Fiction Terms: 35 Brief Definitions

**1. Allegory:**A complete narrative that may also be applied to a parallel set of external situations that may be political, moral, religious, or philosophical; a complete and self-contained narrative signifying another set of conditions.(allegory: symbol::movie:still picture).

**2. Atmosphere (mood):**The emotional aura that a work evokes; the permeating emotional texture within a work.

**3. Character:**The portrayal of a human being, with all the good and bad traits of being human.  Character is revealed through authorial comments, interactions with other characters, dramatic statements and thoughts, and statements by other characters.

**4. Conflict:**The essence of plot; the opposition between two forces.  Examples: man vs. man, man vs. nature, man vs. himself  where "man" is understood to mean "human beings." Contextual or authorial symbol: A symbol specific to a particular work that gathers its meaning from the context of the work.

**5. Cosmic irony or irony of fate**: Situational irony that is connected to a pessimistic or fatalistic view of life.

**6. Cultural or universal symbol:** A symbol recognized and shared as a result of common social and cultural heritage.

**7.*Donnee.***The stated or implied "ground rules" for a work; Henry James's term for indicating that the reader must grant the writer a free choice of subject and treatment: "We must grant the writer his *donnee*."

**8. Dramatic irony:** Situational irony in which a character perceives his or her plight in a limited way while the audience and one or more other characters understand it entirely.

**9. Dramatic or objective point of view:**Third person point of view in which no authorial commentary reveals characters' thoughts.

**10. Epiphany**: Literally, a “manifestation”; for Christian thinkers, a particular manifestation of God’s presence in the created world. For James Joyce: “a sudden sense of radiance and revelation that one may feel while perceiving a commonplace object.” In literature, epiphany “has become the standard term for the description . . . of the sudden flare into revelation of an ordinary object or scene.”

**11. Fable:** A story that features animals with human traits and  "morals" or explanations.

**12. First person point of view:** Narration from the perspective of "I" or "We."  Narrators may be involved with the action or may simply observe it; they may also be reliable or unreliable.

**13. Flat character**: A character that is static and does not grow.  One  purpose of flat characters is to highlight the development of round characters.  Flat characters may be one of several special types, such as stereotypes or stock characters.

**13. Initiation:**Theme in fiction involving process of a young person moving from innocence to experience (or maturity) and recognizing some truth about the world. An initiation story often has a sense of ethical choice as seen in Jewett's “A White Heron.” It also involves the idea that while something is gained (knowledge), something is also lost (innocence or the state of being unaware of the dilemma that precipitates the initiation).

**14. Irony:** The discrepancy between what is perceived and what is revealed; language and situations that seem to reverse normal expectations.

**15. Metapho**r: Comparison of two unlike things; describing some unlike thing in terms of something understandable to the reader.

**16. Myth**: A narrative story associated with the religion, philosophy, or collective psychology of various societies and cultures.

[17. Naturalism](http://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/natural.htm)**:** A turn-of-the-century  literary movement in which heredity and environment determine human fate.

**18. Novel (or story) of manners:** A work of fiction in which the customs, values, morals, and class structure of a particular society create the basis for understanding the story's plot, characters, and themes. Although novels (or stories) of manners comment in a larger sense on human nature, the work depends on the reader's understanding of the values of a particular society. Example: "The Other Two"

**19. Omniscient point of view:** Point of view in which an authorial voice reveals all the characters' thoughts; may include commentary by the author.

**20. Overstatement**(hyperbole) and Understatement (litotes): Hyxaggeration for effect. Understatement (litotes): Deliberate underplaying or undervaluing of a thing to create emphasis or irony

**21. Parable**: A short, simple allegory with a  moral or religious bent.

**22. Plot and Story**: A story is The reporting of actions in chronological sequence. E. M. Forster: "The King died, and then the Queen died." A plot is the development and resolution of a conflict; includes the element of causation. In *Aspects of the Novel,*E. M. Forster defines this element of causation as the difference between plot and story: "The king died, and the queen died of grief."

**23. Point of view:** The voice of the story; the story from the perspective of the person doing the speaking. Examples: first person, second person, third person omniscient, third person limited omniscient, third person dramatic or objective.

**24. Protagonist**: The main character of a story; the character around whom the conflict is centered.

**25. Round characters:** E. M. Forster: round characters "are dynamic--capable of surprising the reader in a convincing way." Round characters recognize, change with, and adjust to circumstances.

**26. Second person point of view:**Story told from the perspective of "you" (uncommon).  Example: Lorrie Moore's "How to Become a Writer."

**27. Setting:**A work's natural, manufactured, political, cultural, and temporal environment, including everything that the characters know and own.

**28. Simile:** Comparison of two unlike things using "like" or "as."

**29. Situational irony:**A type of irony emphasizing that human beings are enmeshed in forces beyond their comprehension and control.

**30. Stereotype**: Flat characters that exhibit no attributes except those of their class.

**31. Stock character**: Flat characters who represent a class or group.  Examples: the braggart soldier, the shrewish wife, the hypocritical Puritan, and so forth.

**32. Structure:** The way in which a plot is assembled: chronologically, through dreams, speeches, fragments, etc.

**33. Style:** The manipulation of language to create certain effects. Symbolism: Objects, incidents, speeches, and characters that have meanings beyond themselves.

**34. Theme:** The major or central idea of a work.Third person limited omniscient point of view:Point of view in which one third-person character's thoughts are revealed but the other characters' thoughts are not.

**35. Tone:**The ways in which the author conveys attitudes about the story material and toward the reader.