Aesthetics—“Philosophical investigation into the nature of beauty and the perception of beauty, especially in the arts; the theory of art or artistic taste.”

Allegory—A story or visual image with a second distinct meaning partially hidden behind its literal or visual meaning. In written narrative, allegory involves a continuous parallel between two (or more) levels of meaning in a story, so that its persons and events correspond to their equivalents in a system of ideas or a chain of events external to the tale.

Allusion—An indirect or passing reference to some event, person, place, or artistic work, the nature and relevance of which is not explained by the writer but relies on the reader’s familiarity with what is thus mentioned.

Ambiguity—A statement which can contain two or more meanings. For example, when the oracle at Delphi told Croesus that if he waged war on Cyrus he would destroy a great empire, Croesus thought the oracle meant his enemy’s empire. In fact, the empire Croesus destroyed by going to war was his own.

Analogy—A resemblance of relations; an agreement or likeness between things in some circumstances or effects, when the things are otherwise entirely different.

Anaphora—repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences. “We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France.

Anecdote—A very short tale told by a character in a literary work. In Chaucer’s “Canterbury Tales,” “The Miller’s Tale” and “The Carpenter’s Tale” are examples.

Antagonist—the character, force, or collection of forces in fiction or drama that opposes the protagonist and gives rise to the conflict of the story.

Anti-climax—Anti-hero; a protagonist who has the opposite of most of the traditional attributes of a hero. [A character who] may be bewildered, ineffectual, deluded, or merely pathetic.

Aphorism—A brief statement which expresses an observation on life, usually intended as a wise observation. Benjamin Franklin’s “Poor Richard’s Almanac” contains numerous examples, one of which is Drive thy business; let it not drive thee.

Apostrophe—A figure of speech wherein the speaker speaks directly to something nonhuman.

Archetype—A term used to describe universal symbols that evoke deep and sometimes unconscious responses in a reader. In literature, characters, images, and themes that symbolically embody universal meanings and basic human experiences.

Aside—A device in which a character in a drama makes a short speech which is heard by the audience but not by other characters in the play.

Asyndeton—The omission of a conjunction from a list (‘chips, beans, peas, vinegar, salt, pepper’).

Canon—A Greek word that implies rule or law, and is used in literature as the source which regulates which selection of authors or works, would be considered important pieces of literature.

Catharsis—Meaning “purgation,” catharsis describes the release of the emotions of pity and fear by the audience at the end of a tragedy. In his Poetics, Aristotle discusses the importance of catharsis. The audience faces the misfortunes of the protagonist, which elicit pity and compassion. Simultaneously, the audience also confronts the failure of the protagonist, thus receiving a frightening reminder of human limitations and frailties.

Chiasmus—A term from classical rhetoric that describes a situation in which you introduce subjects in the order A, B, and C, and then talk about them in the order C, B, and A.
In media res
oppressive heat and all the psychological tensions that go with it.

Monologue
- A style of art in which objects are stripped down to their elementary, geometric form, and presented in an impersonal manner. In literature, minimalists use short descriptions and simple sentences.

Idiom
- A specialized vocabulary used by a group of people; jargon or a style or manner of expression peculiar to a given people.

Metaphor
- A type of figurative language in which a statement is made that one thing is something else but, literally, it is not. In connecting one object, event, or place, to another, a metaphor can uncover new and intriguing qualities of the original thing that we may not normally notice or even consider important. Metaphoric language is used in order to realize a new and different meaning.

Magical realism
- A literary technique where the disbelief of the reader and writer produces a momentary shift in the real world wherein an element of the surreal enters and leaves with ease.

Homily
- An inspirational saying or platitude.

Hubris
- A common theme in Greek tragedies and mythology, whose stories often featured protagonists suffering from hubris and subsequently being punished by the gods for it.

Hyperbole
- A figure of speech in which an overstatement or exaggeration is used for deliberate effect.

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Intertextuality
- Intertextuality is, thus, a way of accounting for the role of literary and extra-literary materials without recourse to traditional notions of authorship. A literary work, then, is not simply the product of a single author, but of its relationship to other texts and to the structures of language itself.

Inversion
- Reversal of the normal order of words for dramatic effect.

Irony
- A device that depends on the existence of at least two separate and contrasting levels of meaning embedded in one message. Verbal irony is sarcasm, when the speaker says something other than what they really mean. In dramatic irony, the audience is more aware than the characters in a work. Situational irony occurs when the opposite of what is expected happens. This type of irony often emphasizes that people are caught in forces beyond their comprehension and control.

