or preface, especially a poem recited to introduce a play.
73. Prose-Ordinary speech or writing without metrical structure, written in paragraph form. Novels and short stories are referred to as prose.
74. Protagonist-The main character in a drama or literary work.
75. Pun-Play on words, when two words have multiple meanings and spellings and are used in a humorous manner.
76. Rhyme- the repetition of sounds in words
77. Rhyme scheme-The act of assigning letters in the alphabet to demonstrate the rhyming lines in a poem.
78. Rising action-The events of a dramatic or narrative plot preceding the climax.
79. Rites of passage-An incident which creates tremendous growth signifying a transition from adolescence to adulthood.
80. Round character-A character who is developed over the course of the book, round characters are usually major characters in a novel.
81. Resolution-Solution to the conflict in literature.
82. Satire-A literary work in which human vice or folly is attacked through irony, derision, or wit; the goal is to change the behavior/issue. Authors known for satires are Jonathan Swift and George Orwell.
83. Simile-A figure of speech in which two essentially unlike things are compared, often in a phrase introduced by *like* or *as*.

84. Slang-A kind of language occurring chiefly in casual and playful speech, made up typically of short-lived coinages and figures of speech that are deliberately used in place of standard terms for added raciness, humor, irreverence, or other effect.
85. Soliloquy-A dramatic or literary form of discourse in which a character talks to himself or herself or reveals his or her thoughts without addressing a listener. Typical in plays.
86. Sonnet-A poem with fourteen lines. An Italian sonnet subdivides into two quatrains and two tercets; while an English sonnet subdivides into three quatrains and one couplet. A volta is a sudden change of thought which is common in sonnets.
87. Style- The combination of distinctive features of literary or artistic expression, execution, or performance characterizing a particular person, group, school, or era.
88. Symbolism- Something that represents something else by association, resemblance, or convention, especially a material object used to represent something invisible.
89. Tragedy- A drama or literary work in which the main character is brought to ruin or suffers extreme sorrow, especially as a consequence of a tragic flaw, moral weakness, or inability to cope with unfavorable circumstances.
90. Tone-Reflects how the author feels about the subject matter or the feeling the author wants to instill in the reader.