**English 11/12**

**GUIDE TO LITERARY TERMS AND TECHNIQUES**

1. **ALLEGORY:** A story in which character, actions or settings represent abstract ideas. An allegory is a story with two meanings – a literal one and a symbolic one. Example: Lord of the Flies.
2. **ALLITERATION:** The close repetition of consonant sounds, used at the beginning of words. Example: To sit in solemn silence in a dark dull doorway.
3. **ALLUSION:** A reference to a person, place or event outside the work in which it appears – a work that the writer expects the reader to recognize. Example: “Bellona’s bridegroom” a reference to Roman mythology in Macbeth. Bellona was a Roman god of war.
4. **ANALOGY:** A special form of comparison that is used for specific purpose: to explain something abstract or difficult to understand by showing its similarity to something concrete or easy to understand. Example: comparing a crowded city to a jammed cage of rats.
5. **ANTAGONIST:** A person of force opposing the protagonist in a story: Example: Jack in Lord of the Flies is the antagonist.
6. **ANTITHESIS:** The balancing of two contrasting ideas, words, phrases, or sentences. Example: “To err is human, to forgive divine.”
7. **APHORISM:** A concise poignant statement expressing a truth about life. Example: “Silence is the virtue of fools.” Francis Bacon.
8. **APOSTROPHE:** The direct addressing of a dead or absent person, an abstract quality, or something nonhuman. Example: Burns “To a Mouse”, Lord Byron “Apostrophe to the Ocean.”
9. **ASIDE:** In drama, lines spoken by a character directed only to the audience: Example: Macbeth (Aside) “If chance will have me king why chance may crown me, without my stir.”
10. **ASSONANCE:** The repetition of similar vocal sounds, especially in poetry. Example: “Thou foster child of silence and slow time.”
11. **ATMOSPHERE/MOOD:** The overall feeling of a literary work. Atmosphere is often developed through descriptions of setting. Such descriptions help to create an emotional climate for the work that serves to establish the reader’s expectations and attitudes. For example: In 1984, Orwell develops a mood of decay and boredom with descriptions of the dusty, shabby, smelly country in which the story is set.
12. **AUTOBIOGRAPHY:** a person’s account of their own life. Example: Angela’s Ashes
13. **BALLAD:** A narrative poem, usually simple and meant to be sung. Ballads often begin abruptly, events stem from everyday life/common people, tell the story tersely through dialogue, and make use of refrains. Example: The Cremation of Sam McGee.
14. **BALLAD STANZA**: A quatrain of alternating tetrameter and trimester lines, ABCB.
15. **BIOGRAPHY:** A detailed account of a person’s life written by another person.
16. **BLANK VERSE:** Verse written in unrhymed iambic pentameter. Example: All Shakespeare’s plays are written in blank verse, Macbeth.
17. **CARIACTURE:** The use of exaggeration or distortion to make a figure appear comic or ridiculous. Example: Homer Simpson.
18. **CARPE DIEM:** A term that means “seize the day” or in other words live for today. Example: Herrick’s “To the Virgins, To Make Much of Time.”
19. **CHARACTERIZATION:** The personality a character displays. Types of characters: flat, round, static, dynamic/developing, complex, foil, stock/stereotype.
20. **CLIMAX:**  The point of greatest intensity or suspense in a story. The climax/crisis usually marks a story’s turning point. Example: The banquet scene in Shakespeare’s MacBeth.
21. **COMEDY:** A literary work that ends happily. Example: Shakespeare’s play All’s Well That Ends Well.
22. **CONFLICT:** The struggle between two opposing characters in a literary work. Conflict can be external or internal and takes one of these forms: person vs. person, person vs. environment, or person vs. self.
23. **CONNOTATION/DENOTATION**: Denotation is the literary or dictionary meaning of a word, whereas, connotation is the emotions and/or associations aroused by the word. Example: Red is a colour. Its connotation is associated with fire, danger, passion, danger and stop.
24. **CONSONANCE**: The repetition of similar consonant sounds in the middle or at the end of a group of words. Example: “And all the air a solemn stillness holds.”
25. **COUPLET**: Two consecutive lines of poetry that rhyme. Example: Blake, “Tiger, tiger burning bright/In the forest of the night.”
26. **HEROIC COUPLET:** A couplet using iambic pentameter: Example: Shakespeare: “So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,/So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.”
27. **DENOUEMENT:** The outcome of a plot when conflicts are resolved or unravelled and mysteries and secrets connected. It is part of the falling action of a story.
28. **DICTION:** Refers simply to choice of words. An effective writer is acutely aware of the level of language chosen and there are many levels: jargon, cliché, vernacular, colloquial, slang, euphemism, formal, informal, and dialect.
29. **DISSONANCE:** A harsh or disagreeable combination of sounds; or discord.
30. **DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE:** A kind of narrative poem in which one character speaks to one or more listeners who are silent. A dramatic monologue reveals the speaker’s personality. Example: “My Last Duchess”, Browning.
31. **ELEGY:** A poem mourning the death of an individual. Example: “Death of a Mad Dog”, Goldsmith.
