Literary Terms

- *alliteration:* Alliteration is the name for repeated sounds – though not necessarily letters – at the beginnings of words in proximity, such as, "Chronological queens created many kaleidoscopes."

- *allusion:* In a work of literature, an allusion is a reference to characters, events, or elements from a separate literary work. William Blake's (1789/1979) "The Tyger," for example, alludes to the myths of Icarus and Prometheus, respectively, in lines 7–8: "On what wings dare he aspire?/What the hand dare seize the fire?"

- *analogy:* An analogy is a comparison of things by way of their similarities. If William Shakespeare were the European continent, one might analogize, then *Romeo and Juliet* would be Paris, France, its seat of romance and drama.

- *anaphora:* When Charles Dickens began *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859/1981) with "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity…" he utilized anaphora, the emphatic repetition of particular words or phrases at the beginnings of successive clauses or phrasal structures (p. 1).

- *anecdote:* An anecdote is a short, humorous story. The adjective "short" is, of course, only meaningful relative to other stories, but while *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is too long to be considered an anecdote, a 2-minute synopsis of that play is not.

- *antagonist:* The antagonist of any story is the character, institution, or force that opposes the tale's protagonist. It is a common misconception that one should be able to identify in any work of literature a singular antagonist; the collective antagonists at the end of Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, for example, are the rebelling Parisian Jacquerie. Moreover, in Orwell's *1984*, Big Brother is an institutional antagonist, while the truest

antagonist to be found in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* is the intangible, half-imagined Beast.

- *aphorism:* Truth be told, there is little difference between aphorisms and proverbs; thus, the explanatory definition of *proverb* also applies here. Perhaps the truest distinction to be made between the two is that aphorisms tend to be didactic, whereas proverbs are perhaps more observational or philosophical in nature.

- *apostrophe:* An apostrophe is a calling out or reaching out: to a deific force, to an absent person, to a deceased individual, to an inanimate object, or to anything else that is essentially incapable of response and/or comprehension. Two famous examples from Shakespeare are Antony's speech to the suddenly murdered Caesar in Julius Caesar – "O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth / That I am meek and gentle with these butchers!" (3.1.254-255) – and, from *Macbeth* (1606/1971), Lady Macbeth's bewildered and frustrated "Out, damned spot! Out, I say!" (5.1.32).

- *archaism:* An archaism is something archaic (old and outdated). Both criteria must be met, so while the English language, for example, is quite old, it is not yet outdated, and thus not archaic; on the other hand, the particular word "thee" is both old and outdated, so it is classifiable as an archaism.

- *aside:* There are two different types of dramatic commentary classifiable as asides. Firstly, moments arise in a scripted performance when a character briefly ceases speaking to others on stage and instead speaks directly to the audience, apparently the only people who can hear these comments; this type of aside is common in television sitcoms. Secondly, asides can be brief speeches wherein an actor on stage speaks only to himself or herself, inaudible to any other characters, as if he or she is simply thinking out loud; muttering under one's breath is a common example of this type of aside.

- *assonance:* Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds, as in the sentence "About the town the owl could not be found," wherein the words "About," "town," "owl," and "found" all contain identical vowel sounds, regardless of their distinct spellings.

- *atmosphere:* Students sometimes misconstrue a piece of writing's atmosphere for the author's tone, considering them synonymous, but there is a distinction. Whereas a writer's tone demonstrates his or her emotional or intellectual attitude, as communicated by diction and syntax, the atmosphere of a piece of literature is how that writing feels *to a reader*; the terms are effectively two sides of the same coin, therefore, and it is viable to conclude that an author's tone creates atmosphere.

- *cacophony:* The word *cacophony* describes harsh, discordant, probably loud noises, and it only is rarely applicable to textual writing, especially polished work of arta. Nevertheless, sometimes authors and poets do piece together, to make a particular point, words that are cacophonous if read aloud; Charles Dickens's (1859/1981) description of the storming of the Bastille, from *A Tale of Two Cities*, is a clear example of his attempt to replicate an aural cacophony: "Flashing weapons, blazing torches, smoking wagonloads of wet straw, hard work at neighbouring barricades in all directions, shrieks, volleys, execrations, bravery without stint, boom, smash and rattle, and the furious sounding of the living sea…" (p. 200).

- *caesura:* Caesurae occur when natural pauses arise within lines of metrical verse. They are commonly noted by a double-slash "//" which is not to be confused with the single-slash "/" indicating line breaks. Terminologists debate whether a pause for punctuation technically qualifies as a caesura, but the majority opinion is that it does, as in Polonius's advice to Laertes in *Hamlet* (1600/1970): "This above all, // to thine own self be true, /

And it must follow // as the night the day / Thou canst not then be false // to any man"

(1.3.78-80).

- *characterization, direct and indirect:* Characterization is the way in which an author

illuminates a character's personality; it has less to do with someone's size or physical

appearance than with his or her personality. Direct characterization occurs when the

audience is explicitly told something about a character, such as, "Todd was really

friendly and energetic." Indirect characterization requires that the audience infer

characteristics from someone's actions, dialogue, or decisions, or from another's

description; one can infer from this sentence, for example, the student's shy, scholarly

personality: "Yolanda always arrived early to class, but rarely contributed even a word to

the goings-on of the group, though the concentration of her eyes, sometimes compounded

with a contented slight smile, consistently demonstrated her intellectual engagement."

