

## 86 Literary and Rhetorical Terms for Secondary Students

1. A CLICHÉ is a word or phrase that has become very familiar and is **over-used**.
2. An ANTAGONIST is a force **against** which the **protagonist** must struggle in order to achieve his or her goal.
3. A FOIL is a character that **helps bring into light** the most pertinent **attributes of the protagonist**, typically by contrast.
4. ONOMATOPOEIA is when a word's **name mirrors its sound**, for example, "buzz" or "meow."
5. SITUATIONAL IRONY is a surprising **twist of events** like when a cop lands behind bars or a dropout opens a school.
6. The RISING ACTION is right **after the set-up (or exposition)**. It is when the **first action** occurs.
7. HYPERBOLE is a form of extravagant **exaggeration**, for example, "You never listen" or "You always do that."
8. PERSONIFICATION is when **human qualities** are attributed to **non-human entities**.
9. CONSONANCE is when a **consonant sound**, usually ending consonant sound, **is repeated for effect** as in "Barb and Abe."
10. SYMBOLISM is when a **material object** represents either a larger, more complex object or an **abstract idea**, for example when a red cap represents independence of spirit or when a cage represents slavery.
11. SYNTAX is the **placement or order of words within a sentence and is a subset of diction**.
12. An ANALOGY is a **comparison of relationships** and is written mathematically: **Finger : hand :: branch : tree**.
13. ALLITERATION is when sounds, usually beginning sounds, are **repeated**, as in "Pink Peter Piper picked purple poppies."
14. RHYME is when the **entire endings of words** sound alike as in "hop" and "pop" and "dime" and "time."
15. A PARADOX is an apparent **conceptual contradiction** or when something is both itself and its opposite at once. For example, boundaries provide freedom or we are often the meanest to those we love the most.
16. An IDIOM is an **expression unique to a culture** and **literally untrue**, for example, "It's raining cats and dogs."
17. ASSONANCE is when a **vowel sound**, usually middle vowel sound, **is repeated** as in "Homostrophic Ode to Conan O".
18. A METAPHOR suggests that **one thing is another thing**, offering profound insight, for example "Ignorance is prison."
19. DICTION is the author's **choice and placement of words**. (Diction = vocabulary + syntax).
20. A SIMILE compares two **dissimilar** things, often **using words such as "like" or "as."**
21. DRAMATIC IRONY is when the reader or audience **knows something that the characters do not**.
22. TONE is the **author's attitude** toward the subject matter, the characters and/or the reader.
23. FORESHADOWING is when the writer gives you a **clue early on** as to what will happen later in the story.
24. An OXYMORON is a **term or phrase that is seemingly contradictory**, such as "cold hotplate" or "jumbo shrimp."
25. The DENOUEMENT is the **ending** of the story wherein all the complexities are unraveled (French for the untying of a knot).
26. VERBAL IRONY is another way of saying "**sarcasm**."
27. THEME has at least two meanings, including: the central idea of a text (in one sentence) and the topic of a text (in one word).
28. The PROTAGONIST is the **main character** of a story. He or she is also often referred to as the hero or heroine.
29. AMBIGUITY is when something is **unclear** and may be **interpreted in a variety of ways**.
30. INFERENCE is when you come to a **conclusion**, based on evidence, about aspects that are **not directly stated**.
31. FLASHBACK is when the **setting suddenly shifts to a place and time in the past**.
32. NEMESIS is the **rival** whom the protagonist just **can't seem to beat**.
33. REPETITION is when a word, element or device repeats for style or effect.
34. POINT OF VIEW is the perspective from which the narrator tells the story: **first person** (use of the pronoun "I" in the narrative); **third person objective** (no thoughts or feelings of the characters, only words and actions); **third person limited omniscient** (thoughts and feelings of just the protagonist); or **third person omniscient** (thoughts and feelings of all characters).
35. BIAS is an inappropriate slant toward one side of an issue; **prejudice**.
36. A DENOTATION is the **explicit and direct** definition of a word.
37. An ALLEGORY is a **short, symbolic narrative intended to provide insight into a parallel narrative or historical event**, for example, the children's book "Terrible Things" is an allegory for the Holocaust.
38. An APHORISM is a **pithy saying** that embodies a general truth. For example, "Absolute power corrupts absolutely."
39. A TRAGEDY is a **narrative** whose hero, due to his own **tragic flaw**, takes a **tragic fall**. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is one.
40. A MOTIF is a **recurring symbol or idea** in an artistic work that supports the central theme.
41. PORTMANTEAU is the **blending of two words** to form an entirely new word, for example smoke + fog = smog.
42. A FACT is a provable, **objective "truth."**
43. UTOPIA is a perfect or **ideal society**.

