

English 10
Literary Terms

(These terms will help you to be successful when writing ELA essays!)

1. plot – the action or events of the story
2. characterization -- the way an author portrays characters
 - direct characterization – the author gives specific details about characters (He was a tall man with flowing blond hair.)
 - indirect characterization -- the reader infers character details based on actions of a character and the opinions/dialogue of other characters
3. protagonist – the “good” guy, the central character in the story who is always involved in the central conflict
4. antagonist – the character or force working against the protagonist
5. point of view -- the vantage point from which the story is told (first person, third person – limited and omniscient)
6. theme – the point or message the author is giving through a story
7. tone -- the attitude a writer takes toward a subject
8. figurative language – language that communicates ideas beyond the literal meanings of the words (hyperbole, metaphor, personification, and simile are all examples of figurative language)
9. allegory – a story in which the characters and happenings have hidden meanings as well as ones that are easily seen (allegory is commonly used to teach or explain moral rules)
10. allusion – a reference to a historical, literary or mythological person, place, thing, or event with which the reader is assumed to be familiar

11. euphemism – the use of indirect or polite language to express a concept generally considered unpleasant (“passed away” is a euphemism for “died”, “fell upon hard times” is a euphemism for “lost all his money”)
12. hyperbole – extreme exaggeration used to prove a point (I’m so hungry I could eat a horse!)
13. imagery – the use of descriptive language to appeal to one of the reader’s senses (sound, touch, taste, smell or sight)
14. irony – the expression of an idea by saying or showing the opposite
 - dramatic irony – occurs when the audience knows more than the characters on stage
 - situational irony – the opposite of what is expected takes place
 - verbal irony – someone says one thing and means another
15. metaphor – a direct comparison made without using the words “like” or “as” (She’s a brick house.)
16. onomatopoeia -- the use of words that sound like what they mean (snap, crackle, pop)
17. paradox – combining ideas that seem to contradict each other (“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...”)
18. personification – giving human characteristics or abilities to nonhuman things (“The morning sunlight danced across his pillow.”)
19. simile – a comparison using “like” or “as” (Writing is like breaking your arm.)
20. symbolism – the use of an object to represent an abstract idea (hearts often symbolize love, the color white is often symbolic of innocence)
21. oxymoron – a phrase made up of two seemingly opposite words (sincere lie, deafening silence, holy war)