

## Literary Terms to Know

In order to express your opinion about a topic for a Response to Literature essay, it is crucial that you are familiar with some common Literary Terms. Below is a list of some terms you should be familiar with when writing about a text for a Response to Literature essay.

- ❖ **Plot** - the related series of events that make up a story
  - **Exposition** - the beginning of a story in which the main characters, conflicts, and setting are introduced
  - **Rising action** - the action that takes place before the climax; the plot becomes more complicated, leading to the climax
  - **Climax** - the turning point of the story; emotional high point for the protagonist
  - **Falling action** - the action that takes place after the climax, leading to the resolution
  - **Resolution** - the end of a story; problems are solved, and characters' futures may be foreshadowed
- ❖ **Conflict** - the struggle(s) between opposing forces, usually characters
  - **Internal conflict** - a character's struggle with himself or his conscience
  - **External conflict** - a character's struggle with an outside force, such as another character, nature, or his environment
- ❖ **Characters** - the individuals involved (either directly or indirectly) in the action of the story
  - **Protagonist** - the central character in a story; struggles against the antagonist
  - **Antagonist** - the conflicting force against the protagonist; can be another character, a force of nature, or the protagonist struggling against himself
  - **Foil** - a character who is nearly opposite of another character; the purpose of a foil (or character foil) is to highlight particular characteristics of each
- ❖ **Setting** - the time and place, or where and when, the action occurs
  - **Physical** - the physical environment in which a story takes place; this includes the social and political environment
  - **Chronological** - the time in which a story takes place (includes the era, season, date, time of day, etc.)
- ❖ **Point of View** - the perspective from which a story is told
  - **Narrator** - the "voice" that tells a story; may or may not reflect the opinions and attitudes of the author himself
  - **First person** - a narrator who uses the first-person pronouns (I, me, my, myself, etc.) when telling the story; focuses on the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of a particular character
  - **Third person limited** - a narrator who uses the third-person perspective with the third person pronouns (he, she, it, they, etc.); observes the action as an outside observer, revealing the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of *only one* character
  - **Third person omniscient** - like third-person limited, the third-person omniscient narrator uses the third-person perspective with the third person pronouns (he, she, it, they, etc.); this type of narrator observes the action as an outside observer, however, revealing the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of *several* characters
- ❖ **Theme** - the main idea behind a literary work; the message in the story

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- ❖ **Symbolism** - the creative use of objects, or **symbols**, to indicate a deeper meaning or to represent something important.
- ❖ **Diction** - an author's choice of words and word arrangement
- ❖ **Irony** - the difference between what actually happens and what might be expected to happen, especially when this inconsistency seems laughable or absurd
  - **Verbal irony** - when a speaker or writer says one thing but actually means the opposite. For example, when your mom walks into your filthy bedroom and says, "I see you've cleaned your room!"
  - **Situational irony** - when the outcome of a situation is inconsistent with what we expect would logically or normally occur.
  - **Dramatic irony** - when the audience or the reader is aware of something that a character does not know. The use of dramatic irony helps increase the tension and excitement of the play, and draws the audience more deeply into the story.
- ❖ **Figurative Language** - ideas communicated beyond their literal meaning to create an image in the reader's mind
  - **metaphor** - a comparison made between two seemingly unlike objects: "the pillow was a cloud"
  - **simile** - a comparison between two unlike objects using the words "like" or "as" in the comparison: "the pillow was *like* a marshmallow"
  - **personification** - giving human qualities or characteristics to non-human objects: "the wind sang its sad song"
  - **understatement** - deliberately de-emphasizing something in order to downplay its importance, ex. "The Internet has contributed somewhat to improving communication," is an understatement.
  - **hyperbole** - exaggeration for emphasis or for rhetorical effect, ex. "I died laughing."
- ❖ **Tone** - the author's attitude toward the subject or audience of a literary work; tone reflects the feelings of the writer, and can affect the emotional response of the reader to the piece.
- ❖ **Mood** - a general feeling that is created by the tone, *usually* described in expressions of feeling and emotions, such as fear, surprise, anger, hatred, contentment, or jealousy, to name a few.
- ❖ **Foreshadowing** - subtle details or clues which hint at upcoming events in a novel
- ❖ **Flashback** - when a writer presents events from the past within the narration of current events. In other words, the author takes a moment to "flash" to the past.