

Common Literary Devices

Device	Definition	Example	Notes
Allegory	Device (story, figure of speech, or art) that extends a metaphor and illustrates abstract or complex ideas. Often used in rhetoric to suggest a specific meaning via metaphoric examples.	Faith is like a stony uphill climb: a single stumble might send you sprawling but belief and steadfastness will see you to the very top.	
Alliteration	Device where words are emphasized in quick succession and begin with letters belonging to the same sound group.	Angela Applewhite Ate Anchovies And Artichokes. Five Furry Friends Frolicked in the Forest For Fun. The Wicked Witch of the West Went her own Way.	
Allusion	Figure of speech in which the author speaks of a subject (person, place, thing) by referring to a more famous example. One can derive a literary allusion from a classic text/art. One can derive an everyday allusion by mentioning a historic event or celebrity figure.	Judas (who betrayed Jesus) or Brutus (who betrayed Caesar) can be used to refer/allude to a person who stabs you in the back. King Solomon, Bill Gates and even Bruce Wayne can refer to a smart/rich (affluent) person.	
Characterization	Device in literature that refers the step by step process wherein an author introduces, describes, and later develops a character in a story. Usually a text introduces a character by describing and explaining the character's personality, features, traits, likes and dislikes.	In the novel, <u>The Book Thief</u> , the main character, Liesel, is characterized as a young girl with a passion for words. In the <u>Harry Potter</u> series, Professor <i>Severus Snipes</i> is characterized as a strict/ hostile teacher; especially towards Harry and friends.	
Conflict	Element in a storyline that causes a struggle or tension. Internal (psychological conflict) arises as soon as a character experiences two opposite emotions or desires; while External conflict arises when a character finds himself in struggle with outside forces that hamper his progress towards a goal.	The "Big Four" types of literary conflict demonstrated: Man vs. Man (Cinderella vs. Evil Stepmother), Man vs. Nature (Captain Ahab vs. the White Whale in Moby Dick), Man vs. Society (Fredrick Douglass vs. Slaveholders), and Man vs. Self (Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde).	
Euphemism	Literary practice of using a comparatively milder or less abrasive form of a negative description/word instead of its original, blunt form. This device is used when writing about unpleasant subject matters such as sex, violence, and crime.	Downsizing - This is used when a company fires a large number of employees. Passed Away - This is a polite way to say that someone has died. Deflowered - This is a softer way of saying she lost her virginity.	
Foreshadowing	Device that uses phrases to warn or suggest themes or actions that will develop later in a storyline. It is often used to dramatically set the stage for events and gives the reader a hint of something that is going to happen within the plot.	"From forth the fatal loins of these two foes A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life; Whole misadventured piteous overthrow Do with their death bury their parents' strife." In the prologue from <u>Romeo and Juliet</u> , Shakespeare warns the reader from the very beginning about the destiny of the main characters.	

Hyperbole	Device used to create a larger-than-life effect and dramatically stress a specific point. Such sentences usually convey an action or sentiment that is generally not practical or realistically plausible.	She ran like a hundred miles today. I told you a million times to sit down. It's raining cats and dogs out there. He's got a truck-load of money. I'm so tired I can sleep a year.	
Imagery	Device wherein the author uses words and phrases to help the reader visualize and create "mental images" of what is being described. Imagery helps the reader to more realistically "see" or understand the author's writings.	To help support his idea of how horrible slavery is Fredrick Douglass uses imagery in his speech <u>What to the Slave is the 4th of July?</u> "I see clouds of dust raised on the highways of the South; I see the bleeding footsteps; I hear the doleful wail of fettered humanity on the way to slave-markets, where the victims are to be sold like horses, sheep and swine, knocked off by the highest bidder" (116).	
Irony	The use of a statement that signals the difference between the appearance of things and reality. Ironical statements usually convey meaning opposite from the literal meaning. It can also be an action that demonstrates an incongruity between a situation and the accompanying words.	Posting a video about how useless Facebook is on Facebook is ironic. Making a statement that is obviously not true in order to convey a specific meaning is irony - Like when someone comments on the beautiful day when, in fact, the weather is miserable.	
Juxtaposition	Device wherein the author compares two concepts/subjects side by side in order to highlight the difference between the two. Things you can juxtapose can be words, phrases, ideas, actions, characters, settings, themes, or story lines.	"Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks / Within his bending sickle's compass come..." Sonnet 116 Shakespeare is saying love is eternal, yet beauty dies. The image of youth is juxtaposed here against the image of the grim reaper.	
Metaphor	Device that implies that one subject is like another and draws a comparison between their similarities and shared traits.	"Henry was a lion on the battlefield". This sentence suggests that Henry fought so valiantly and bravely that he embodied the traits (courageous, ferocious, and fearless) of a lion.	
Oxymoron	Device that allows the author to use contradictory concepts (words or phrases) and place them together in a manner that makes sense.	It was seriously funny... That was pretty ugly... That's my original copy... We are finally alone together...	
Paradox	Device that uses concepts or ideas that appear to be contradictory to one another, yet, when placed together hold significant value	They must go to war to make peace. Deep down, he's really shallow. This is the beginning of the end.	
Personification	Device that attaches human traits and characteristics to inanimate objects, concepts, phenomena and animals	"The raging winds made the fall leaves dance." "The warm and comforting fire embraced me." The wind, the leaves, and the fire are given human characteristics.	
Plot (Summary)	The sequence of events or narrative structure that make up a story that often has a pattern. All plots have an exposition (situation), rising action, climax (turning point), falling action, and resolution. One can summarize or outline the plot in order to highlight all the important points in a story.	Many date movies follow a similar simple plot. Boy meets girl, boy and girl have conflict, boy loses girl, boy wins girl back in the end. A tornado picks up a house and drops it on a witch, a girl meets some traveling companions, a wizard sends them on a mission, and they melt a witch with a bucket of water.	

