Glossary of Literary Elements

**ATMOSPHERE**

Atmosphere is the general feeling or mood in a work of literature. Writers create atmosphere by using imagery and descriptions. Readers can describe atmosphere in just a word or two – for example, “a scary poem, or “an exciting scene”, or “a story filled with sadness.”

**CHARACTER**

A character is a person or an animal in a work of literature. A character can even be a thing – for example, the computer robot named “Wall-E”.

**CHARACTERIZATION**

Characterization is ***how*** the writer reveals what a character is like. Writers do this is different ways:

1. Direct Characterization: The writer simply tells what the character is like.

EX: Jamie had a hot temper and a tender heart.

1. Indirect Characterization: The writer gives the actual words of the character, tells what the character is thinking and feeling, tells about the character’s actions, or tells how others respond to the character.

EX: Jamie threw his lunch box across the room, and then burst into tears.

“I’m sorry!” He wailed. “I’m just so tired of peanut butter!”

**CLIMAX**

**The climax is the most exciting part of the story when the main character faces and makes a huge decision. The climax often occurs near the end of a story.**

CONFLICT

The conflict is the major struggle between characters or between opposing forces. A conflict may be *external* or *internal*. Some stories have both kinds of conflict. Internal and external.

External Conflict: The main character struggles with another person or with an outside force, like the sea.

Internal Conflict: The main character struggles with opposing ideas or feelings within his or her own mind, like wanting to make friends at a new school but also being very shy.

DIALOGUE

Dialogue consists of the exact words that characters say. When you write dialogue, you use quotation marks to enclose the exact words. Example: “Don’t even try to climb the Mountain!” said Luis.

“Why not?” Shana replied, “I like challenges!”

**IMAGERY**

Imagery is the language that appeals to the five senses. Examples: a freezing-cold snow cone; the fragile touch of a butterfly’s wings; the screeching of an owl.

**INTRODUCTION**

The introduction is the beginning of the story. It starts the plot moving by grabbing the reader’s attention. An introduction can name a main character, describe the setting, and perhaps even the conflict. Example:

A long time ago, a girl named Cinderella sat by the fireside. She was a sweet girl and a hard worker, but her sisters and step mother treated her badly.

**METAPHOR**

A metaphor is a word or phrase that draws a comparison between two things. It does not use the words *like* or *as*; therefore it is often harder to identify than a simile. Metaphors may not be factually true, but they help readers see events and characters in a vivid way. Example:

His eyes are piercing lasers.

MOTIVATION

Motivation is *why* characters behave in a certain way. As a reader, you can track motivation with because sentences. Examples: Manuel entered the talent show *because* he wanted to impress a girl he liked.

Shana befriended the new student *because* she remembered how awful it felt to be an outsider.

PLOT

Plot is the series of related events that make up the story.

POINT OF VIEW

Point of view in a literary work is the vantage point from which the story is told. Two common points of view are the first person point of view and the all-knowing, or omniscient, point of view. Examples:

First Person Point of View: The person telling the story is often a character in the story. The character uses such words as *I, me, mine, myself.* The first person narrator only tells what she or he observes or experiences.

All-knowing Point of View: The person telling the story is not a character. This “third person” uses third person pronouns, such as *her, him, them…*

*“He sympathized with Leah and asked her to sit at his table.”*

RESOLUTION

The resolution occurs at the end of the story. Often, it includes how the main character feels about experiences faced in the story.

SETTING

The setting is the time, place, and atmosphere in which a story’s events occur.

SIMILE

A simile is a description that compares one thing to another, using the words *like* or *as*. Similes may not be factually true, but they help readers to see events and characters in a vivid way. Example: *“*The hurricane was *like a huge beast trying to devour us.”*

*SYMBOL*

*A symbol is something (an object or colour, for example) that an author uses to represent an idea in a story.*

*THEME*

The theme is the big idea that a story conveys about life. The writer usually doesn’t state the theme directly. It’s up to the readers to discover the theme for themselves. Some stories may also have more than one theme.