

The Basic Terms Packet: *Fundamental Terminology for Literary Analysis*

The terms in this packet are used to discuss the parts, pieces, and techniques of telling a story. Just like doctors, lawyers, and mechanics use certain kinds of terminology to talk about their work, so too do those people who talk about literature. The need for technical terminology will grow as your understanding of stories and storytelling grows.

Character: Fictional persons presented in a dramatic or narrative work who are perceived by the reader to have certain qualities. There are many different types of characters, determined both by the character's function in the story and the depth of the character's development.

Protagonist: The character that is the central figure and main source of action in a story. The protagonist is the character in the story that struggles with the central conflict.

Antagonist: The character or figure that creates conflict by opposing the protagonist. Many stories have an antagonist, but just as many stories do not.

Major Characters: These characters are essential to the advancement of the plot because they play major roles in the central conflict. They are most often either the protagonist or the antagonist.

Minor Characters: These are characters that have little impact on the advancement of the plot, or are only present for a small part of the story, but by no means are they completely unimportant to the overall plot.

Stock Characters: In a specific genre, a stock character is a certain type that recurs from story to story. Stock characters often are drawn from stereotypes or stereotypical roles. In many cases it is the stock characters that make a genre identifiable or definable.

Ex. the clever servant, the fool, the loyal sidekick, the handsome prince

Round Character: A character who is complex in his or her motivation and temperament. It would be difficult to describe this character in just one sentence or phrase. This is also much like a "well-rounded" person.

Ex. Holden Caulfield, Ponyboy, Lisa Simpson

Flat Character: A character who is built around one central quality and therefore is simplistic or undeveloped in most other ways. It would be easy to describe this type of character in one to two sentences.

Ex. Romeo, Grumpy (of the seven dwarves), Principal Skinner

Dynamic Character: This is the type of character who undergoes a dramatic change during the story. By the end of the story, the dynamic character is a different person, so to speak.

Ex. Scout, Bilbo Baggins, Nemo

Static Character: This type of character does not undergo any type of change over the course of any story.

Ex. Superman, Bart Simpson, Herman Bloom

Characterization: How an author shows the reader the different qualities of a character over the course of a narrative. Characterization is accomplished through

1. What the character does
2. What the character says, thinks, and feels
3. How the narrator describes the character
4. What other characters say about the one character

Conflict: The tension or struggles experienced by the characters that serve to advance the plot. Conflicts take many forms, and some forms can be seen more easily than others.

Internal conflict: the struggle of a person with him/herself.

External conflict: a struggle between two people, or between a person and an animal or immediate physical danger.

Intangible conflict: a struggle with ideas like fate, destiny, or the expectations of one's community or society (also any metaphysical or philosophical struggle).

Connotation: The suggestion or implication evoked by a word or phrase. Connotation expresses the idea that a single word or phrases can cause different reactions from different people. Connotation is the implication of a word, and that is not necessarily given in the dictionary. Connotation also determines whether or not a word is polite to use within a certain social context.

Denotation: The actual dictionary definition of a word.

Dialogue: The direct speech or conversation between characters in a story.

Diction: the author's deliberate selection of words, phrases, sentence structures, and types of figurative language in a work of literature.

Flashbacks: Narratives or scenes which represent events that happened before the time at which the story began. Flashbacks are events that are told out of chronological order.

Chronological: when events occur in order or sequence, from beginning to end.

Foil: A character with qualities opposite to the protagonist. The presence of the foil helps to emphasize the protagonist through contrast.

Foreshadowing: A writer's use of hints or clues to suggest events that will occur further on in a story. Foreshadowing is used to create suspense and prepare the reader for what will happen later in the story.

Genre: Any category of literature or art. Poetry, novels, and short stories are three different genres. Also, things like horror, fantasy, and mystery are considered genres.

Mood: The overall feeling of a literary work, which creates expectations in the reader of where the plot may go. Mood is created by the author's **diction**, the author's **tone**, the **setting**, and other elements of the story.

Narrator: The voice that tells the story. The **point of view** of the narrator determines how the story can be told.