44. DEUS EX MACHINA is when an external force, such as a **god, comes to save the day**.
45. JUXTAPOSITION is the **side-by-side placement** of objects or ideas for the purpose of comparing and contrasting.
46. ZEUGMA is when a **single word, usually a verb, is used to govern two words or phrases**, for example “She stole my heart and my cat” or “He held his breath and the door.” “I filed my nails and then for divorce.” (Similar to, but not the same as, *syllipsis*.)
47. A CONNOTATION is an **associated meaning of a word** and is often considered to be either “positive” or “negative.”
48. A SLANT-RHYME is a **half rhyme**, usually involving consonance and/or assonance. Example: “Ma’am” and “warm.”
49. The CLIMAX is the heightened part of the narrative during which the protagonist overcomes his or her **biggest obstacle**.
50. PROSE is **ordinary, non-poetic** written or spoken expression; regular sentences NOT written in verse.
51. A PARABLE is a type of short, **simple story** involving **human characters** that carries a **strong message**.
52. A FABLE is a type of short, **simple story** involving **animal characters** that conveys a **strong message**.
53. ETHOS is the part of a rhetorical expression (argument) that involves an **appeal to the author’s credibility**.
54. LOGOS is the part of a rhetorical expression (argument) that involves an **appeal to reason and logic**.
55. PATHOS is the part of a rhetorical expression (argument) that involves an **appeal to emotion**.
56. HUBRIS is a type of **tragic flaw** that involves **putting oneself in the position of a god**.
57. A CATHARSIS is an **emotional purging or cleansing** experienced by the audience, usually as part of an artistic work’s climax.
58. SATIRE is a genre of expression that involves the **humorous teasing** or mocking of a subject **in order to effect social change**.
59. PARODY is a **type of satire that involves mimicking** the person being mocked. For example, Stephen Colbert.
60. FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE is **language that is not scientific and literal**. *Metaphor, simile* and *hyperbole* are examples.
61. A EUPHEMISM is a mild word that takes the place of a less mild or offensive word. For example, “pass away” for “die.”
62. EXPLICATION is the **analysis and explanation** of a work, often a **poem**.
63. An OPINION is a **belief** that has **yet to be proven** as fact. (In Law it is the judge’s ruling.)
64. An ALLUSION is a **nod or reference** to something outside of the text that is **not directly stated**.
65. IMAGERY involves the use of images to **evoke a sensory response**. (Literal imagery is akin to sensory details; Figurative imagery involves the use of figurative language, such as similes and metaphors.)
66. A PROBLEM-SOLUTION essay explores a problem and suggested solution.
67. A COMPARE-CONTRAST essay compares and contrasts two works.
68. A FOOT is a **metrical unit of two or more syllables**. An *iamb* is one. A *trochee* is another.
69. RHETORIC is written or spoken expression that is intended **to persuade**.
70. A BILDUNGSROMAN is a **coming-of-age story** – a story that involves the evolution of a **young protagonist**.
71. A DOPPELGÄNGER is a living being’s **ghostly double**.
72. ANAPHORA is a rhetorical device wherein **beginning words or phrases are repeated** as in “I have a dream...I have a dream...”
73. ASYNDETON is a stylistic device wherein **conjunctions are omitted**. Ex: “...with jobs, with opportunity, with self-respect.”
74. An APOSTROPHE is a theatrical speech addressed to someone who is not there or to a personified entity.
75. A SOLILOQUY is an extended theatrical speech addressed to oneself.
76. A MONOLOGUE is an extended theatrical speech addressed to another character or directly to the audience.
77. An EPIPHORA (EPISTROPHE) is a when **ending words or phrases are repeated**: “of the people, by the people, for the people...”
78. METONYMY is when a thing isn’t called by its name **but by the name of something typically associated with it**. For example: “The Crown” for the monarchy; “sweat” for hard work; “Washington” for the federal government or “a pink slip” for a layoff.
79. An ANAGRAM is a word or phrase **comprised of the letters of another word** or phrase. For example: “Heart” into “Earth.”
80. A PUN is a comedic **play on words** involving a word with more than one meaning or a word that sounds like a word with a different meaning. Example: “Back when the guillotine was introduced, people wondered if death was where they would beheaded.” “Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana.” “I’ve been to the dentist before, so I know the drill.”
81. An EPISTOLARY is a story **told through written correspondence**, such as letters, postcards, or text messages.
82. A MYTH is a traditional narrative, often fantastical, that **seeks to explain one or more natural or social phenomena**.
83. A LEGEND is a **longstanding narrative about a hero** that many people believe but that has **not been proven to be true**.
84. An ARCHETYPE is a **prototype of object or person** after which future objects and people (often characters) are modeled.
85. The SETTING of a story is the **time and place where the story takes place** (not where the author lived when she wrote it).
86. ANTITHESIS is the **juxtaposition of contradictory ideas** in parallel form (like oxymoron except with ideas, not single words).