Magical realism
- A literary technique where the disbelief of the reader and writer produces a momentary shift in the real world wherein an element of the surreal enters and leaves with ease.

Malapropism
- Is an incorrect usage of a word, usually with comic effect. "He was punished by the gods for it.

Metaphor
- A type of figurative language in which a statement is made that one thing is something else but, literally, it is not. In connecting one object, event, or place, to another, a metaphor can uncover new and intriguing qualities of the original thing that we may not normally notice or even consider important. Metaphoric language is used in order to realize a new and different meaning.

Metonymy
- A 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.

Minimalism
- A style of art in which objects are stripped down to their elementary, geometric form, and presented in an impersonal manner. In literature, minimalists use short descriptions and simple sentences.

Monologue
- Thoughts of a single person, directed outward.

Motif
- A recurrent image, word, phrase, represented object or action that tends to unify the literary work or that may be elaborated into a more general theme.

Paradox
- A literary form in which the style of an author or particular work is mocked in its style for the sake of comic effect.

Pastiche
- The attribution of human emotions or characteristics to inanimate objects or to nature; for example, angry clouds; a cruel wind.

Pastoral
- Of, relating to, or being a literary or other artistic work that portrays or evokes rural life, usually in an idealized way.

Persona
- In literature, the persona is the narrator, or the storyteller, of a literary work created by the author. As Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama puts it, the persona is not the author, but the author’s creation—the voice “through which the author speaks.”

Personification
- A figure of speech where animals, ideas or inanimate objects are given human characteristics. One example of this is James Stephens’s persona, “Vantage point” from which the narrative is passed from author to the reader.

Point of view
- A way the events of a story are conveyed to the reader, it is the “vantage point” from which the narrative is passed from author to the reader. In the omniscient point of view, the person telling the story, or narrator, knows everything that’s going on in the story. In the first-person point of view, the narrator is a character in the story. Using the pronoun “I” the narrator tells us his or her own experiences but cannot reveal with certainty any other character’s private thoughts. In the limited third-person point of view, the narrator is outside the story, like an omniscient narrator, but tells the story from the vantage point of one character.

Polemic
- A controversial argument, especially one refuting or attacking a specific opinion or doctrine.

Protagonist
- The central character of a literary work.

Realism
- Broadly defined as “the faithful representation of reality” or “verisimilitude,” realism is a literary technique practiced by many schools of writing. Although strictly speaking, realism is a technique, it also denotes a particular kind of subject matter, especially the representation of middle-class life.

Rhetoric
- The art of persuasive argument through writing or speech—the art of eloquence and charismatic language.

Roman a clef
- A novel in which actual persons and events are disguised as fictional characters.
**Satire** - A literary work which exposes and ridicules human vices or folly. Historically perceived as tending toward didacticism, it is usually intended as a moral criticism directed against the injustice of social wrongs.

**Scansion** - The analysis of a poem’s meter. This is usually done by marking the stressed and unstressed syllables in each line and then, based on the pattern of the stresses, dividing the line into feet.

**Semantics** - the study of the meaning of language, as opposed to its form

**Semiotics** - theories regarding symbolism and how people glean meaning from words, sounds, and pictures.

**Stock character** - a fictional character that relies heavily on cultural types or stereotypes for its personality, manner of speech, and other characteristics. Stock characters are instantly recognizable to members of a given culture.

**Stream of consciousness** - technique that records the multifarious thoughts and feelings of a character without regard to logical argument or narrative sequence. The writer attempts by the stream of consciousness to reflect all the forces, external and internal, influencing the psychology of a character at a single moment.

**Subtext** - the hidden meaning lying behind the overt.

**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.

**Syntax** - The way in which linguistic elements (words and phrases) are arranged to form grammatical structure.

**Soliloquy** - A dramatic or literary form of discourse in which a character talks to himself or herself or reveals his or her thoughts without addressing a listener.

**Tone** - the writer’s attitude toward the material and/or readers. Tone may be playful, formal, intimate, angry, serious, ironic, outraged, baffled, tender, serene, depressed or combinations

**Theme** - (1) the abstract concept explored in a literary work; (2) frequently recurring ideas, such as enjoy-life while-you-can; (3) repetition of a meaningful element in a work, such as references to sight, vision, and blindness in Oedipus Rex.

**Tragedy** - A serious play in which the chief figures, by some peculiarity of character, pass through a series of misfortunes leading to a final, devastating catastrophe.

**Tragic flaw (hamartia)** - the character flaw or error of a tragic hero that leads to his downfall.

**Trope** - The intentional use of a word or expression figuratively, i.e., used in a different sense from its original significance in order to give vividness or emphasis.