

# AP Literature Terms

- **anaphora** – the repetition of a word or expression at the beginning of successive phrases or clauses for rhetorical or poetic effect, as in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: *We cannot dedicate--we cannot consecrate--we cannot hallow this ground....*
- **anecdote** – a short narrative (story) used in a longer work or speech—to make a point, often humorous
- **antecedent** – the noun that a pronoun refers back to in a sentence or closely related sentences.
- **antithesis** – figure of speech in which a thought is balanced with a contrasting thought in parallel arrangements of words and phrases, such as *"He promised wealth and provided poverty,"* or *"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times"*
- **apostrophe** – the addressing of an absent person or an inanimate object: *Death, where is your sting?*
- **caesura** – a pause for effect in the middle of a line of poetry; (period, dash, semicolon, etc.) it may or may not affect the meter. In scansion, a caesura is usually indicated by the following symbol (/ /). Here's an example by Alexander Pop: The proper study of Mankind / / is Man
- **canon** – works generally considered by scholars, critics, and teachers to be the most important to study or read, which collectively constitute the "masterpieces" or "classics" of literature.
- **carpe diem** – a Latin phrase which translated means "Seize (Catch) the day," meaning "Make the most of today."
- **catharsis** – Aristotle's word for the pity and fear an audience experiences upon viewing the downfall of a hero
- **chiasmus** – a reversed repetition in successive clauses which are usually parallel in **syntax**, as in "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country" (JFK) or "Fair is foul and foul is fair." (Macbeth)
- **chronological ordering** – arrangement in the order in which things occur; may move from past to present or in reverse chronological order, from present to past.
- **classification (or cataloguing)** – as a means of ordering, arrangement of objects according to class; e.g. media classified as print, television, and radio.
- **conflict** – a struggle between opposing forces: man versus man; man versus nature; man versus himself
- **conjunction** – part of speech used to link words, phrases, and clauses. Coordinate conjunctions (and, but, or, nor) connect independent clauses. Subordinate conjunctions connect a subordinate clause to an independent clause, a complete thought.
- **connotation** – the emotional implications that a word may carry; implied or associated meaning for a particular word. Compare the connotations and denotations (dictionary meanings) of the words house and home. House is quite standard, while home can have many meanings, especially emotional.
- **consonance** – the repetition of consonant sounds with differing vowel sounds in words near each other in a line or lines of poetry. EX: But yet we trust
- **couplet** – a pair of rhyming lines written in the same meter; may be a separate stanza
- **crisis** – the climax or turning point of a story or play (may have more than one crisis when there are several almost-equal major characters)
- **crux** – the most crucial line(s) in a poem or prose passage, the part that best shows the main point
- **cumulative sentence** – a sentence that starts with an independent clause, then adds on more and more with other explanatory phrases and/or subordinate clauses. Complete sentence is at the beginning—you can stop it at any place. The added phrases and clauses just add depth and explanation: The family used to gather around the hearth, doing such chores as polishing shoes, mending ripped clothing, reading, chatting, always warmed by one another's presence as much as by the flames.
- **denotation** – the specific, exact meaning of a word; a dictionary definition
- **denouement** – the resolution of a plot after the climax
- **deus ex machina** – an unexpected, artificial, or improbable character, device, or event introduced suddenly in a work of fiction or drama to resolve a situation or untangle a plot
- **dialect** – speech peculiar to a region; exhibits distinctions between two groups or even two persons.
- Dialects in this country are peculiar to various regions - - "Eastern" vs. "Southern."
- **dialogue** – conversation between two or more characters, usually set off with quotation marks

- **diction** – an author’s choice of words—i.e., simple, sophisticated, colloquial, formal, or informal.
- **didactic verse** - a term for a poem that teaches, almost preaches. It often discusses the “proper” way to behave. The lesson being taught is more important to the writer than the artistic quality of the work
- **ellipsis**--In grammar, the omission of a word or words necessary for complete construction but understood in context. The sign (...) that something has been left out of a quotation: "To be or not...that is the question." (Emily Dickinson uses a dash (-) for ellipsis.)
