



A Glossary of Literary Terms: KS4 – KS5

Epigraph: A quotation from another writer placed at the beginning of a document or book. An epigraph serves to draw a comparison, provide exposition or to generate a specific context for the literary piece.

– Lynn Domina

Preface

Literature is a labyrinth. However, much like any maze, it can be solved by careful attention to detail, some creative thinking and a bit of planning ahead. If you keep your left hand on the wall of a maze the entire time you're in there and follow the path it leads you down you may end up taking a much longer route, but you will eventually get out. Consider this booklet your hedgerow. Return to it whenever you start to feel a bit lost and can't find what you're looking for. You'll soon be at the exit. Before you begin your journey, here are a few things to bear in mind:

1. You don't have to memorise every word and phrase inside this booklet. While you should be familiar with the terms in at least the fundamental and advanced sections, the expert section contains literary devices most university students wouldn't know the names of. What this document is meant to do is to help you recognise certain patterns in literature so you can build your conceptual tool-kit; not to give you a set of definitions you have to be able to quote verbatim.
2. You don't have to read this entire booklet in one sitting. Take your time with it and go at your own pace.
3. Try to search for connections between the examples and the other literary devices discussed. Oscar Wilde's word 11-word quote "The world is a stage, but the play is badly cast" might work as an interesting tidbit of knowledge in the discussion of characterisation, but would fit equally well in the discussions of epigrams, parodies, parapsydokians, allusions, metaphors, etc. When you know what to look for, literature becomes incredibly rich. Although it may seem didactic on the surface, treat this text as anything but. It requires your engagement as much as your attention!
4. I would not recommend using this booklet as something that you revisit just before your exams in the interest of learning a number of phrases you think might make your paper more impressive. Identifying these devices takes practice; using this as a part of your last-minute preparation will only serve to confuse you and do more harm than good.
5. If you have a lot of difficulty with any of the devices I've discussed, don't hesitate to set them aside. This booklet is meant to make you more comfortable with literature; if it does not serve that purpose then the fault lies with it, not with you. If you have any questions about any of the terms, feel free to ask me.
6. Try to enjoy it. Mazes can be awful when you're inside but once you've got the hang of what you're doing and know where you're going, they can be brilliant fun!

Fundamental

1. *Adjective*: Any word or phrase which describes, quantifies or identifies a noun or a pronoun.

There are many different types of adjective. These include:

Articles: Interestingly, articles are considered a subclass of adjectives. There are two types of articles, definite and indefinite. The only definite article is 'the'. The indefinite articles are 'a' and 'an'.

Possessive: These are used to show possession and are a class of pronouns (called *possessive pronouns*). For example: **my** cat, **his** father, **her** longsword, **our** friendship, etc.

Demonstrative: Used to demonstrate or indicate specific things. There are several classes of demonstrative adjectives: the common ones ('this', 'that', 'these', 'those'), the special pairs ('on the **one** hand' and 'on the **other** hand', 'the former' and 'the latter'), and the numeric ones ('first', 'second', 'third'... etc. (to infinity so long as they end with the relevant classifier ('st', 'nd', 'rd', 'nth', etc.))).

Indefinite: Unlike demonstrative adjectives, these do not point out specific things. They are formed from indefinite pronouns. For example: 'many', 'some', 'several', 'no', etc.

Number: All unmodified numbers are classified as adjectives. For example: '**two** turtle doves', '**three** French hens', '**four** calling birds', etc.

Quality or Opinion: A personal opinion on an object, or a statement of its features or attributes. For example: good, bad, brittle, soft, etc.

Size: How large or small an object is. For example: huge, enormous, tiny, scrawny, etc.

Age: How old or young an object is. For example: ancient, youthful, juvenile, teenaged, etc.

Shape: The structure of an object. For example: sharp, blunt, oblong, square, etc.

Colour: The shade, tint, hue or complexion of an object. For example: blue, transparent, tinted, Caucasian, etc..

Origin: The place or time-period an object comes from. For example: Indian, modernist, baroque, European, etc..

Material: What an object is made of. For example: diamond, obsidian, paper, gilded, etc..

