

Literary Elements and Techniques

A literary element refers to components of a literary work (character, setting, plot, theme, frame, exposition, ending/denouement, motif, titling, narrative point-of-view). These are technical terms for the “what” of a work.

A literary device refers to a literary technique employed by the author to produce an effect (tone, irony, figurative language, symbolism, foreshadowing). You don’t need to know the difference between the two.

Term	Definition	Some examples of what it looks like in a sentence or two
Setting	... refers to time periods, geographic locations, cultural contexts, immediate surroundings, weather, times of day, or times of year employed in the story. A setting can be used to create a mood, as an integral part of the plot (creating a conflict, etc.), to bring out certain aspects of the characters, and can also be used figuratively or symbolically to hint at the story’s theme or reflect an interior state of the characters.	<p>* The story is set in... the setting of (Story title) evokes <i>“In the Land of Men” is set over two brutally cold winter evenings in Chicago. The setting of the story evokes a feeling of despair and isolation.</i></p> <p>* One of the most interesting aspects of the (Story title’s) setting is... This shows... <i>One of the most interesting aspects of “In the Land of Men’s” setting is that the temperature is described as being exactly the same on the night of the narrator’s rape and on the night her brother’s kidnap her attacker. This shows...</i></p> <p>* The story’s setting, which _____, is clearly used by (author name) to... <i>“In the Land of Men’s” setting, which is a cold, dark night in winter, is clearly used by Antonya Nelson to show the internal state of the main character.</i></p>
Tone	... refers to the attitude the work takes toward the audience and subject. A work’s tone can be playful, serious, upbeat, detached, ironic, intimate, haughty, objective and any other number of great adjectives used to describe an attitude toward something.	<p>* The tone of (work title), which can be best described as...., implies...</p> <p>(Title of work’s) tone shifts over the course of the story from _____ to _____, suggesting that...</p> <p>(Work’s) tone is notable because...</p> <p>2. (Work) has a distinctly _____ tone, like...</p> <p>The tone evoked by (work) is _____ and _____, sort of like _____.</p>
Exposition	...refers to the background plot information. Exposition can be deliberately with-held and/or dumped early in the story. The exposition can occur through dialogue, the narration, and/or inter-chapters. An author’s mode of exposition often tells us something about his/her project in a book and how we, as an audience, are invited into the world of the book.	<p>(Work’s) exposition happens primarily through..., perhaps to...</p> <p>The exposition in (work) is notable/interesting because...</p>
Narrative perspective / point-of-view	<p>... refers to the point-of-view from which the story is narrated. The story can be from the first person point-of-view (“I saw...”) or the third person point-of-view (“he saw”). Notably, there are some important variations on both of these major points-of-view:</p> <p>First person protagonist – the person telling the story is also the main character First person observer – the person telling the story is a secondary character in the story.</p>	<p>(Author last name) choose to write the story from the _____ point-of-view which has the effect of...</p> <p>The _____ point-of-view underscores/highlights/enhances/Intimates/suggests/creates/...</p> <p>The most interesting part about (the Work’s) _____ narrative point-of-view is...</p>

	<p>Third person limited – the narrative follows around one character primarily and has access to his/her thoughts. This narrative perspective also describes things happening around him/her.</p> <p>Third person omniscient – has access to multiple character’s thoughts and actions.</p> <p>Third person objective – describes only the actions of the characters. We see the actions of the book almost as if on a stage with no access or limited access to character’s thoughts.</p> <p>Note: texts can switch between different points-of-view</p>	
Motif	... refers to a series of reoccurring details that have symbolic importance in the story. (e.g. the fire motif or the motif of masks and marks in <i>Lord of the Flies</i>).	<p>The motif of _____, first established with the detail of _____ in the end suggests...</p> <p>One prominent motif in (work) is _____; this motif is significant/notable/remarkable/interesting because...</p>
Image	...refers to a description of something to be seen, hear, smelled, or touched.	<p>One of the most compelling/strange/ironic/paradoxical/ stirring/ambiguous/revealing images in (work) shows up at (the end, beginning, etc.) when (author name) describes...</p> <p>To understand the theme of (work) one need look no further than its most revealing image, which...</p>
Characterization	...refers to how the author describes his/her characters.	<p>* (AUTHOR NAME) characterizes (character name) as being... <i>Salinger characterizes Holden as being a confused and hurting teenager</i></p> <p>* (AUTHOR NAME) characterizes (character name) through/by... For example,... This shows... <i>Salinger characterizes Holden through the way he describes other people. For example, when Holden is in Grand Central Station, he criticizes the rich people’s suitcases. This shows that he is uncomfortable with money, which is ironic because his family is very rich.</i></p>
Protagonist	The main character in a story. He/she is often a hero but sometimes is not. He/she can also be the story’s narrator.	<p>* (CHARACTER NAME), the protagonist of the story, ... Titus, the protagonist of <i>feed</i>, narrates his adventures in a not-so-distant future.</p> <p>* The novel has many main characters, but the clear protagonist is...</p>
Antagonist	A character who stands in the way of the protagonist’s movement in the story. Often times, this is a villain but it does not have to be.	<p>* (CHARACTER NAME), the book’s antagonist,...</p> <p>* The book’s antagonist, (CHARACTER NAME), ...</p> <p>* It is interesting to note that (BOOK TITLE) does not have a clear antagonist... This suggests...</p>
Static vs. Dynamic characterization	... refers to what the author does with the character over the course of the book. If the character changes a lot over the course of the story, the author has made the character dynamic . If the character stays pretty much the same, he/she is static .	<p>(Author name) characterizes (character name) as static/dynamic. The story’s ending shows that the character...</p> <p><i>J.D. Salinger characterizes Holden as dynamic. The story’s ending shows that Holden has started to realize that he cannot freeze time and must deal with his grief.</i></p>
Round vs. flat characterization	... refers to how complex the author makes character. If the character is very complex in his/her motivations and/or actions, he/she is round . If the character is straightforward in his/her motivations and/or actions, he/she is flat .	<p>(Author name) characterizes (character name) as round/flat. <i>Salinger characterizes Holden as a round character. He can be at times annoying and other times completely sweet.</i></p>
Foil	Foil- character intended as an thematic opposite of the main character, revealing his/her salient qualities.	

