



Elements of a Literary Analysis

In order to know what to look for in a text before you write your literary analysis essay, you need to know your literary terms. Knowing your terms will be beneficial to you, so you can consider what you want to discuss in your essay. Below are literary elements to choose from when writing your literary analysis.

Literary Elements:

Theme – The message/es explored throughout a work of literature.

Motifs -- Repeated patterns in the story, particularly the symbolic.

Plot – The arrangement of events; consider chronology or use of flashback/flashforward.

Setting – The time and place (or when and where) of the story. It can be time period, location, the time of day, the season, the weather, the type of room or building. Three types of setting to keep in mind are **Physical, Historical, and Atmospheric.**

Character – is a person, animal, being, creature in a story. Writers use characters to perform the actions and speak dialogue, moving the story along a plot line. Examples: **Protagonist, Antagonist**

Characterization - is a writer's process used to develop their characters throughout the story. The author uses details to teach us about a character. This is used over the course of a story in order to tell the tale. There are two types of characterization, **Direct and Indirect.**

Point of view – The vantage point from which the story is told. Who is telling the story? There are three points of view a story can be told from, **First-person, Second-person, and Third-person.**

Diction – Refers to word choice and phrasing in any written or spoken text. There are two types of diction: **Formal and Informal.**

Denotation- Dictionary definition of a word. Sometimes a word can have multiple definitions. Consider the way the word is used in context to the story.

Connotation - Feelings and images associated with a word or phrase.

Tone – is the author's attitude towards the subject they are writing about.

Mood- is the atmosphere of the story. The reader determines the feel of the story.

Types of Elements

Certain elements have extensions within them. Here are a list of those types of elements.

TYPES OF PLOT:

Exposition – The opening of the story that sets up the characters, setting, (time and place), and basic information in introduced.

Conflict – The protagonist struggles between opposing forces. It can be external: person vs. person, person vs. person vs. nature, person vs. society, person vs. technology, person vs. supernatural. It can be internal: person vs. self.

Rising Action – The main character faces a series of conflicts.

Crisis – A significant turning point in the story that determines how it must end.

Climax – The highest point of tension or drama in a narratives' plot. Often climax is also when the main problem of the story is faced and solved by the main character or protagonist.

Falling Action – The story begins to slow down and work towards its end, tying up loose ends.

Resolution/Denouement – The conclusion of the story's plot.

TYPES OF SETTING:

Physical - The place where the story occurs. **Ex. The setting of Trifles takes place in a farmhouse.**

Historical - The time period in history that either surrounds the story. **Ex: The Yellow Wallpaper takes place around the nineteenth century, which is important to why the protagonist is treated a certain way by her husband.**



Atmospheric - The feeling, emotion, or mood that an author creates in a narrative through descriptive language.

TYPES OF CHARACTER:

Protagonist – This is the main character, around which the whole story revolves.

Antagonist – This character, or group of characters, causes the conflict for the protagonist. The antagonist could be the protagonist, who is torn by a problem within.

Foil – Opposite character traits from another, character meant to help highlight or bring out another's positive or negative side.

Static – Do not change throughout the story. A major character can remain static through the whole story.

Dynamic – Changes throughout the story. They may learn a lesson, become bad, or change in complex ways.

Flat – Has one or two traits, usually only all positive or negative. They are the opposite of a round character. The flaw or strength has its use in the story.

Round – Opposite of the flat character. Characters have many different traits, good and bad, making them more interesting.

TYPES OF CHARACTERIZATION:

Direct: The author explicitly tells the audience what he or she wants you to know about the character.

Indirect: The reader makes inferences about a character based on their actions, thoughts, personality, and emotional affect on other characters. There are five types of Indirect characterization:

Speech, Thoughts, Effect on others, Actions, and Looks.

TYPES OF POINT OF VIEW:

First-person: The story is told through the eyes of the character telling the story.

Second-person: The narrator is speaking to you. This is seen mostly in poems, speeches, instructional writing, and persuasive articles.

Third-person: The narrator is describing what's seen, but as a spectator. If the narrator is a character in the story, then we are reading what he or she observes as the story unfolds. The story can be told from an omniscient (all-knowing) narrator who doesn't interact in the events, or a limited omniscient character who knows only one other person's thoughts or feelings, or character who has a limited perspective of the events unfolding.

TYPES OF DICTION-

Formal- Involves choosing words that are polite and proper. Formal language is often filled with descriptive words that are quite precise, and sentences may be longer.

Informal- Generally uses shorter words. Sentences may be incomplete or ignore some finer points of grammar and usage.

Here is a list of literary devices to consider when analyzing your essay.

Symbolism – The use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities, by giving them symbolic meanings that are different from their literal sense. Symbols can be universal, conventional, and contextual.

Figurative Language – Used to describe someone or something by comparing to another or using words for description that do not have a literal meaning.

Examples: Metaphor and Simile.

Imagery – Evokes the five senses. What does the character or narrator make the reader touch, see, hear, feel, smell, taste?

Extensions of Literary Devices: The following are extensions of literary devices you can use throughout your essay.

TYPES OF SYMBOLS:

Universal – A word or object that most everyone agrees on the meaning.



Conventional - Widely recognized by a society or culture. **Ex: Christian cross, the Star of Da-vid, a swastika, or a nation's flag.**

Contextual - A word or object that stands for something else just in the story or situation.

TYPES OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE:

Metaphor - Makes a comparison of two unrelated things often using "is." **Example:** But soft! What light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun. – **The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet.**

Simile - Makes a comparison of two unrelated things to show common quality between them using "like" or "as." Example, "She smiles like the sun"

Personification - A thing- an idea or an animal – is given human attributes. **Example:** "I find it hovering in the dining-room, skulking in the parlor, hiding in the hall, lying in wait for me on the stairs." – "The Yellow Wallpaper"

Allegory: The characters are representative of some larger humanistic trait and attempt to convey some larger lesson or meaning in life.

Allusion – A reference to something in history, culture, or literature (especially historical).

*This handout was created using literaryterms.com and literarydevices.com