Purpose: The use of an object. For example: shearing (as in 'scissors'), coffee (as in 'mug'), running (as in 'shoes'), tennis (as in 'racquet'), etc..

It is important to remember that because of the diversity of ways in which words can be employed, certain words can figure into several different classes of adjectives so it is important to be mindful of where one uses them in a description. A 'golden Chinese dress' would suggest a dress that originates in China that is golden in colour, but a 'Chinese golden

dress' would suggest a dress that originates in China but is *made* of gold.

Did you know: "Adjectives in English absolutely have to be in this order: opinion-size-age-shape-colour-origin-material-purpose Noun. So, you can have a **lovely little old rectangular green French silver whittling** knife. But if you mess with that word order in the slightest, you'll sound like a maniac. It's an odd thing that every English speaker uses that list, but almost none of us could write it out. And as size comes before colour, **green great** dragons can't exist." (*Elements of Eloquence* – Mark Forsyth)

2. *Adverb:* A descriptive word used to modify a verb, adjective, or another adverb. Typically ending in *-ly*, adverbs answer the questions when, how, and how many times. There are four different types of adverb. These include (the adverb is in bold and what it modifies is underlined):

Manner: How an action occurs. For example: 'I ate **greedily**', 'she danced **excitedly**', 'he raised his children **well**'.

Place: Where an action occurs. For example: 'I ate **outside**', 'she danced **somewhere** in Paris', he went **downstairs**'.

Time: When an action occurs. For example: 'I ate **yesterday**', he will come **soon**', I am still **waiting** for my friend'.

Frequency: How often an action occurs. For example: I meet him **most of the time**', She called me **again and again**', They come here **daily**'.

Did you know: Most writers hate overusing adverbs. Take a look, for example, at these quotes: "I believe the road to hell is paved with adverbs, and I will shout it from the rooftops" – Stephen King

"I adore adverbs; they are the only qualifications I really much respect" – Henry James.

3. *Affixes:* An affix is added to the root of a word to change its meaning. There are two types of affixes:

Prefix: An affix added to the front of the word. For example: 'amoral', '**circum**vent', '**de**value', '**extra**ordinary', '**un**finished', '**non**starter', '**in**capable', '**dis**appear', '**intra**venous', etc.

Suffix: An affix added to the end of a word. For example: 'comfort**able**', 'personal', 'conspirator', 'care**ful**', 'linguistic', 'humility', 'danc**ing**', 'attraction', 'quick**ly**', 'table**s**', 'enjoy**ment**', 'fatty', etc.

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Advanced

1. *Allegory*: A hidden story – typically moral or political – that lies underneath the primary story. An allegory is an extended metaphor that runs throughout the text. It is used to deliver a broader message about real-world issues and occurrences.

For example:

One of the most famous allegorical novellas is George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Ostensibly a story about a farm-yard animal uprising, the hidden story is about the power struggle that took place between Trotsky and Stalin after Lenin's death, and aims to show some of the strategies Stalin used to betray the spirit of the communist uprising in Russia and impose a totalitarian system.

2. *Alliteration*: The repetition of words with the same, or at least very similar *initial* sounds. Alliteration links words to build rhythm by creating head-rhymes.

For example:

"Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta."

(*Lolita* – Vladimir Nabokov)

3. *Allusion*: A figure of speech in which an object or circumstance from an unrelated context is referred to covertly or indirectly. It is left to the audience to make the direct connection (distinguishing it from a *reference* which makes the connection explicit). Using allusion puts the alluded text in a new context under which it assumes new meanings and denotations.

For example:

The myth of Oedipus, as told by Sophocles, discusses fate, free-will and tragic flaws. When Milan Kundera alludes to it in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, it takes on a new meaning – being something that is beautiful because it only happens the once.

4. *Ambiguity*: An idea, situation or sentence that can be interpreted in more than one way. Although ambiguity is often considered a flaw in writing, many writers intentionally use this technique to allow readers to understand their works in a variety of ways, giving them depth and complexity.

For example:

Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* has been read as a religious fable, a Marxist fable, a farce, and a tragedy.