- **elegy** – lyrical poem about death; a serious poem, usually meant to express grief or sorrow. The theme is serious, usually death.
- **empathy** – feelings of pity and understanding for a character
- **end rhyme – schematic rhyme that comes at the ends of lines of verse (such as aa,bb or ab, ab)**
- **end stop line**—line of verse in which both the grammatical structure and the sense reach completion at the end of a line; denoting a line of verse in which a logical or rhetorical pause occurs at the end of the line, usually marked with a period, comma, or semicolon; line in poetry that ends with a complete pause created by punctuation (; or .)
- **enjambment**—line of verse that carries over into next line without a pause of any kind
- **envelope method – (frame)** Begins and ends with same setting and/or narrator(s); middle is flashback
- **epic**—a long narrative, usually written in elevated language, which related the adventures of a hero upon whom rests the fate of a nation
- **epigram** – a witty saying, usually at the end of a poem, about 2 lines long; a brief, witty observation about a person, institution, or experience
- **epigraph** - A brief quotation at the beginning of a book or chapter.
- **epiphany** – an awakening; a sudden understanding or burst of insight; key moment in Greek plays
- **epitaph** – an engraving on a tombstone
- **epithet** – *nickname or appellation, i.e., “Helen of the white arms” in the Iliad*
- **euphemism** – substitute word(s) that sounds better than another (lingerie instead of underwear); the use of inoffensive or neutral words to describe a harsher, more serious concept. IT reduces the risk that the listener will be upset or offended. Example: people “pass away”, instead of “Die”. Euphemisms soften the blow of unhappy news or truths.
- **euphony** - a quality of style marked by pleasing, harmonious sounds, the opposite of cacophony
- **existentialism**—a term applied to a group of attitudes which emphasize existence rather than the essence, and sees the inadequacy of human reason to explain the enigma of the universe
- **exposition**—the introductory material which sets the tone, gives the setting, introduces the characters, and supplies necessary facts; may be the first section of the typical Plot, in which Characters are introduced, the Setting is described, and any necessary background information is given. Sometimes there is a lot, and the exposition stretches out; sometimes and the expository information is tucked in unobtrusively as people talk to each other or inside the narrator's descriptions.
- **eye rhyme** - a form of rhyme wherein the look rather than the sound is important. "Cough" and "tough" do not sound enough alike to constitute a rhyme. However, if these two words appeared at the ends of successive lines of poetry, they would be considered eye rhyme.
- **figurative language** - writing or speech not meant to be taken literally figure of speech; states something that is not literally true in order to create an effect. Similes, metaphors and personification are figures of speech based on comparisons. Metonymy, synecdoche, synesthesia, apostrophe, oxymoron, and hyperbole are other **figures of speech** or **tropes**
- **flashback**—a device by which an author can present action or scenes that occurred before the opening scene in a work
- **flat character** –a character who is not fully developed by an author; character who has only one outstanding trait or feature, or at the most a few distinguishing marks.
- **foil** - character who provides a contrast to another character, thus emphasizing the other’s traits; a character in a play who sets off the main character or other characters by comparison. In Shakespeare's Hamlet, Hamlet and Laertes are young men who behave very differently. While Hamlet delays in carrying out his mission to avenge the death of his father, Laertes is quick and bold in his challenge of the king over the death of his father.
- **folk tale** - a story which has been composed orally and then passed down by word of mouth

- **foot**—a unit of meter; a metrical foot can have two or three syllables; the basic unit of measurement in a line of poetry. In scansion, a foot represents one instance of a metrical pattern and is shown either between or to the right or left of vertical lines. The most common foot is the iamb—two syllables with accent on the last. The most widely used meter is iambic pentameter. A foot is the smallest repeated pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a poetic line. A line of meter is described by the kind of meter and the number of feet.
