LITERARY DEVICES

Use this sheet to aid you in analyzing literature: on book reports and class projects, and even for a greater understanding and appreciation when leisure reading. (Note: these are only some of many literary devices.)

1. **ambiguity** – an “unclear” element in a text; the text’s ending, an element of a character, etc. may have multiple interpretations

2. **archetype** - universal & timeless (iconic) themes, symbols, characters, plot elements, and/or images

3. **characterization** – the methods an author uses to develop the qualities of a char.
   (see chart below for elements of indirect characterization)
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>elements of indirect characterization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>appearance</td>
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<tr>
<td>words</td>
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<tr>
<td>actions</td>
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<tr>
<td>thoughts</td>
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<td>reactions of other characters</td>
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4. **conflict** – the part of the plot that is the “struggle” btwn. 2 opposing forces – see also “plot”
   (Note: a pc. may have several conflicts – some being minor – which may or may not impact the major conflict):
   (wo)man vs. (wo)man – **external**
   (wo)man vs. her/himself – **internal**
   (wo)man vs. society, nature, etc. – **external**

5. **diction** – a writer’s word choice – see also “style”
   a writer may choose to use:
   
   - figur. lang.
   - appropriate syntax
   - dialect
   - slang or colloquialisms
   - an authentic vocab.
   - poetic voice, etc.

6. **figurative language** – language that is NOT literal; fig. lang. paints “figures” in reader’s minds in order to communicate an idea; figures of speech are:
   a. **allusion** – references to things, people, events, or aspects of culture (real or fictional and/or past or present).
      The four main types are:
      1. biblical
      2. historical
      3. literary
      4. mythological
   b. **hyperbole** – an exaggeration
   c. **imagery** – (a.k.a. sensory imagery) – evoking a reader’s 5 senses with words
   d. **irony** – a contrast btwn. what’s expected and what actually happens; a contrast in the amt. of info. an audience and a char. knows (dramatic irony); a contrast in what is stated and what is meant (verbal irony)
   e. **metaphors** – comparisons (stated or implied) btwn. 2 unlike things – comparison is **direct**– doesn’t use “like or as”
   f. **personification** – giving human characteristics to non-human things (i.e. “The sun smiled on me this morning.”)
   g. **similes** – comparisons btwn. 2 unlike things using like or as
   h. **symbol** – a concrete item represents an abstract one (i.e. Robert Frost’s “road not taken” = choice)

7. **mood** – (a.k.a **atmosphere**) the feeling evoked in a reader from a story (setting often plays a major role)

8. **narrative techniques** – the “ways” that a writer can deliver the story – see also “plot”
   a. **narrative pace** – speeding up or slowing down the narrative to “fit” its meaning/purpose
   b. **suspense** – the element of anticipation in a narrative
   c. **stream-of-consciousness** – the narration is a ‘stream’ of the narrator’s thoughts
   d. **epistolary** – narration in the form of letters (i.e. from protagonist to a friend, etc.)
   e. **suspension of disbelief** – the willingness of a reader or viewer to accept the premises of a work of fiction, even if they are fantastic or impossible.
   f. **deus ex machina** - illogical finale when a new, unexpected factor (i.e. a god, *deus*) appears on stage and solves the seemingly hopeless situation
9. **pathos** - attempt on the part of the author to evoke pity or deep sympathy in his/her readers

10. **plot** – the sequence of events in the story (“what happens”). Including:
   a. **flashback** – interruption in the events of a story to intro. or earlier event
   b. **foreshadowing** – clues that help reader predict a latter part of plot
   c. **en medias res** – a technique in which readers are just dropped “in the middle” of story
   d. **climax** – the peak pt. of interest/action in the story
   e. **anti-climactic** – plot w/o resolution or w/an unexpected or “disappointing” resolution
   f. **resolution** – how the conflict is “solved,” not necessarily “happy”
   g. **inciting incident** – the incident/event that begins the conflict

11. **point of view** – the person or intelligence (narrator) telling the story perspective is the “angle” from which the story’s coming (i.e. whose point of view.)
   a. **first person** – (I, me, my, etc. . . .story’s BY a narrator)
   b. **third person** – (char.’s name, he, she, them, etc. . . .story’s about chars.)
      1. **omniscient** – seeing into char.(s)’ minds
      2. **objective** – “just the facts;” no ability to enter char.(s’) minds; for non-fiction

12. **satire** - wit, irony, sarcasm, parody used to expose a vice or folly.

13. **setting** – the time and place a story occurs. Often readers must INFER setting (clues = chars.’ speech [dialogue or vocab.] and/or dress, historical or current refs., cultural context, etc.)

14. **style** – the distinct-to-the-writer way that a writer communicates his/her ideas; the lang. a writer uses to narrate a story; (HOW the writer tells the story);
   The three major elements of style are: The two main types of style are:
   a. **diction**
   b. **syntax (sent. struct./length)** “formal”/academic = Grammar A “informal”/authentic = Grammar B
   c. **tone**
   By comparing the styles of different authors we can better understand the concept.

   A writer’s style is conveyed in his/her CHOICES. Exs:
   Why 1st person p.o.v. instead of 3rd or vice-versa?
   Why 3rd person omniscient instead of objective or vice-versa?
   Did the writer use dialect? Why or why not? What effect does it have?
   How (if at all) did the writer create interest/suspense or provoke thought from the reader?
   Why/how did the writer manipulate diction?
   How fully developed are the characters? Are there reasons for some chars. to be flat and others to be round? For some chars. to be dynamic and others static?
   How and/or why did the writer establish the mood that he/she did?
   Does the tone “match” the story? What effect does it have? Did the writer consider tone, do you think?
   Did the writer use figurative language? What effect does this have?
   Consider the story’s syntax. Does this affect the story? How/why?
   How much dialogue compared to narration is in the story? What effect does this have?, etc.

15. **theme** – the central idea about human experience that we take from a pc. of lit. It’s kind of like the “moral to the story.” It is **NOT** plot!

   One thing to understand about theme is that the “moral” conveyed may **NOT** be a personal value or it may make you uncomfortable, but it IS what is conveyed in the piece.

   Exploring various topics (themes) in the story can help us develop a thematic statement. Themes might be: loss, friendship, betrayal, love, tragedy, relationships, hope, good vs. evil, death, human nature, people’s motives, courage, honor, etc.

   A thematic statement that might grow out of one of these topics, then, could be:
   "Tragedy can irrevocably destroy relationship."

16. **tone** – the writer’s (or the narrator’s [prose] or speaker’s [poetry]) attitude toward his or her subject or audience. The tone can often be described with one word, like formal, informal, light, somber, humorous, bitter, ironic, serious, passionate, etc.