COMMON LITERARY TERMS
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A representation of an individual in literary work.
The main character is referred to as the protagonist.
The character against whom the protagonist struggles is referred to as the antagonist.

Captain Ahab
*Moby Dick*
Herman Melville

Ishmael
*Moby Dick*
Herman Melville
An author’s use of dialogue and description—physical, emotional, psychological, and intellectual—to portray characters.

Round characters have depth and complexity, are fully developed, and undergo change or growth.

“And isn't Voldemort convinced that Snape's on his side, even now? Professor ... how can you be sure Snape's on our side?”

*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*

J. K. Rowling

Flat characters have few traits described.

They are minor characters and serve a supportive role in the text.
The point of greatest emotional intensity, interest, or suspense in the plot. The point at which the fate of the protagonist is most at stake.

“What would you say, Harry, if I told you that I had murdered Basil?”

_The Picture of Dorian Gray_

Oscar Wilde
CONFLICT

A struggle between two opposing forces or characters in a narrative. Characters can face conflicts within themselves or conflicts with nature, society, supernatural forces, or other characters.

“A breach in the giant flesh-frame showed then, shoulder muscles sprang apart, there was a snapping of tendons, bone-locks burst. To Beowulf the glory of this fight was granted.”

Beowulf
The thoughts, feelings, attitudes, judgments, and images associated with a word.

Society’s notions about a word not related to its dictionary definition. Connotation is used to evoke emotion in a reader.

Example: a figurative versus literal heart
The lines spoken by characters or the conversations between characters.

“Don’t have scenes with your young ladies. Try not to. Because you can’t have scenes without crying, and then you pity yourself so much you can’t remember what the other person has said.”

_The Sun Also Rises_
Ernest Hemingway
Soliloquy: The character is alone and speaking directly to the audience to reveal thoughts, feelings, or ideas while no other character is present.

“To be, or not to be: That is the question / Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer / The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, / Or to take arms against a sea of troubles / And by opposing, end them?

*Hamlet*
William Shakespeare
Monologue: A long, uninterrupted speech by one character.

“Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious by this son of York…”

Richard III
William Shakespeare
• The choice and arrangement of specific words as opposed to others that convey tone and evoke emotion in the reader.
• Diction can be formal, conversational, or slang.
• It can be literal or figurative.

“IT IS A TRUTH UNIVERSALLY ACKNOWLEDGED, THAT A SINGLE MAN IN POSSESSION OF A GOOD FORTUNE MUST BE IN WANT OF A WIFE.”

Pride and Prejudice
Jane Austen
• Language that departs from the everyday literal use of words.
• Using figures of speech such as metaphors and symbols to describe something or convey meaning.

“A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within.”

Self Reliance
Ralph Waldo Emerson
A type of narration in which the present action is temporarily interrupted with a scene of past event in order to provide information to the reader about a place or character.

"To Sethe, the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay. The 'better life' she believed she and Denver were living was simply not that other one."

*Beloved*

Toni Morrison
• The use of hints or clues in the narrative to suggest what action is to come

“I was never kinder to the old man than in the week before I killed him”

*The Tell-Tale Heart*

Edgar Allan Poe
Exaggerated statement used for emphasis or effect. An overstatement not intended to be taken literally.

“I am assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London; that a young healthy child, well nursed, is, at a year old, a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food; whether stewed, roasted, baked or boiled, and I make no doubt, that it will equally serve in a fricassee, or ragout.”

* A Modest Proposal
Jonathon Swift
Vivid descriptions that evoke mental pictures and appeal to the senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch).

Literal or figurative sensory pictures that evoke feelings and sensations.

“Concealed within his fortress, the lord of Mordor sees all. His gaze pierces cloud, shadow, earth, and flesh. You know of what I speak Gandalf: a great Eye, lidless, wreathed in flame.”

*Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*

J.R.R. Tolkien
Language that means exactly what it says.

Words that follow their defined meaning as used in everyday life.

For example: “I’m so hungry I could eat a horse,” would not be taken literally.

But, “I’m so hungry I could eat a two hamburgers,” would.

The news is an example of literal language.
A comparison stating that one thing is something else, although literally it is not. Metaphors suggest a resemblance.

“History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.”

