A Worn Path: Literary Terms

**allusion** (a-LOO-zhuhn):  a reference in a literary work to a person, place, or thing in history or another work of literature. Allusions are often indirect or brief references to well-known characters or events.

**author’s purpose:** an author’s purpose is his or her reason for creating a particular work.  The purpose can be to entertain, explain or inform, express an opinion, or to persuade.

**dialect:** a form of language that is spoken in a particular place or by a particular group of people.

**inference:** is a logical guess based on evidence based on evidence in the text.

**motif** (moh-TEEF): a recurring object, concept, or structure in a work of literature. A motif may also be two contrasting elements in a work, such as good and evil. A motif is important because it allows one to see main points and themes that the author is trying to express, in order that one might be able to interpret the work more accurately.

**point of view**: perspective from which a story is told. Understanding the point of view used in a work is critical to understanding literature; it serves as the instrument to relay the events of a story, and in some instances the feelings and motives of the character(s).

**sequence**:  the order in which events occur or in which ideas are presented.

**setting** (set-ting): the time, place, physical details, and circumstances in which a story occurs. Settings include the background, atmosphere or environment in which [**characters**](http://www.wallkillcsd.k12.ny.us/glt.htm#character) live and move, and usually include physical characteristics of the surroundings.

Settings enables the reader to better envision how a story unfolds by relating necessary physical details of a piece of literature.

**short story:** brief work of fiction that generally focuses on one or two main characters who face a single problem or conflict.

**symbolism**: using something specific to stand for something else, especially an idea. A symbol is a person, place, object or action that for something beyond itself. For example, a dove may represent peace. The dove can be seen and peace cannot.

**third person limited or third person objective:** the person telling the story is not one of the characters in the story.  He or she is an outside observer.  The reader can only know what one character learns through interaction with other characters or through overheard conversations.  The narrator cannot supply the thoughts or feelings of other characters in the story.

**round character:** is a character who is fully described by the author (several character traits, background information, etc.)

**static character:** a character who does not change or who changes very little in the course of a story.

**flat character:** a character about whom little information is provided.

**theme**: a common thread or repeated idea that is incorporated throughout a literary work. A theme is a thought or idea the author presents to the reader about life or human nature. Generally, a theme has to be extracted as the reader explores the passages of a work. The author utilizes the characters, plot, and other literary devices to assist the reader in this endeavor. The author often intertwines the theme throughout the work, and the full impact is slowly realized as the reader processes the text. The ability to recognize a theme is important because it allows the reader to understand part of the author’s purpose in writing the book.

**tone**: the writer’s attitude or feeling  about his or her subject