- **foreshadowing**—the arrangement and presentation of events and information in such a way that prepare for later events in a work
- **form** - the structure, shape, pattern, organization, or style of a piece of literature
- **frame** - a narrative constructed so that one or more stories are embedded within another story
- **free verse** - unrhymed poetry with lines of varying lengths, containing no specific metrical pattern.
- **genre** - a specific kind or category of literature, e.g., mystery story, sonnet, romance novel
- **gothic**—a form of novel in which magic, mystery, horrors and chivalry abound
- **grotesque**—focuses on physically or mentally (warped, deluded, retarded) impaired characters
- **heroic couplet** - two successive lines of rhymed poetry in iambic pentameter
- **hyperbole** - exaggeration for effect and emphasis, overstatement
- **iambic** - 1 unaccented, 1 accented - "trapeze" - very Shakespearean
- **iambic pentameter** - A metrical pattern in poetry which consists of five iambic feet per line. (An iamb, or iambic foot, consists of one unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable, i.e. "away.")
- **idioms** - expressions that do not translate exactly into what a speaker means; idioms are culturally relevant; when a person uses an idiomatic expression, he or she truly "thinks" in the language.
- **imagery**—devices which appeal to the senses: visual, tactile, auditory, gustatory, olfactory, kinetic; a group of words that create a mental "picture" (ie., animal, water, death, plant, decay, war, etc.); devices which appeal to the senses: visual, tactile, auditory, olfactory, kinetic. The use of images serves to intensify the impact of the work.
- **internal rhyme** - rhyming within lines of verse instead of at the ends of lines
- **inverted sentence** - reversing the normal subject - verb - complement order. Poets do this sometimes to conform to normal rhyme and rhythm patterns. Prose writers sometimes do this for emphasis. example- "Still grows the vivacious lilac a generation after the door . . . and sill are gone, unfolding its sweet-scented flowers each spring, to be plucked by the musing traveler." Henry David Thoreau
- **irony** - surprising, amusing, or interesting contrast between reality and expectation. In irony of situation, the result of an action is the reverse of what the actor expected. In dramatic irony, the audience knows something that the characters in the drama do not. In verbal irony, the contrast is between the literal meaning of what is said and what is meant. A character may refer to a plan as "brilliant," while actually meaning that (s)he thinks the plan is foolish. Sarcasm is a form of verbal irony.
- **juxtaposition** - the positioning of ideas or images side by side for emphasis or to show contrast—ex: In *Romeo & Juliet*, love and hate are juxtaposed as the two teenagers' love is forced into the same arena as the families' hatred.
- **loose or cumulative sentence** - has independent clause first, followed by a series of phrases and clauses—ex. The family used to gather around the hearth, doing such chores as polishing shoes, mending ripped clothing, reading, chatting, always warmed by one another's presence as much as by the flames.
- **metaphor**—a figure of speech wherein a comparison is made between two unlike quantities without the use of the words "like" or "as." Jonathan Edwards, in his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," has this to say about the moral condition of his parishioners: There are the black clouds of God's wrath now hanging directly over your heads, full of the dreadful storm and big with thunder.
- **meter** - the rhythmical pattern of a poem; classified according both to its pattern and the number of feet to the line. Below is a list of classifications: monometer = one foot to a line; Dimeter = two feet; Trimeter = three feet; Tetrameter = four feet; and Pentameter = five feet to a line patterned repetition of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of poetry.
- **metonymy**—substituting a word naming an object for another word closely associated with it. EX: Pay tribute to the *crown*; figure of speech in which a word represents something else which it suggests. For example in a herd of fifty cows, the herd might be referred to as fifty head of cattle. The word "head" is the word representing the herd.

- **microcosm** – a small “world” that stands for the larger one: In *Lord of the Flies*, the island is representative of the world’s political realm; in *One Flew...Cuckoo’s Nest*, the hospital is representative of totalitarian authority and/or technological control.