32. **EPIC:** A long narrative poem telling about the deeds of a great hero and reflecting the values of a society. Example: Beowulf.
33. **EPIGRAM:** A short, witty, pointed statement often in the form of a poem. Example: “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.”
34. **EPIGRAPH:** A quotation or motto at the beginning of a chapter, book, short story, or poem that makes some point about the work.
35. **EPILOGUE:** A short addition or conclusion at the end of a literary work. Example: Prospero’s speech at the end of The Tempest.
36. **EPIPHANY:** A moment of illumination.
37. **EPITAPH:** An inscription on a gravestone, or a short poem written in memory of someone who has died. Example: “On My First Son”, Ben Jonson.
38. **FABLE:** A brief story told to present a moral or practical lesson using animals who speak and act like humans. Example: The Fox and the Grapes, Aesop.
39. **FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE/FIGURES OF SPEECH:** Language that is not intended to be interpreted I the literal sense. Example: “It’s raining cats and dogs.”
40. **FLASHBACK:** An incident in a story that interrupts the action to show an even that happened earlier.
41. **FORESHADOWING:** The use of hints or clues in a narrative to suggest what will happen later.
42. **FREE VERSE:** Poetry without rhyme or regular metrical pattern.
43. **HYPERBOLE:** A figure of speech that uses exaggeration or overstatement. Example: I’ve told you a million times.
44. **IAMBIC PENTAMETER:** A poetic line using five verse feet, that is an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable five times. Example: see Shakespeare.
45. **IMAGERY:** Words that create pictures or images in the reader’s mind. Example: Sandberg, “Fog”: “The fog comes/on little cat feet./It sits looking/over harbour and city/on silent haunches/and then moves on.
46. **IRONY:**  A contrast between what is said and what is meant or between what is expected to happen and what actually happens. Verbal irony is saying the opposite of what one means. Iron y of situation is when you expect one thing to happen but the opposite does. Dramatic irony is when the reader or an audience perceives something that a character in a story/play does not know.
47. **LYRIC:** A poem, usually a short one that expresses a speaker’s personal thoughts and/or feelings. Example: “The Road Not Taken”, Robert Frost.
48. **MELODRAMA:** A drama that has stereotyped characters exaggerated emotions, and a conflict that pits an all-good hero or heroin against and all-evil villain. Example: most of the soaps on television.
49. **METAPHOR:** A figure of speech that makes a direct comparison of two dissimilar things. Example: Life is a hard road.
    1. **EXTENDED METAPHOR:** A metaphor that is found throughout the poem. Example: Tennyson, “Crossing the Bar”.
50. **METER:** a generally regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in poetry.
51. **METONYMY:** a figure of speech in which something very closely associated with a thing is used to stand for or suggest the thing itself. Example: “crown” would mean a king/queen, “hard hat” would suggest a construction worker.
52. **MORAL:** lesson the reader is supposed to learn from the story. A suggestion for how to live your life. **NOT A THEME!!!!**
53. **MOTIVATION:** The reasons, either stated or implied, for a character’s behaviour. Character’s motivation may come form outside events or from internal needs or fears.
54. **MYTH:** A story often about immortals and sometimes connected with religious rituals that are intended to give meaning to the mysteries of the world. Example: In Greek myths, Zeus is associated with the sky and Apollo with the sun.
55. **NARRATIVE POEM:** A poem that tells a story. Example: Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales.
56. **NARRATOR:** One who tells the story. Example: The narrator in Browning’s, “My Last Duchess” is the Duke.
57. **OCTAVE/SESTET:**
    1. Octave – an eight-line poem or stanza. Usually the first eight lines of a Petrarchan sonnet are referred to as the octave.
    2. Sestet – a six-line poem or stanza. Usually the last six lines of a Petrarchan sonnet are referred to as the sestet.
58. **ODE:** A complex and often lengthy lyric poem written in a dignified formal style on a lofty and/or serious subject. Odes are often written for a special occasion to honour a person or a season or to commemorate an event. Example: “Ode to the West Wind”, Shelley.
59. **ONOMATOPOEIA:** Words whose pronunciation suggests their meaning. The sound of the word clearly imitates what it describes. Example: “hiss”, “bang”, “plop” imitate the sounds they represent.
60. **OXYMORON:** A figure of speech that combines opposite or contradictory ideas using two or three words. Example: “wise fool, “jumbo shrimp”.
61. **PARADOX:** A statement that reveals a truth though it seems at first to be self-contradictory. Example: Lovelace’s “Stone walls do not a prison make.”
62. **PARALLELISM:** The use of phrases, clauses or sentences that are similar in structure. Example: “To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.” Tennyson.
63. **PASTORAL:** A type of poem that deals in an idealized way with rural life. Example: Marlowe: “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love.”
64. **PATHOS:** In a work of literature, the quality that arouses the reader’s feelings of pity, sorrow or compassion for a character. Example, One scene with pathos is Act IV, Scene II of Macbeth when Lady Macduff and her son are brutally murdered.