There are two possible points of view:

Third Person: the narrator is not a character in the story.

Omniscient: The narrator knows everything about the story and moves freely through the setting and from character to character. This type of narrator not only reports the events, but freely comments on them as well.

Limited: The narrator tells the story in the third person but sticks to the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of one character.

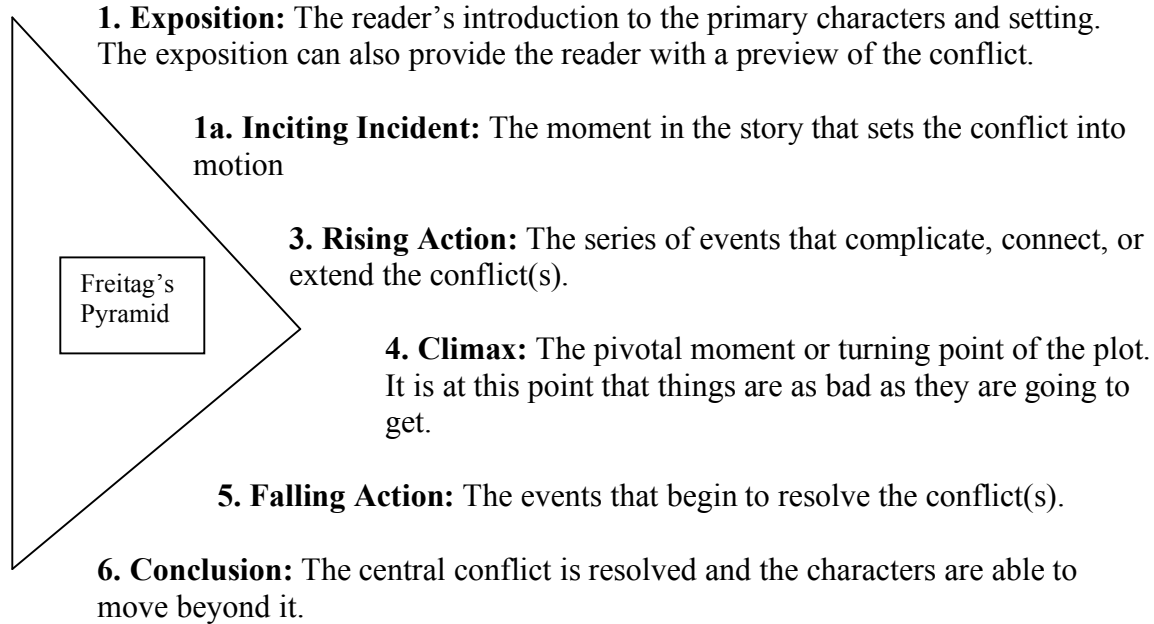
First Person: the narrator is actually one of the characters in the story.

Self-conscious: the narrator is aware of the reader or audience and occasionally offers commentary on the story while telling it.

Unreliable Narrator: the narrator becomes unreliable when inconsistencies appear in the narrative. An unreliable narrator forces the reader to question the story that is told and ask if that is truly what happened.

Narrative: a story: any spoken or written account of connected events. A narrative is basically the telling of a story, and a story may be told in many different ways.

Plot: The events that occur in a story. We understand how the elements of plot progress through Freitag's Pyramid. Not all stories fit into the pyramid perfectly.



Setting: The period of time and place in which a story occurs, including culture, weather, religion, and historical era.

Stream of Consciousness: A narrative method in modern fiction involving long passages of introspection that describe in some detail what passes through a character's mind. Stream of consciousness is often identifiable by unconnected and often seemingly random jumps in the narration.

Symbol: An object that represents an idea. While there are many common or universal symbols (such as a country's flag, a heart, or a wedding ring), often a work of literature will introduce a symbolic object that has unique meaning only in that story (such as the mockingbird in *To Kill a Mockingbird* or the ring in *The Lord of the Rings*).

Theme: A certain idea or belief which is implied or even stated outright. A theme recurs throughout a work of literature and is often (but not always) a lesson or moral.

Tone: The writer's attitude as it is conveyed by his or her word choice. The setting can also convey tone.