- **narrative** -- a story
- **narrative pacing**—the way a story moves: quickly because of piled up conjunctions and long sentences, or slowly, perhaps because of fragments, short sentences, repetition, or punctuation.
- **narrator** – speaker or persona, the one who tells a story.
- **ode** - a long, formal lyric poem with a serious theme; a form of lyric poetry using elaborate, sophisticated vocabulary in iambic pentameter. It usually focuses upon a single object or person. Ex: “Ode on a Grecian Urn” - the poet is talking to a piece of pottery in a museum (apostrophe)
- **onomatopoeia**—the use of a word to represent or to imitate natural sounds. EN: sizzle, buzz, pop, hiss;
- **oxymoron**— technique used to produce an effect by a seeming self-contradiction. EX: cruel kindness, make haste slowly
- **parable** – a short story to prove a point with a moral basis (New Testament stories by Christ)
- **paradox** - a statement which contains seemingly contradictory elements or appears contrary to common sense, yet can be seen as perhaps true when viewed from another angle, such as Alexander Pope's statement that a literary critic would “*damn with faint praise*”
- **parallel structure or parallelism** -- the repetition of syntactical similarities in passages closely connected for rhetorical effect, for example a list of infinitive phrases.
- **parody** - ludicrous imitation, usually for comic effect but sometimes for ridicule, of the style and content of another work. The humor depends upon the reader's familiarity with the original. A literary work that imitates the style of another literary work. A parody can be simply amusing or it can be mocking in tone, such as a poem which exaggerates the use of alliteration in order to show the ridiculous effect of overuse.
- **pastoral** – a literary work that has to do with shepherds and rustic settings. Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" and Robert Burns' "Sweet Afton" are examples.
- **pathetic fallacy** - overdone writing that sees the inadequacy of human reason to explain the enigma of the universe --*And the Wild Winds flew round, sobbing in their dismay*. Writing that uses clichés to show nature mirroring what happens in real life. Evil always happens or dark and stormy nights, while spring days are when new lovers meet.
- **pathos** - Greek term for deep emotion, passion, or suffering. When applied to literature, its meaning is usually narrowed to refer to tragic emotions, describing the language and situations which deeply move the audience or reader by arousing sadness, sympathy, or pity. Pathos which seems excessive or exaggerated becomes melodramatic or sentimental, and when its disproportion to its subject results from anticlimax, pathos becomes bathetic.
- **periodic sentence** - saves the subject and verb of the independent clause until the end of the sentence— ex: If you can keep your head when everyone around you is panicking, you probably don't understand the situation.
- **persona** - the mask worn by an actor in Greek drama. In a literary context, the persona is the character of the first-person narrator in verse or prose narratives, and the speaker in lyric poetry. The use of the term "persona" (as distinct from "author") stresses that the speaker is part of the fictional creation, invented for the author's particular purposes in a given literary work.
- **personification** – figure of speech in which inanimate objects are given qualities of speech and/or movement. EX: Carl Sandburg's “Chicago”: “Stormy, husky, brawling, / City of the big shoulders.”
- **point of view** -- the narrator or speaker perspective from which story is told. The two main points of view are those of the **third-person narrator**, who stands outside the story itself, and the **first-person narrator**, who participates in the story. An **objective 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator** can relay only occurrences outside the characters' thoughts--like dialogue and actions. An **omniscient 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator** sees into people's thoughts, as evidenced by words like “they *knew* deep down that they were wrong” or “*remembering* the past, she shivered in fear.” If you can see many characters’ thoughts, the narrator point of view is omniscient. If you only see through the **eyes of only one person (“She thought”; “He felt”)**, then the **vantage point is partial or limited omniscient.**
- **polysyndeton** - The repetition of a number of conjunctions in close succession, as in, “*We have men and arms and planes and tanks.*” Most often it involves the conjunction “**and**” to create emphasis.