- *chiasmus:* A rhetorical device that is analogically described as a syntactical palindrome

or as "mirror-image parallelism," chiasmus is the effect of juxtaposed clauses that include

a relative reversal of word order and/or structure; it is closely related to and often

confused with *antimetabole*, as demonstrated in the famous incantation from *Macbeth*

(1606/1971), "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (1.1.10).

- *climax:* The climax of any narrative is the moment of highest suspense, excitement, and

drama, the last possible moment when it might be possible for the characters to "turn

back the clock," so to speak, and return to the ways that they were at the beginning of

their story. At the climax of Homer's *The Odyssey*, he finally arrives home in Ithaca,

sheds his beggarly disguise, thereby revealing his true identity, and enacts violent and

long-overdue vengeance upon the indignant, panicked suitors.

- *complication:* A story's complication is the plot twist that actually makes the rest of the narrative interesting, exciting, or dramatic; it commonly is confused with the inciting incident, which is the moment of time when the complication arises. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the complication is the love at first sight felt by Romeo and Juliet at the Capulets' ball, for if the lovers never actually love one another, well, then there's no rest of the story.

- *conceit:* A conceit is a metaphor that just does not work or fit very easily. The statement that "The United States of America is a venerable sea turtle, silently gliding through the blue depths" is a metaphor, yes, but it's a bit of a stretch. The word *conceited*, describing someone who makes or thinks too much of him- or herself, is related to this noun.

- *conflict:* Generally defined as a clash or struggle between opposing characters or forces, there are six major types of literary conflict: human vs. human (as Tybalt vs. Mercutio), human vs. nature (as in *Lord of the Flies*), human vs. self (exemplified clearly by both Hamlet and Lady Macbeth), human vs. the supernatural (portrayed strongly in *The Odyssey*), human vs. society (as in *1984*), and human vs. technology (as in Shelley's *Frankenstein*). As a rule, the greater the variety of conflicts in a story, the more engaging it will be.

- *consonance:* Consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds in close proximity, as in the sentence, "The archetypal arachnid attacked the critical acrobat's katydid," where the hard "k" sound is repeated six times.

- *contraction:* Shakespeare's iambic pentameter, like all lines of metrical verse, requires a set number of syllables per line. Oftentimes, the Bard needed to say something within a line of verse, but could do so no better than to contract a word into fewer syllables. "For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night" is an example, as the contraction of the two-syllable "never" into one syllable retains the necessary 10 syllables (1.5.60).

- *couplet, rhyming and unrhymed:* A poetic couplet is a series of two successive lines. They need not rhyme, but when they do, they are classified as a rhyming couplet: "Tyger! Tyger! burning bright/In the forests of the night" (Blake, 1789/1979, lns. 1–2). Otherwise, a couplet is simply unrhymed: "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?/Thou art more lovely and more temperate" (Shakespeare Sonnet 18, 1609/1997, lns.1–2).

- *deification:* Deification is the treatment of something, usually an abstract noun, as some kind of higher power or force, independent of and probably more powerful or influential than humans. Concepts or objects deified in this way are indicated in text by their capitalization, as is Power in Percy Shelley's poem "Mont Blanc."

- *dialect:* A dialect is a form of language that is characteristic of a particular regional (or otherwise homogenized) group of people. Portrayals of dialects are common among regionalist writers such as Twain or Faulkner.

- *dialogue:* A true dialogue is a conversation between two persons, but the word also describes any conversation among three or more individuals. Any portion of a staged drama (that is neither a monologue nor a soliloquy) is a dialogue.

- *diction:* Diction is one's choice of words. The differences among vocabulary, diction, and syntax can be explained to students per this three-step process: one's vocabulary is his or her treasure chest of all the words that he or she knows; diction is the process of rummaging through that chest in order to choose words to use at any given moment; and syntax is the arrangement of them in a logical way, thereby creating linguistic meaning.

- *denouement:* The *denouement* of any story, also known as resolution, is the end result, where the characters, conflicts, and situations stand on the last page, so to speak. The word itself is French, and means "the unwinding" or "unknotting"; thus, the *denouement*

of *Romeo and Juliet* is that both eponymous lovers are dead, as are four other persons, but the Capulet and Montague families have resolved to make peace with one another.

- *enjambment:* Enjambment is a poetic device whereby syllables, within lines of patterned verse, run over into subsequent lines, making the lines of regularized, syllabic verse "irregular." For example, Dr. Seuss's (1960) famous couplet, "I do not like green eggs and ham./I do not like them, Sam-I-Am," is written in iambic tetrameter (p. 16). Were he to utilize enjambment, however, then the lines might read instead, "I will not eat green eggs/And ham, I will not eat them, Sam I Am." Poets often use enjambment to highlight or emphasize certain words or phrases over others.