_Ulysses_

James Joyce
Giving human traits or qualities to non-human things.
Representing animals or inanimate objects as having human abilities.

“Wilbur never forgot Charlotte. Although he loved her children and grandchildren dearly, none of the new spiders ever quite took her place in his heart. She was in a class by herself. It is not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer. Charlotte was both.”

*Charlotte’s Web*
E. B. White
The arrangement of ideas and incidents.
The series of events that form the action in a story.

“Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns driven time and again off course, once he had plundered the hallowed heights of Troy. Many cities of men he saw and learned their minds, many pains he suffered, heartsick on the open sea, fighting to save his life and bring his comrades home.”

_The Odyssey_
Homer
The perspective from which a narrative is told.

In **first person point of view**, the narrator tells the story as a character who takes part in the plot or observes it directly. This narrator usually knows only what has been explicitly revealed or what he/she is able to deduce.

Nick Carraway narrates *The Great Gatsby* and through his narration, casts himself as the book's author.

"Whenever you feel like criticizing any one...just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had."

*The Great Gatsby*

F. Scott Fitzgerald
In third person point of view the narrator is not directly involved in the story but tells it as an outside observer.

Third person narrators may be omniscient (knowing all the character’s actions and motivation).

The narrator in *A Tale of Two Cities* switches between Paris and London, knowing all the events happening in both cities.

“I see a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this abyss, and, in their struggles to be truly free, in their triumphs and defeats, through long years to come, I see the evil of this time and of the previous time of which this is the natural birth, gradually making expiation for itself and wearing out. . . .”

*A Tale of Two Cities*  
Charles Dickens
Third person narrators may be limited (knowing what only one or a few characters know and feel).

"I would always rather not know. Then, no matter what can happen, it was not me that talked."

For Whom the Bell Tolls
Ernest Hemingway
Third person narrators may be **objective** (objectively reporting events without knowledge or opinions about character motivation).

“There had been, also, a ritual salute, which the official of the lottery had had to use in addressing each person who came up to draw from the box, but this had also changed with time, until now it was felt necessary only for the official to speak to each person approaching.”

*The Lottery*
Shirley Jackson
Second person point of view is much less common in literature. In this perspective, the narrator tells the story to a character addressed as “you” which causes readers to feel that they are the character in the story rather than witnessing the action in the story.

Example: Most self-help books are written in second person point of view.
RESOLUTION OR DENOUEMENT

The outcome or result of the conflict which usually occurs at the end of the plot.

Complications are resolved in some way and clarification are made.

Do not pity the dead, Harry, pity the living. Above all, pity those who live without love. By returning you may ensure that fewer souls are maimed and fewer families are torn apart. If that seems to you a worthy goal, then we say goodbye for the present.

*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

J. K. Rowling
The time and place of a story

It’s location and physical surroundings as well as its era or time period.

“Our part of District 12, nicknamed the Seam, is usually crawling with coal miners heading out to the morning shift at this hour...But today the black cinder streets are empty. Shutters on the squat gray houses are closed.”

*Suzanne Collins*
A figurative comparison between two unlike objects which nonetheless have similarities.

Comparison is made by using an adverb such as “like” or “as.”

“My love is like a red, red rose
That is newly sprung in June.”

*A Red, Red Rose*

Robert Burns
The author’s characteristic way of using language to achieve certain effects. The author’s individual word choice and syntax.

"She lives in a world of her own—a world of little glass ornaments."

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS
The Glass Menagerie
Tennessee Williams
A word, object, place, character, or action that means something beyond what it means on a literal level and represents a more abstract idea or meaning.

Example: King Arthur’s sword, Excalibur. Excalibur is not just a sword, it is a symbol of divine kingship, responsibility, and power.
The major idea of a literary work.
The message or central unifying point.

Example: The Lord of the Flies. The major themes in this novel are civilization versus savagery and the loss of innocence.

"Here, invisible yet strong, was the taboo of the old life."
An author’s attitude toward the topic or the readers.
Tone is the mood conveyed in the work.
Tone can be hopeful, critical, playful, etc.
Tone can be created through diction and connotation.

“When a true genius appears, you can know him by this sign: that all the dunces are in a confederacy against him.”

*A Confederacy of Dunces*
Jonathon Swift