65. **PERSONIFICATION:** A figure of speech in which inanimate objects, animals or abstract ideas are given human qualities. Example: Ogden Nash: “Hark to the whimper of the sea-gull/He weeps because he’s not an ea-gull.”
66. **PLOT:** The sequence of events or actions in a literary work. Elements of plot include conflict, climax, suspense, dilemma, surprise, denouement and falling action.
67. **POINT OF VIEW:** The perspective from which a story is told. This may be first person, objective, omniscient or limited omniscient.
68. **PROTAGONIST:** The central or main character of a literary work. The protagonist can be heroic or ordinary, good or bad. Example: Macbeth in Macbeth.
69. **PUN:** Word play involving the use of a word with two different meanings, or the similarity of meanings in two words spelled differently but pronounced the same, or two words pronounced and spelled somewhat the same but containing different meanings. Example: “steel-steal”.
70. **QUATRAIN:** A stanza or a poem of four lines. Quatrains usually have an ABAB or ABBA or ABCB rhyme scheme.
71. **REPFRAIN:** A word, phrase, line or lines repeated regularly in a poem, usually at the end of each stanza. Refrains usually help build suspense and serve to emphasize a particular idea. Example: Poe, quote the Raven, nevermore.”
72. **RHYME:** The repetition of sounds in two or more words that appear close to each other in a poem. Example: Tennyson’s “The Eagle”: “He clasps the crag with crooked hands,/Close to the sun in lonely lands,/Ringed with the azure world, he stands”
    1. **INTERNAL RHYME:** is when rhyme occurs within a line. Example: Coleridge, “The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared.”
73. **RHYTHM:** The arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables into a pattern of beats. Rhythm often gives a poem a distinct musical quality.
74. **ROMANCE:** Any imaginative literature that is set in an idealized world and that deals with heroic adventures and battles between good characters and villains or monsters. Example: Shakespeare’s The Tempest.
75. **SATIRE:** A literary work that ridicules a subject, idea, institution, person, groups or mankind in general. Satires vary from mere entertainment to serious works which aim to reform. Example: Swift, Gulliver’s Travels.
76. **SETTING:** The time and place in which the events occur in a literary work. Setting serves to establish the physical background, the atmosphere and/or the story’s theme.
77. **SIMILE:** A comparison of two dissimilar things using “like” or “as”. Example: He runs like the wind.
78. **SOLILOQUY:** In drama, an extended speech delivered by a character alone on the stage in order to reveal a character’s true thoughts and feelings to the audience. Example: Macbeth, Act V, Scene iii, lines 19-28, “Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow.”
79. **SONNET:** A fourteen line lyric poem, usually written in iambic pentameter. The two main types of sonnets are the Petrarchan/Italian and the Shakespearean/Elizabethan. The Petrarchan sonnet’s rhyme scheme is usually ABBA ABBA CDECDE and is divided into the octave that presents a problem or question and the sestet that resolves or answers the problem/question. The Shakespearean sonnet is divided into three quatrains and a concluding couplet. The three quatrains present a problem that usually is resolved in the closing couplet. Example: Petrarchan sonnet: Wyatt’s “Whoso List to Hunt”
80. **STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS:** This term refers to the depiction of the thoughts and feelings which flow, with no apparent logic, through the mind of a character. Example: most of Virginia Woolf’s work.
81. **STYLE:** An author’s characteristic way of writing determined by such elements as diction, syntax, use of imagery. Style is the sum of qualities that distinguish the writings of one writer from those of another.
82. **SYMBOL:** An object, person, place or action that has a meaning in itself and also stands for something larger than it does. Example: a red rose is often symbolic for true love.
83. **SYNECHDOCHE:** A figure of speech that substitutes a part for a whole. Example: “All hands on deck.”
84. **SYNTAX:** The way in which words are put together to form phrases, clauses or sentences. Example: “I went to the store.” **OR** “To the store, I went.”
85. **THEME:** The general idea of insight about life that a writer wishes to express. Example: One theme in Shakespeare’s The Tempest is that “forgiveness is superior to revenge.”
86. **TONE:** The attitude a writer takes towards his/her subjects, characters or audience. Example: the tone in Dylan Thomas’ “Fern Hill” is nostalgic.
87. **TRAGEDY:** A literary work in which the protagonist meets an unhappy or disastrous end. Example: Shakespeare’s Macbeth.
88. **TRAGIC HERO:** A person of stature who moves from happiness to misery through some frailty of his/her own – often referred to as the protagonist’s **tragic flaw**. Example: Macbeth in Macbeth is a tragic hero and his tragic flaw is his ambition.
89. **UNDERSTATEMENT:** A statement that expresses an idea/concept in mild or restrained terms. Example: John Milton, Paradise Lost, says that Satan has “unblest feet”. This is a clear example of understatement for Satan’s feet are of course, cursed.
90. **VOICE:** Every author of a piece of literature has a “voice” – a distinct way of expressing his/her thoughts and feelings depending on the writer’s diction, syntax, expressions, intonation, point of view and life experiences. “Voice” is what you “hear” when you read a literary work.

Credit given to North Delta English Department