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What are literary terms? What are examples of literary devices? Here is a list of 20 common literary terms with examples. This article discusses literary devices such as alliteration, homophones, hyperboles, idioms, metaphors, onomatopoeia, personification and similes, and many more. Literary terms (also called "devices") are used regularly in the majority of material we read. They are structures and styles of writing used to express symbolism, convey messages and deliver information. They can evoke the senses, and give readers a deeper understanding and resonance to make your writing more impactful. This guide gives a quick overview explaining some of the more common literary terms along with examples, so you can utilize these in your writing to enhance your story and style of language, which in turn can boost reader engagement. If you'd like to know the literary elements of a story, or basic literary terms (devices) in general, this literary terms list details 20 common literary terms with examples. Allegory meaning: An allegory is where you use a character, story, picture, event or poem to describe a piece of work (symbolize the literal meaning), and can often be applied to reveal a political or moral/social meaning. It is used to provide an easy to understand meaning to a fable or parable, a complex piece of writing, or works that have a dark meaning. Allegory examples: One of the most common examples of an allegory is Animal Farm by George Orwell. The story of a group of farm animals who rise up and defeat humans to run society can be understood to be about the Russian Revolution and the author's disapproval of communism. Aesop's Fables can be classed as allegories in that they provide moral and educational life lessons to children on "right from wrong", how to conduct yourself, what is important, and what to value in life. Related reading: Alliteration meaning: Alliteration is a literary style where there is repetition of the initial consonants in a series of words. As well as tongue twisters, alliteration is used in poems, song lyrics, and brand names and slogans. Alliteration examples: She sells seashells down by the seashore. Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers. KitKat, Burt's Bees, Tetley Tea, Yoplait Yoghurt, Krispy Kreme. Allusion meaning: Allusion is when the writer alludes or refers to an event, character or thing from another book within their own story, or a societal or political reference, for example, in order to emphasize a connection. Allusion examples: He is nothing but a Judas (showing the negative traits of betrayal and deceit). Who does he think he is? Peter Pan? (someone who doesn't grow up). She is his Achilles' heel (the person in question is his weakness) He's a Romeo/Don Juan/Casanova/etc. (he's a "ladies" man). If she finds out, it will be like opening Pandora's Box (uncovering problems they didn't know existed). He's like Jekyll and Hyde (a split personality). It's like living with Scrooge (someone who doesn't like Christmas or who is a skinflint or bitter). Colloquialism meaning: Colloquialism relates to informal words, phrases, and expressions used in everyday conversational language. It also includes the use of double negatives, using contractions, or swear words, for example. Colloquial expressions are used in writing to evoke realistic dialogue for characters to convey their regional differences, class, education, upbringing, etc. Therefore, making them realistic, believable, and identifiable to readers. British colloquialism examples: A balls-up / A cock-up = a bad situation or messed-up set of circumstances Bloke or Geezer = man Cashpoint = ATM Chav = derogatory term for a person deemed lower class, has loutish behaviour, wears stereotypical blingy jewelry/tracksuit/hoodie/baseball cap Chinwag = chat Doddle = easy Kip = nap/short sleep Knackered (cream crackered) = tired/exhausted Lad = boy/young man Mard = sulky Plonk = cheap wine American colloquialism examples: Beat (I'm beat) = I'm exhausted/very tired Bomb = be unsuccessful/to fail Flake = some who regularly cancels plans Hit the books = study Hyped = very excited My bad = my mistake/my fault Ripped/Jacked = muscular physique Sick = cool, awesome Take a rain check = do something at another time Trash = to destroy something Wheels = car Diction meaning: Diction is established through the word choice, style of language, and sentence structure used to indicate a writer's or speaker's "voice" and "tone". Diction can also refer to the enunciation and sounds of words when spoken. The two main types of diction discussed in this article are "informal/low" and "formal/high/elevated". Informal diction examples: Uses slang, colloquialisms, figures of speech/idioms, and contractions When talking to people we know as more conversational speech Used in informal letters/email/correspondence When writing dialogue to establish characterization in novels Example of informal diction in literature: "All kings is mostly rapscaillions, as fur as I can make out." "But by-and-by pap got too handy with his hick'ry, and I