

Literary Features

WALLINGFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Device	Definition	Example
allusion	A reference to a well-known person, place, event, literary work, or work of art.	Black Monday (event: stock market collapse) sour grapes (Aesop's fable)
analogy	An analogy compares two different things to point out how they are similar.	Pets are like plants. If you give them lots of care and attention, they grow strong and healthy. If you neglect them, they become weak and sickly.
character	A dynamic character is a character that is changed by events or interactions with others. A static character is a character that stays essentially the same.	
climax	The climax in a story or play is the high point of interest or suspense in a literary work. In some works of literature, the climax is the turning point.	
conflict	A conflict is a struggle between opposing forces. Sometimes the struggle is internal, or inside a character, as when a character strives to meet a self-imposed challenge (man versus himself). At other times the struggle is external and involves a force outside the character. This force may be another character, the antagonist; a force of nature; or a social convention or custom.	
dialogue	A dialogue is a conversation between characters. Writers use dialogue to reveal character, to present events, to add variety to a narrative, and to interest readers.	
flashback	Interruption of present action to insert an episode that took place at an earlier time for the purpose of giving the reader information to make the present situation understandable or account for a character's current motivation.	"Can you listen, back, far back?" People from another past time suddenly live again. They sing, eat fried chicken, braid long hair, swing in an uneven swing in the black walnut tree, wash dishes, swat at mosquitoes, and watch thunderstorms -- just like now.
foreshadowing	A device that provides clues to alert the reader about events that will occur later in the narrative. It serves to build purpose.	Nothing could go wrong on such a perfect day. Or so I, in my childlike innocence, thought.
hyperbole	Obvious and extravagant exaggeration not meant to be taken literally.	I'm so hungry I could eat a horse.
imagery	Imagery is the descriptive language used in literature to re-create sensory experiences. The images in a work supply details of sight, sound, taste, touch, smell, or movement and help the reader to sense the experience being described.	Even the usually cool green willows bordering the pond hung wilting and dry.

irony	Irony is the general name given to literary techniques that involve surprising, interesting, or amusing contradictions. There are three main literary forms of irony:	
	Verbal: Saying one thing and meaning another.	As you come in from a raging blizzard, you say, "Nice day, huh?"
	Climatic Situation: Events turn out opposite to what is expected to happen or what seems appropriate under the circumstances.	A man believes he is the only human left on Earth; in despair he swallows sleeping tablets; just as he slops into unconsciousness, the telephone rings.
	Dramatic: The reader perceives something that the characters in the story don't see or know.	In picture books, this may often be shown through illustrations, in plays it may be show in actions.
metaphor	A metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing is spoken of as though it were something else. It does not use <i>like</i> or <i>as</i> in the comparison.	Tumbleweeds are the lost children of the desert.
mood	Mood, or atmosphere, is the feeling created in the reader by a literary work or passage. The mood may be suggested by the writer's choice of words, by events in the work, or by the physical setting.	"The dirt under his feet felt soft and warm. He spread his toes and watched the dust squirt between them." A gentle, slow-paced, bucolic environment is evoked.
paradox	A statement that reveals a kind of unlikely truth although it seems at first to be self-contradictory and untrue.	Good fences make good neighbors. (Fences do separate people, but since they define limits of people's property, fences prevent conflicts.)
parody	A parody is an imitation of another work that exaggerates or distorts features of the work to make fun of it or simply to amuse readers.	<i>The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig</i> is a parody of <i>The Three Little Pigs</i> .
plot	The sequence of events in a literary work.	
point-of-view	The perspective from which the story is seen and told; three principal vantage points are most commonly employed.	
	Omniscient: All-knowing -the ability to see into minds and record thoughts of characters and make comments about either one or several of them so that the reader may come to know more of their situation than does any single character in it.	George, anxiously hoping that no one was watching him, placed a carefully wrapped package on an empty park bench. But Molly, who was walking home, saw him and couldn't help thinking that he was acting strangely.
	Limited or Objective Third Person: Here, the central observer of the story limits interpretation to what is seen or heard without additional comment about the character motive or thoughts.	As George placed the carefully wrapped package on the park bench, he looked up and saw Molly walking across the street.
	Limited First Person: The view and thoughts are solely through one character telling the story, (I). This view can only reveal what the character sees and is told by others.	As I placed the carefully wrapped package on the park bench, I looked up and saw Molly walking across the street. I hoped that she hadn't seen me.

satire	Satire is a type of writing that ridicules or criticizes the faults of individuals or groups. The satirist may use a tolerant, sympathetic tone or an angry, bitter tone. Although a satire may be humorous, its purpose is not simply to make readers laugh but to correct, through laughter, the flaws and shortcomings it points out.	A self-important young man refuses to rescue a girl who has fallen into quicksand and gives her a long lecture on the property of quicksand and how to survive a fall into it. When he, in turn, tumbles into it, he can only remember to holler "Help, help."
simile	Explicit comparison from one unlike thing to another that shares some common recognizable similarity; this device uses "like," "as," "such as," and "than" to set them off.	Mad as a hornet, laughed like a hyena; lower than a snake's belly in a wagon rut.
symbol	Any person, object, or action that has stands for or represents something else.	The tree brings the villagers together in a spirit of new hope. When the cherry tree came back to life, so did the village.
theme	The underlying meaning of a literary work, a particular truth about life or humanity, which the author is trying to make the reader see. Plot is a pattern or events or what happens -- theme is the meaning, what it's about.	Plot -- a young soldier in his first battle. Theme-war is futile or fighting solves nothing.
tone	The tone of a literary work is the writer's attitude toward the readers and toward the subject. A writer's tone may be formal or informal, friendly or distant, personal or impersonal.	
understatement	Understatement means saying less than is actually meant, generally in an ironic way.	Describe a flooded area as "slightly soggy"

Taken from *Prentice Hall Literature "Handbook of Literary Terms and Techniques"* and *Using Picture Story Books to Teach Literary Devices* by Susan Hall

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