

Reference List of Literary Terms for Middle School Students.

1st person point of view - the events are told by a character in the story.

2nd period point of view - the events are told directly to you about the story

3rd person point of view - the events are told by someone outside the story.

alliteration - the repetition of similar initial consonant sounds in order to create a musical or rhythmic effect, to emphasize key words or to imitate sounds.

Example: "He was reluctant to return to the room."

allusion - a reference to a well-known person, place, event, literary work, or work of art, often used to help make a comparison.

analogy - comparison based on resemblance of some parts of otherwise unlike things

Example: a pilot is to an airplane as a teacher is to a classroom.

analyze - the practice of looking at all the small parts to see how they affect the whole.

antagonist - the central or leading character's chief opponent. Often referred to as the "villain" by the audience.

anthropomorphic - giving human characteristics and or emotions to animals.

antonym - words that have the opposite meaning.

biography - a form of non-fiction in which a writer tells the life story of another person.

central idea - the unifying element that ties all the other elements of fiction together to tell the story. It is a universal truth.

character - refers to what someone is like – what their qualities are.

(Someone's character refers to their character traits.)

character trait – the quality of a character; what a character is like.

claim - make an argument to support a position. Different reasons are often used for support.

climax – the highest point of action in a story, often the turning point.

compare - a literary device in which a writer compares two or more people, places, things, or ideas.

concrete - something that is real, not abstract; able to be experienced with the five senses.

connotation - an additional meaning suggested by a word or expression in addition to its exact meaning.

context clues - hints that the author gives to help define a difficult or unusual word.

contrast - a literary device where the author describes the differences between two or more entities.

denotation – the specific meaning of words.

direct characterization – the writer directly states the character’s traits or characteristics.

dynamic character – a character who changes over the course of a story.

evidence – facts that prove or disprove something.

explicit - fully and clearly expressed or demonstrated; described or shown in realistic detail.

external conflict – a problem or struggle between a character and an outside force:

character vs. character

character vs. group

character vs. nature

character vs. society

character vs. fate

fable - a brief story, usually with animal characters, that teaches a lesson or a moral.

fact - provable, observable or measurable truth or non-truth.

fiction – writing that tells about imaginary characters and events.

figurative language - word or phrase that means something non-literal. It can be a simile, alliteration, personification etc.

flashback - a section that interrupts the sequence of events in order to relate an earlier incident or set of events.

foreshadowing – an author’s use of hints or clues to give a reader an idea of what may happen next.

free-verse - poetry that has irregular lines and may or may not rhyme.

generalization – a vague or indefinite statement that is made to cover many cases.

Example: “All human beings hope for something.”

hyperbole – use of extreme exaggeration.

idiom - a word or phrase which means something different from what it says – it is usually a metaphor. An idiom is an expression peculiar to a certain group of people and/or used only under certain circumstances.

imagery – words or phrases that appeal to one or more of the five senses and help to create a vivid description for the reader.

implicit - implied rather than directly or expressly stated.

indirect characterization – the writer allows the reader to draw his/her conclusions as to what a character is like, based on the appearances, words, actions, or interactions with other characters.

inference – a logical conclusion drawn by the reader based on available information.

internal conflict – a problem *within* a character (character vs. self).

irony - a situation where the opposite of what is expected to occur or exist *does* occur or exist.

metaphor - a figure of speech in which something is described as if it were something else; without using “like” or “as”.

mood – the atmosphere or feeling an author creates within the piece of writing.

moral – a lesson taught by a literary work.

motif - an image, sound, action, or figure that has symbolic significance *and* explains the theme.

motivation – a reason that explains or partially explains a character’s thoughts, feelings, actions, or speech.

mythological – having to do with stories dealing with gods, heroes, and monsters.

myth - a traditional story about a hero and his rite of passage; it may use true to life details.

narrative – writing or speech that tells a story.

narrative poetry - poetry that tells a story.

narrator – the speaker or character who is telling the story.

non-fiction - writing that tells about real people, places, objects, or events.

objective details – details that are factual and true to life.

opinion - a personal belief or judgment that does not founded on proof.

oxymoron – the close placement of words having opposite or near opposite meanings in order to create a unique description.

parable – a short tale that illustrates a universal truth, a belief that appeals to all people of all Civilizations.

personification – a type of figurative language in which a non-human subject is given human characteristics.

plot – the sequence of events in a literary work.

plot twist - a radical change in the suspected direction or outcome of the plot, usually adds a surprising revelation.

poetry – a short piece of writing that often uses rhyming, similar sounds, symbolism, and meter to evoke meaning.
Examples: sonnet, Haiku, blank verse, sestina, villanelle, limerick etc.

point of view – the perspective from which a story is told.

protagonist - central, leading character. Often call the “hero” by the audience.

pun – a humorous play on words.

repetition – the repeated use of words or phrases in order to emphasize a point.

resolution – the events that occur in the falling action of a story’s plot.

rhymes – words that have the same ending sound.

setting – the time and location of the events described in a literary work.

simile – a comparison between two things, using “like” or “as”.

speaker – the imaginary voice assumed by the writer of a poem, who describing the events in a poem.

stanza – a group of lines in a poem.

static character – a character who does *not* undergo a change over the course of a story.

subject - what the story or poem is about (the topic).

subjective details – details that reveal the author’s feelings, attitudes, or judgments.

supporting details - helps the reader understand the central idea. They clarify, illuminate, illustrate, and expand.

symbol /symbolism – anything that stands for or represents something else.

synonym – words with similar meanings.

theme – a central message, idea, or concern that expressed in a literary work.

tone – the attitude of an author toward the subject that he/she is writing about.