Point of View	The manner in which a story is narrated (who it is that tells the story). Simply put, the point of view determines from what angle the story is told and what perception of the story influences the reader's understanding of the narrative.	In the popular Twilight book series, the story is told in the first person, by the protagonist herself using "I". In the Lord of the Rings book series, the stories are narrated in the third person. All events are described from an "outside the story" or <u>omnipresent</u> perspective. Second person is when a writer speaks directly to the reader using "you" instead of "he", "she", or "I".	
Rhetoric	Mode of persuasion that employs various methods to convince or influence an audience. Rhetorical communication is a technique of using language effectively and persuasively in spoken or written form.	Ethos: establishes the credibility of the author. Believe me because I am an expert in this. Pathos: plays on the emotions of the audience. Imagine a world without the laughter of children. Logos: uses logic/reason to convince the audience. Data, facts, and statistics prove that cats land on their feet.	
Satire	Technique that brings awareness of flaws to an audience by providing humorous social criticism. The practice of making fun of a human weakness or character flaws can be found in literature, television, and art.	"A lot of people have a three-day weekend because of Columbus Day. In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue and 522 years later a lot of people still get Monday off to celebrate. No one's received more credit for getting lost than Christopher Columbus in the history of mankind." –Jimmy Kimmel	
Setting	Element in a narrative that establishes where and when and under what circumstances a particular scene of a story takes place using descriptive language evoking imagery. The mood of the story, the geographical location, historical era, social conditions, weather, immediate surroundings, and time of day can all be aspects of setting.	In the novel "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone" the reader is introduced to the magical sight of Hogwarts for the first time along with Harry. The author uses descriptive language to set the mood of wonder when first seeing the castle. "Perched atop a high mountain on the other side [of a black lake], its windows sparkling in the starry sky, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers."	
Simile	Device drawing parallels or comparisons between two unrelated and dissimilar things. Similes are marked by the use of the words 'as' or 'such as' or 'like'.	You are as blind as a bat. She is as agile as a monkey. Life is like a box of chocolates: You never know what you're gonna get.	
Symbol	Device that assigns meaning to an object or an action beyond the literal meaning. Many times significant symbols in literature convey a range of meanings.	A lamb symbolizes innocence while a lion symbolizes strength or freedom. The phrase "a new dawn" not only means the actual beginning of a new day but also signifies a new start, a fresh chance to begin again.	
Theme (Motif)	A major focus or general idea behind the story that acts as a foundation for the entire literary piece. Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.	A theme is the universal idea in a text and a motif is a symbol representing that theme. The theme in "Green Eggs and Ham" could be to keep an open mind. The plate of green eggs and ham is a motif that represents change that is consistently presented.	
Tone	Device used in written composition that conveys the attitude of a writer toward a subject or an audience.	Father: "We are going on a vacation." Son: "That's great!!!" <i>The tone of son's response is very cheerful.</i>	