	Static vs. Dynamic: a static character is one who does not change, a dynamic one does.	
Frame story	... refers to a literary technique whereby the author tells a story at the beginning of a the work that sets the stage for the main story to come.	(Author name) frames the story by...
Theme	... refers to a broad idea or moral in a story. Remember, a good theme shouldn't be something broad like "death" and also cannot be something so specific, like "the death of Violet" as to only be applicable to that one work. The best themes are specific but could be applied to other works: e.g. <u>Feed</u> by M.T. Anderson explores the theme of the shallowness of death in the age of technology.	(Author name) seems interested in exploring the theme of... While (work) clearly evokes the theme of _____, it also suggest the theme of _____.
Resolution / Denouement	... refers to a story's final "untying" or resolution. The story's denouement is always at the end, after the climax. Some of the short stories we have read have denouements that purposefully don't resolve the plot's central conflict.	The story's resolution, in which _____, suggests.. In the story's resolution, we see...
Conflict	... refers to the central problems of a text. Most works are animated by some form of conflict. Literary theorists have suggested that there are five primary types of conflict that to different degrees and in different combinations show up: Man vs. man Man vs. himself Man vs. society Man vs. technology Man vs. mythical/paranormal force An even easier way to think about this is that some conflicts are internal (someone struggling with two different feelings inside of themselves) and some conflicts are external (someone struggling against a person or situation)	While (Work) certainly includes a conflict between _____ and _____, it also seems to be about a different conflict, namely... Underneath the story's primary conflict of _____ is _____. The resolution of the story's conflict, which happens when _____, suggests _____.
Foreshadowing	...refers to when an author hints at what is to come in the narrative through a particular description or image.	(Author) foreshadows _____ through the image/description of _____. _____ foreshadows _____.
Symbolism	... refers to when a word or object stands in for something of bigger significance. In the great works of literature, symbols are often complex, encoding more than one thing in the same object; for example, the conch in <u>Lord of the Flies</u> clearly symbolizes democratic power on the island but it is also symbolic oft totalitarian authority through its connection to the "man with the megaphone."	(Author name) symbolizes _____ in the object/image/person of _____. (Object, person, image) clearly symbolizes _____. While _____ symbolizes _____, it may also symbolize _____.
Figurative Language: Metaphor, Simile	- Metaphor: word or phrase that compares two unlike things Simile: word or phrase that compares two unlike things using "as" or "like" Other common figurative language – hyperbole (dramatic exaggeration), synecdoche (a part standing	In _____, the author chooses to use metaphors such as _____ in order to _____. <i>One of the most interesting metaphors in the book is _____. (Author name) may be comparing</i>

	<p>in from the whole)</p> <p>- word/phrase used to convey special effect or meaning</p>	<p>_____ to _____ in order to...</p> <p><i>It is worth paying attention to the metaphor of _____ because _____.</i></p> <p><i>Figurative language is a technique used/implemented/employed in the book _____. Perhaps the author, _____, uses this figurative language to emphasize _____.</i></p>
Allegory	... refers to a work in which almost all of the characters are intended as symbols.	
Personification	... refers to when animals, inanimate objects, or places are metaphorically given the qualities of human beings.	... (work) personifies _____, suggesting that perhaps...
Allusion	... refers to a brief and often indirect reference to another work of art, person, place, or object. An allusion often deepens or complicates our understanding of the work.	<p>... the story alludes to _____, perhaps in order to _____.</p> <p>A major allusion in the work is to _____ - _____.</p>
Flashback	... refers to a technique in which an author interrupts present events with a look at past events. Often it is up to the reader to infer why a flashback is being employed in the text and how it adds to or complicates the present narrative.	

Literary Elements/Techniques Practice

Please **choose four of the literary elements** from the page above about which you feel the most confident. For each element, write me one to three sentences about a work of literature you have read that employs that element or technique in an interesting or significant way.

Example: Running through almost all of the short stories in Jhumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies is the motif of food. Lahiri uses food imagery to demonstrate the interior states of the characters and also to show the difficult process of assimilation that her immigrant characters undergo.

1.

2.

3.

4.