couldn't stand it. I was all over welts." Dialogue from Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain. Formal diction examples: Elegant, sophisticated, and more complex vocabulary Used in formal and professional situations Appropriate for writing scholastic papers or journals, for example Uses proper grammar; not slang, colloquialisms or contractions Example of formal diction in literature: "I trust that age doth not wither nor custom stale my infinite variety." "Because, my dear Watson, I had the strongest possible reason for wishing certain people to think that I was there when I was really elsewhere." Dialogue spoken by Sherlock Holmes in The Adventure of the Empty House by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Euphemism meaning: A euphemism is a more polite or indirect word or expression to replace one thought to be too blunt or harsh when talking about something upsetting, unpleasant or embarrassing. Euphemism examples: Letting someone go = someone being fired Met their maker = a person has died Powder my nose = going to the toilet/restroom Big boned = overweight/fat Not the sharpest tool in the box = not very intelligent Vertically challenged = a short person In between jobs = unemployed Not up to scratch = not very good Collateral damage = unintentional deaths, injuries or damage accidentally inflicted on an unintended person/group of people/area/building/etc. A bit worse for wear = drunk Foreshadowing meaning: Foreshadowing is where a writer uses information, events or phrases that suggest or hint what's going to happen in the story to build suspense and anticipation so the reader keeps reading. Foreshadowing examples in literature: "By the pricking of my thumbs, Something wicked this way comes." — William Shakespeare, Macbeth "Stupendous, my lad, the forces of our men that are met together! Last night I looked at the fires burning, no end of them. A regular Moscow!" — Leo Tolstoy, War and Peace "It is like you to have thought of such a beautiful thing." "Not a thing, only an ending," said Helen rather sadly; and the sense of tragedy closed in on Margaret again as soon as she left the house. — E.M. Forster, Howards End Check out this Top 10 Uses of Foreshadowing in Movies video from WatchMojo.com Homophone meaning: Homophones are words that are pronounced the same way but spelt differently. Homophone examples: A reel waist of thyme. Miss steaks like these will not bee putt rite bye ewer spell chequer. Their/there, saw/sore, bear/bare, whether/weather, ate/eight. Also, homophones are sometimes confused with "homonyms", which are words pronounced the same and spelt the same but have different meanings. Homonym examples: Fine = feeling OK/due because of late payment. Date = a fruit/a particular day/a meeting. Change = to exchange/to become different/money or loose coins. Hyperbole meaning: Hyperboles are exaggerated figures of speech to create an effect or to emphasize a point. Hyperbole examples: The suitcase weighed a ton (this makes the point that the bag was very heavy, though it probably doesn't weigh a ton). I'm so tired I could sleep for a year. I've told you a million times not to exaggerate... Idiom meaning: An idiom is a word, phrase or expression that means something different from what it says; therefore, it cannot be taken literally but can be understood due to their popular use. Idiom examples: The handbags in that shop cost an arm and a leg (the handbags are very expensive). It was raining cats and dogs on our trip to Wales (it was raining heavily). Joe thought the exam was a piece of cake (the exam was very easy). Imagery meaning: Imagery is using symbolic or descriptive language in the writing of novels, books, poems, and other creative writing to create images in the readers' minds. Using imagery can evoke the senses while reading, which enhances reader engagement and their connection to the writing. This can also be described as "show, not tell" when learning creative writing. Imagery examples in literature: William Wordsworth, I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud I wandered lonely as a cloud That floats on high o'er vales and hills, When all at once I saw a crowd, A host, of golden daffodils; Beside the lake, beneath the trees, Fluttering and dancing in the breeze. For oft, when on my couch I lie In vacant or in pensive mood, They flash upon that inward eye Which is the bliss of solitude; And then my heart with pleasure fills, And dances with the daffodils. E.M. Forster, A Room With a View "I heard the rain still beating continuously on the staircase window, and the wind howling in the grove behind the hall; I grew by degrees cold as a stone, and then my courage sank. My habitual mood of humiliation, self-doubt, forlorn depression, fell damp on the embers of my decaying ire." Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird "Maycomb was an old town, but it was a tired old town when I first knew it. In rainy weather the streets turned to red slop; grass grew on the sidewalks, the courthouse sagged in the square. Somehow, it was hotter then: a black dog suffered on a summer's day; bony mules hitched to Hoover carts flicked flies in the sweltering shade of the live oaks on the square. Men's stiff collars wilted by nine in the morning. Ladies bathed before noon, after their three-o'clock naps, and by night fall were like soft toacakes with frostings of sweat and sweet talcum." Juxtaposition meaning: A juxtaposition is where two situations, people, circumstances, images, ideas or objects are discussed to compare or contrast. Therefore, their differences (or similarities) are highlighted, which in turn creates a juxtaposition. Juxtaposition examples in literature: "Merry and tragical? Tedious and brief? That is hot ice, and wondrous strange snow! How shall we find the concord of this discord?" — William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I— I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference. — Robert Frost, The Road Not Taken "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness..." — Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities Malapropism meaning: A malapropism is a verbal gaffe where a very similar sounding word is used mistakenly in the place of the correct one, which can result in an amusing turn of phrase. See the origin of the literary device malapropism and its connection to Mrs Malaprop at this article from ThoughtCo. Famous malapropism examples: "They misuderestimated me." George W. Bush "He was a man of great statue." Thomas Menino, Boston mayor "I'm fading into Bolivian." Mike Tyson "I think that I was detrimental to my own career." Justin Bieber "It is beyond my apprehension." Danny Ozark, baseball team manager More malapropism examples: It's not rocket salad (science) On tenderhooks (tenterhooks) A damp squid (squib) For all intensive purposes (for all intents and purposes) Be more pacific (specific) Well-known malapropism from Del Boy in Only Fools and Horses: "There's a ruddy typhoid blowing out there!" (typhoon) "What do you think I am, physic or something?" (psychic) "It's good to be back on the old terracotta." (terra firma) "No, I'm ambigulous." (ambidextrous) "He might have hit his head and got percussion." (concussion) Metaphor meaning: A metaphor is a figure of speech that compares two unlike things (people, objects, animals or places) that have something in common. Some metaphors are used so often in everyday language that many don't realize they are metaphors. Metaphor examples: "I am a deeply superficial person." — Andy Warhol "The paradox of simplicity is that making things simpler is hard work." — Bill Jensen "A joke is an extremely serious issue." — Winston Churchill "If you don't risk anything, you risk even more." — Erica Jong "The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change." — Carl Rogers "It is the pursuit of happiness that makes people unhappy." — Piero Scaruffi Satire meaning: Satire is using irony, dry wit, or sarcasm to characterize and deride human behaviour or foolishness. Satire examples: Spitting Image — UK TV series where well-known figures and politicians are satirized as puppets. The Daily Show — US late-night talk show and news satire program. The films Shrek, This Is Spinal Tap, Airplane!, Tropic Thunder, Hot Fuzz. Satire examples in literature: "The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which." — George Orwell, Animal Farm "Ay me! for aught that I could ever read, Could ever hear by tale or history, The course of true love never did run smooth." — William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream "His face looked shrewd and wise, as if he knew many things, many of them not worth knowing." — E.B. White, The Trumpet of the Swan Symbolism meaning: Symbolism is a literary device that uses objects, settings, events or people to symbolize and represent something more than their literal meaning. Symbolism examples: Springtime or a new day can represent a new start. Rain can symbolize misery, anguish or sadness. An open door can signify a new opportunity. A fork in the road or crossroads can symbolize a dilemma or a choice to make. In everyday life, colors can be associated with emotions or ideas, such as white with wholesomeness or peace, black with evil or death, red with matters of the heart or danger. Symbolism examples in literature: "Ah! Sunflower, weary of time, Who countest the steps of the sun; Seeking after that sweet golden clime Where the traveler's journey is done; Where the youth pined away with desire, And the pale virgin shrouded in snow, Arise from their graves and aspire; Where my sunflower wishes to go." — William Blake, Ah Sunflower Conclusion This article details just a selection of commonly used literary terms and their differences with relevant examples. These terms can be used to enhance your writing to describe and add context which will leave a visual image in your reader's mind. Used sparingly, they can add greatly to your tools as a writer. Also, they can increase your ability to understand how these are applied in other works of literature and poetry. "Fantasy is probably the oldest literary device for talking about reality." — Ursula K. Le Guin

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