

Literary Devices (Techniques)

1. **Alliteration:** The repetition of similar sounds, usually consonants, at the beginning of words. For example, Robert Frost's poem "Out, out—" contains the alliterative phrase "sweet-scented stuff."
2. **Allusion:** A reference within a literary work to a historical, literary, or biblical character, place, or event. For example, the title of William Faulkner's novel *The Sound and the Fury* alludes to a line from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.
3. **Assonance:** The repetition of vowel sounds in a sequence of nearby words. For example, the line "The monster spoke in a low mellow tone" (from Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem "The Lotos-Eaters") contains assonance in its repetition of the "o" sound.
4. **Aside:** a dramatic device in which a character makes a short speech intended for the audience but not heard by the other characters on stage.
5. **Characterization:** The manner in which an author develops characters and their personalities
6. **Cliché:** An expression, such as "turn over a new leaf," that has been used and reused so many times that it has lost its expressive power.
7. **Cliff hanger:** The narrative ends unresolved, to draw the audience back to a future episode for the resolution.
8. **Conflict:** struggle between two or more opposing forces (character versus character; character versus self; character versus society; character versus nature; character versus the supernatural; character versus fate; character versus a supreme being/God)
9. **Epiphany:** A sudden, powerful, and often spiritual or life changing realization that a character experiences in an otherwise ordinary moment. For example, the main character in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* has an epiphany during a walk by the sea.
10. **Flashback:** the method of returning to an earlier point in time for the purpose of making the present clearer
11. **Flash forward:** the method of moving to a future time in the narrative for the purpose of adding significance to the events
12. **Foreshadowing:** An author's deliberate use of hints or suggestions to give a preview of events or themes that do not develop until later in the narrative. Images such as a storm brewing or a crow landing on a fence post often foreshadow ominous developments in a story.
13. **Framing structure:** A single action, scene, event, setting, or any element of significance at both the beginning and end of a work.
14. **Genre:** type or category to which a literary work belongs
15. **Hamartia:** The character flaw or error of a tragic hero or heroine (hubris) that leads to his or her downfall.
16. **Hyperbole:** An excessive *overstatement* or conscious exaggeration of fact. "I've told you that a million times already" is a hyperbolic statement.
17. **Idiom:** A common expression that has acquired a meaning that differs from its literal meaning, such as "It's raining cats and dogs" or "That cost me an arm and a leg."
18. **Imagery:** Language that brings to mind sensory impressions. For example, in the *Odyssey*, Homer creates a powerful image with his description of "rosy-fingered dawn."
19. **Irony:** Broadly speaking, irony is a device that emphasizes the contrast between the way things are expected to be and the way they actually are. An historical example of irony might be the fact that people in medieval Europe believed bathing would harm them when in fact not bathing led to the unsanitary conditions that caused the bubonic plague.
 - a. Dramatic... when the reader or audience knows something a character does not
 - b. Situational... when there is a disparity between what is expected and what actually occurs
 - c. Verbal... when the speaker says one thing but means the opposite
20. **Juxtaposition:** Using two themes, characters, phrases, words, or situations together for comparison or contrast

21. **Metaphor:** The comparison of one thing to another that does not use the terms “like” or “as.” A metaphor from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*: “Life is but a walking shadow.”
22. **Motif:** A recurring structure, contrast, or other device that develops a literary work’s major themes (see *below*). For example, light and dark images are a motif in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*; Romeo is associated with the dark and Juliet with the light (“What light through yonder window breaks?” (2.3.144).
23. **Narrative Hook:** Story opening that “hooks” readers’ attention so they will keep reading. Quite often the story will begin in the middle, to make readers what has happened and they seek to find out.
24. **Onomatopoeia:** The use of words like *pop*, *hiss*, or *boing*, in which the spoken sound resembles the actual sound.
25. **Oxymoron:** The association of two terms that seem to contradict each other, such as “same difference” or “wise fool.”
26. **Paradox:** A phrase that describes an idea composed of concepts that conflict. A good example occurs in the first sentence of *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times” (1).
27. **Parody:** Ridicule by overstated imitation, usually humorous
28. **Pathetic Fallacy:** Reflecting a character’s (usually the protagonist) mood in the atmosphere or inanimate objects—for example, the storm in William Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, which mirrors Lear’s conflict and mental deterioration.
29. **Pathos:** Emotional appeal, one of the three modes of persuasion in rhetoric that the author uses to inspire pity or sorrow towards a character—typically does not counterbalance the target character’s suffering with a positive outcome, as in tragedy.
30. **Personification:** The use of human characteristics to describe animals, things, or ideas. Carl Sandburg’s poem “Chicago” describes the city as “Stormy, husky, brawling / City of the Big Shoulders.”
31. **Poetic Justice:** Virtue ultimately rewarded, or vice punished, by an ironic twist of fate related to the character’s own conduct
32. **Pun:** A play on words that uses the similarity in sound between two words with distinctly different meanings. For example, the title of Oscar Wilde’s play *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a pun on the word *earnest*, which means serious or sober, and the name “Ernest.”
33. **Repetition:** A word or phrase is repeated; the effect adds emphasis to the idea or concept and can alter the tone of the story
34. **Sarcasm:** A form of verbal irony (see *above*) in which it is obvious from context and tone that the speaker means the opposite of what he or she says. Saying “That was graceful” when someone trips and falls is an example of sarcasm.
35. **Simile:** A comparison of two things through the use of the words *like* or *as*. The title of Robert Burns’ poem “My Love Is Like a Red, Red Rose” is a simile.
36. **Symbol:** An object, character, figure, place, or color used to represent an abstract idea or concept. For example, the two roads in Robert Frost’s poem “The Road Not Taken” symbolize the choice between two paths in life.
37. **Theme:** A fundamental, universal idea explored in a literary work. The struggle to achieve the American Dream, for example, is a common theme in 20th-century American literature.
38. **Ticking clock scenario:** Threat of impending disaster—often used in thrillers where salvation and escape are essential elements.
39. **Tone:** The general atmosphere created in a story, or the author’s or narrator’s attitude toward the story or the subject. For example, the tone of the Declaration of Independence is determined and confident.
40. **Voice:** The story is written in such a way that the narrator’s voice can be heard. Adds to characterization and potential links to theme.