5. *Amplification*: Extending a sentence or phrase in order to further explain, emphasize, or exaggerate certain points of a definition, description, or argument.

For example:

"If a person has ugly thoughts, it begins to show on the face. And when that person has ugly thoughts every day, every week, every year, the face gets uglier and uglier until you can hardly bear to look at it. A person who has good thoughts cannot ever be ugly. You can have a wonky nose and a crooked mouth and a double chin and stick-out teeth, but if you have good thoughts it will shine out of your face like sunbeams and you will always look lovely."

(*The Twits* – Roald Dahl)

Dahl uses amplification to put the point that 'ugly thoughts beget ugly people, beautiful thoughts beget beautiful people' in a much more forceful and compelling way.

6. *Anaphora*: A certain word or phrase that is repeated at the beginning of clauses or sentences that follow each other. This repetition emphasizes the phrase while adding rhythm to the passage, making it more memorable and enjoyable to read.

For example:

"**It was** the best of times, **it was** the worst of times, **it was** the age of wisdom, **it was** the age of foolishness, **it was** the epoch of belief, **it was** the epoch of incredulity, **it was** the season of Light, **it was** the season of Darkness, **it was** the spring of hope, **it was** the winter of despair."

(*Tale of Two Cities* – Charles Dickens)

7. *Antagonist*: The adversary of the hero or protagonist of a drama or other literary work, like Iago in *Othello*, Moriarty in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, or Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings*.

For example:

"Antagonist, *n.* The miserable scoundrel who won't let us."

(*The Unabridged Devil's Dictionary* – Ambrose Bierce)

8. *Anthropomorphism*: The ascription of human traits to animals or other non-human things such that those things behave like a human. Not to be confused with *personification*.

For example:

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Expert

Literary Devices:

1. *Accumalatio*: Accumulating arguments or words which embody similar abstract or physical qualities or meanings, to emphasise the common qualities they hold.

For example:

“What syllabus of intellectual pursuits was simultaneously possible? Snapshot photography, comparative study of religions, folklore relative to various amatory and superstitious practices, contemplation of celestial constellations...”

(*Ulysses* – James Joyce)

2. *Ad Hominem*: An argument “against the man”. *Ad Hominem* attacks focus on undermining the character of the interlocutor rather than their arguments.

For example:

Proctor: I—I have no love for Mr. Parris. It is no secret. But God, surely, do I love.

Cheever: He plow on Sunday, sir.

Danforth: Plow on Sunday!

Cheever: I think it be evidence, John. I am an official of the court. I cannot keep it.

Proctor: I—I have once or twice plowed on Sunday. I have three children, sir, and until last year my land give little.”

Here, John Proctor (the defender of the accused townspeople) is questioned not because his story was inconsistent, but because he plows on Sunday, causing the judge and the audience to doubt his Christian piety.

(*The Crucible* – Arthur Miller)

3. *Anacoluthon*: A syntactic deviation and interruption within a sentence from one structure to another. In this interruption, the expected sequence of grammar is absent. The grammatical flow of sentences is interrupted in order to begin another sentence. Particularly common in *stream of consciousness* novels but also in poetry, plays and dramatic monologues. Most often used to either show character confusion or to highlight a revelation.

For example:

“I will have such revenges on you both,

That all the world **shall** — I will do such things,

What they are, yet I know not..."

(*King Lear* – William Shakespeare)

4. *Anagram*: A form of word play in which letters of a word or phrase are rearranged in such a way that a new word or phrase is formed. Often used either to create humour, or to plant clues in mysteries.

For example:

"At first my brain was somewhat numbed
by your somnambulistic numbers, Edmund.
Now, having shaken off that stupor,
I find the latter anagrimed with 'Proust'
while 'T. S. Eliot'
goes well with 'toilets.'"

(*Untitled* – Vladimir Nabokov)

5. *Antihimeria*: A rhetorical device that uses a word in a new grammatical shape; like using a noun as a verb. Can be used to alienate the audience and confuse them, or to provide more vivid imagery, or for humour.