- **protagonist**—the main character in a story; more than one character may be important enough to be called "main," or NO character seems to qualify. In those cases, figuring out whether there is a main character and who it is may be an interesting and even difficult interpretive job.
- **pun** – a play on words wherein a word is used to convey two meanings at the same time. The line below, spoken by Mercutio in Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," is an example of a pun. Mercutio has just been stabbed, knows he is dying and says: "Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man. "
- **rhetoric** - The art of speaking or writing effectively; skill in the eloquent use of language.
- **rhetorical device** – device used to produce effective speaking or writing
- **rhetorical question** – a question solely for effect, with no answer expected. By the implication that the answer is obvious, it is a means of achieving an emphasis stronger than a direct statement.
- **rhyme scheme** - a pattern of rhyming words in a stanza
- **rhyme**—similarity or likeness of sound; may be internal (within a segment of writing) or at the ends of lines of verse in poetry
- **round character** - a fully developed character; character who is complex, multi-dimensional, and convincing.
- **sarcasm** - the caustic and heavy use of apparent praise
- **satire** - a piece of literature designed to ridicule the subject of the work. While satire can be funny, its aim is not to amuse, but to arouse contempt. Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* satirizes the English people, making them seem dwarfish in their ability to deal with large thoughts, issues, or deeds. Satire arouses laughter or scorn as a means of ridicule and derision, with the avowed intention of correcting human faults.
- **scan** - to mark off lines of poetry into rhythmic units, or feet, so as to show their metrical structure
- **scansion**—a system for describing more or less conventional poetic rhythms by dividing the lines into feet; the process of measuring verse, that is, of marking accented and unaccented syllables, dividing the lines into feet, identifying the metrical pattern, and noting significant variations from that pattern.
- **scene** – short division within an act in a play; a particular setting in any work of literature
- **simile**— a figure of speech which compares two unlike quantities and which uses the words "like" or "as" in the comparison, as in the following: "clear as frost on the grass-blade."
- **shift**—a change in a passage created by syntax (often by punctuation or a conjunction) or by diction
- **soliloquy** - a long speech made by a character who is alone on the stage in which he reveals his innermost thoughts & feelings
- **sonnet** –The **English, or Shakespearean sonnet** is divided into three quatrains (four-line groupings) and a final couplet (14 lines). The rhyme scheme is abab cdcd efef gg. The change of rhyme in the English sonnet is coincidental with a change of theme in the poem. The structure of the English sonnet explores variations on a theme in the first three quatrains and concludes with an epigrammatic couplet. A **Spenserian sonnet** is a nine-line stanza, with the first eight lines in iambic pentameter and the last line in iambic hexameter
- **stream of consciousness** - narrative technique which presents thoughts as if they were coming directly from a character's mind; often a chaotic "stream" of unrelated ideas thrown together for effect
- **structure**—the planned framework for a piece of literature
- **style** - a writer's typical way of expressing himself or herself
- **synecdoche** – a figure of speech in which a part of something stands for the whole or the whole for a part, as *wheels* for automobile or *society* for high society (see **metonymy**).
- **synesthesia** - the perception or description of one kind of sense impression in words normally used to describe a different sense, like a "sweet voice" or a "velvety smile." It can be very effective for creating vivid imagery. One sensory experience described in terms of another sensory experience. Emily Dickinson, in "I Heard a Fly Buzz-When I Died," uses a color to describe a sound, *the buzz of a fly:with blue, uncertain stumbling buzz*
- **syntax**—the arrangement of words in a sentence, the grammar of a sentence, including punctuation
- **theme** - The theme provides an answer to the question, "What is the work about?" Each literary work carries its own theme(s). Unlike plot, which deals with the action of a work, theme concerns itself with a work's message or contains the general idea of a work and is worded in a complete sentence.
- **thesis**—the statement of the main position in an essay or speech; defines scope or answers a prompt
- **tone** – created through the syntax and diction, expresses the author's attitude toward his or her subject