

Literary Devices - Techniques

Literary devices are tools and techniques that writers use to make a point, to make their writing stronger or more vivid, to connect with the reader, and to give a logical framework for a story, play, or poem. Literary techniques help readers to understand, appreciate, interpret and analyze a literary work.

Literary **techniques** are used by writers to give their readers a greater understanding and appreciation for their stories or poems. Unlike literary elements, literary techniques are *optional*; they may be used or not, in combination, or individually.

Here are some common literary techniques:

Imagery uses sensory language to create vivid descriptions of actions, objects and ideas. Examples: her cloaked expression, a menacing sky, a velvet fist

Simile states that one thing is like another: “Your love is like a red red rose.”

Metaphor states that one thing IS another: “Love is a battlefield.”

Hyperbole is a deliberate exaggeration for the sake of emphasis.

Personification gives a thing, an idea or an animal human qualities.

Alliteration uses the same consonant sound in a series of words for emphasis.

Allegory uses a plot, characters and setting to explain something else. Example: *Animal Farm* is an allegory of the Russian Revolution and communism.

Irony is a contrast between expectation and reality, often with humorous, tragic, or gratifying results. Example: in *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet pretends to die as part of a plan to escape and be with Romeo forever, but hearing of her death, Romeo kills himself, which ensures that she will never be with him again.

Oxymoron is a description that seems impossible or opposite of what it describes, as in jumbo shrimp.

Literary Devices - Elements

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Literary **elements** are used to develop a written work. Because great writing has structure, writers use these elements to build the story, play, or poem, and keep it moving along.

Here are some examples of literary elements:

Plot — the sequence of events that tells a story

Theme — the central idea in the telling of the story

Narrative method — the way in which the plot is conveyed (diary, autobiography, flashbacks, letters, news articles, captain's log, historical documents, etc.)

Setting — the time and place in which the story takes place. The setting is often an integral part of the story and almost functions as a character in certain stories.

Characters — the people, animals, etc. that the story is about

Protagonist — the main character

Antagonist — the character in conflict with the protagonist

Narrator — the character telling the story

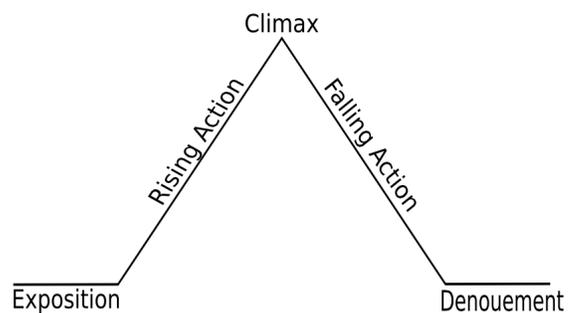
Point of view — the perspective from which the story is told

Dialogue — words spoken by the characters in the telling of the story

Conflict — the problem, disagreement, quest, or goal around which the story unfolds

Tone/Mood — tone is how the author creates atmosphere of the narrative, whereas mood is the effect that this atmosphere has on the reader

Voice — this can refer to active vs. passive



German novelist Gustav Freytag created a diagram to illustrate dramatic structure. While his original intent focused on drama, Freytag's pyramid is also useful for mapping the action in short stories and novels.