For example:

"Let me not suppose that she dares go about, Emma **Woodhouse-ing** me"

(*Emma* – Jane Austen)

"The thunder would not **peace** at my bidding"

(*King Lear* – William Shakespeare)

6. *Antiphrasis*: Figurative speech in which a word or phrase is employed in a way that is opposite to its literal meaning to create ironic or comic effect.

For example:

"Yes, I killed him. I killed him for money—and a woman—and I didn't get the money and I didn't get the woman. **Pretty**, isn't it..."

(*Double Indemnity* – Raymond Chandler and Billy Wilder)

7. *Aposiopesis*: A figure of speech where a character, speaker or writer break off abruptly and leave their statement incomplete. Usually used to heighten the tension by evoking fear, passion or excitement.

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objects. It functions in the opposite direction of an *anthropomorphism*.

For example:

“The **two sisters** got down, big, **bovine**, in a flutter of cheap ribbons; one of them drew from the jumbled wagon bed a battered lantern, the other a worn broom. His father handed the reins to the older son and began to climb stiffly over the wheels ... There was something about his **wolf-like independence** and even courage when the advantage was at least neutral which impressed strangers, as if they got from his latent ravening ferocity not so much a sense of dependability, as a feeling that his ferocious conviction in the rightness of his own actions would be of advantage to all whose interest lay with his...”

(*Barn Burning* – William Faulkner)

Poetic Terms:

1. *Amphibrach*: A metrical foot containing a long syllable in between two short syllables. It is rarely used as the overall meter in English poetry (although it extremely common in Russian poetry) and is generally used for comedic purposes. It is the main foot used in the construction of limericks, which are written in amphibrachic trimeter for the first, second and last lines and in amphibrachic dimeter for the remaining lines.

For example:

“There **was** a small **boy** of **Quebec**,
Who **was** buried **in** snow to **his** neck;
When **they** said. “Are **you** friz?”
He **replied**, “Yes, **I** is –
But **we** don’t call **this** cold in **Quebec**.”

(*There was a Small Boy of Quebec* – Rudyard Kipling)

2. *Anapest*: A metrical foot containing two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable. It is sometimes called the reverse *dactylic* because it preserves the rapid, driving pace of its counterpart. It is generally used for comedy (the anapaestic tetrameter is used in the majority of Dr. Seuss’ works) but sometimes can be used in more dramatic poems as well.

For example:

“Not a **word** to each **other**; we **kept** the great **pace**
Neck by **neck**, stride by **stride**, never **changing** our **place**;
I turn’d **in** my **saddle** and made **its** girths tight,

Then shorten'd each stirrup, and set the pique right,

Rebuckled the cheek-strap, chain'd slacker the bit,

Nor gallop'd less steadily Roland a whit."

(*How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix* – Robert Browning)

3. *Couplet*: Two successive rhyming lines in a poem with the same meter to form a complete thought. All Shakespearean sonnets conclude with a couplet.

For example:

"The time is out of joint, O cursed spite

That ever I was born to set it right."

(*Hamlet* – William Shakespeare)

4. *Cadence*: A term used to single out the rising and falling of a voice when reading a literary piece. In poetry, it is the momentary changes in rhythm and pitch. Cadences help set the rhythmic pace of a literary piece. It is used to establish sectional articulation and closure. However, the basic purpose of cadence is a communicative; it indicates to the listeners when a part ends, and therefore helps them understand the formal composition of the piece. Generally, there are two types of cadence worth paying particular attention to:

Imperfect or half cadence: In poetry, a half cadence is a pause. Half cadence is represented with a comma, or a semi-colon, in poetry and prose. This rhythm does not sound final, and often the lines end with indecisive tension.

Perfect or authentic cadence: Perfect cadence comes at the end of the phrase in a poem.

For example:

"Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,

Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—

While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,

'Tis some visitor,' I muttered, 'tapping at my chamber door—

Only this and nothing more."

(*The Raven* – Edgar Allen Poe)

Here the commas and en dashes are half-cadences and the period at the end is a full cadence.

5. *Dactyl*: A metrical foot containing one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables. It is rare in English poetry because it generally gives the verses a jerky rhythm. However, when used correctly it can convey a remarkable sense of movement.

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