- *enunciation:* In metrical poetry, to enunciate is to read as a separate syllable one part of a word that normally would not be. For example, the word "martyred" is normally spoken as a two-syllable word; to enunciate the final suffix, "martyrèd," is to make it a three-syllable word. Poets commonly enunciate syllables to retain metrical regularity, and they often indicate enunciated syllables through the use of an *accent grave* ("è").

- *epiphora:* Sometimes alternately called "epistrophe," epiphora is the repetition of words or phrases at the ends of successive clauses or phrasal structures, such as in the observation, "As plants are reborn, as the seasons are reborn, so opportunity can be reborn."

- *epithet:* An epithet is a phrase that is commonly used to describe a certain individual or characteristic, sort of like a cultural code. To describe someone as being "under the weather," for example, is a coded way of saying that he or she is ill.

- *euphony:* The opposite of cacophony, euphony is the grouping together of harmonic, pleasing sounds. Much poetry is naturally euphonic, engendered by such devices as alliteration and consonance, such as in these lines from Robert Frost's (1923/1969)

"Nothing Gold Can Stay": "Nature's first green is gold,/Her hardest hue to hold./Her early leaf's a flower;/But only so an hour./Then leaf subsides to leaf" (lns. 1–5).

- *exposition:* In any chronological narrative, the exposition occurs prior to the introduction of the major complication via the inciting incident. It contains a near-complete lack of tension and excitement—its purpose, after all, is to explicate basic elements such as characters and setting—so any story's suspense rises only after its exposition's conclusion, hence the rising of the "plot graph" toward the climax. Almost the entirety of *Romeo and Juliet*'s Act I qualifies as its exposition, in which we meet the Capulets and Montagues, learn about their feud, identify where and when the story takes place, and so on. Until Romeo meets Juliet at the Capulets' ball, which is the inciting incident of the play, there really is no suspense, hence the flatness of the exposition's depiction.

- *falling action:* A story's falling action occurs after the passage of its climax. For example, at the top of any rollercoaster's first hill, up which the cars go slowly and steadily, there is that last possible moment when the ride could be stopped mechanically, when the cars would cease their progress and nobody would have to speed downhill; after the passage of that last possible moment of stoppage, however, gravity takes over, and the cars must speed inevitably downward. If that last moment before gravity takes over is the story's climax, then the speeding downhill is the falling action, during which it is literally impossible to stop the plot's action and return to the narrative's beginning unaltered.

- *figurative language:* Figurative language describes one thing in terms of something else, though not meant to be understood literally. It is the larger categorical umbrella under which metaphors, similes, analogies, allegories, symbols, and the like all fit. The statement that "it's raining cats and dogs" often is called a "figure of speech," a phrase derived from the description, "figurative language."

- *foils:* Foils are, widely speaking, opposites in one or more characteristic ways; foils need not be total opposites, and they need not be characters, which are more particularly classified as "character foils." In *Romeo and Juliet*, Tybalt and Mercutio are both young, both male, and both antagonistic toward their perceived rival family, yet they qualify as foils because of their opposite temperaments and approaches to that antagonism: while Mercutio is most of the time mockingly fun-loving, Tybalt is constantly, aggressively belligerent, incapable of even a whit of humor.

- *foreshadowing:* Authors foreshadow future events when they hint or suggest at what may be to come. As Romeo leaves Juliet's bedroom, descending from her balcony in Act III, scene v, she prophetically remarks, "O God, I have an ill-divining soul!/Methinks I see thee, how thou art so low,/As one dead in the bottom of a tomb," a clear example of foreshadowing (54-56).

- *hemistich:* Among the questions most frequently asked of teachers by students new to reading Shakespeare is why the beginnings of certain dialogic lines are indented far beyond the leftmost margin, seeming in fact to begin in the middle of the page. The answer is that these indented half-lines function with the truncated lines above them to form complete units of metrical verse. In other words, in the first scene of *Macbeth* (1606/1971), when one witch asks, "Where the place?" and another responds (indented halfway into the page), "Upon the heath," these two sentences constitute one full line of trochaic tetrameter (1.1.6). A hemistich is a half-line of metrical verse, so it is accurate to say that when Shakespeare cut off one line of verse early and indented a second one below it, he was in most cases composing a full line of metrical dialogue using two hemistiches.

- *heroic couplet:* A traditional heroic couplet is formed by two lines of iambic pentameter, including masculine end rhyme. *King Lear*'s concluding sentence constitutes a heroic couplet.

- *hyperbole:* Hyperbole is extreme exaggeration, often used to emphasize the power or depth of emotions. Saying, "I'm so hungry that I could eat a horse!" is an example.

- *idiom:* An idiom is a common expression in a particular language that means, connotatively, something quite different than the individual denotations of its words do. For example, the sayings "the early bird gets the worm" and "if you can't stand the heat, then get out of the kitchen" communicate much more than their simple, commonplace words do at face value.

- *imagery:* Imagery is language that appeals to or enlivens one's senses, recreating sensations of sight, touch, taste, smell, and hearing. Consider this excerpt from *Lord of the Flies* as an example: "Toward noon, as the floods of light fell more nearly to the perpendicular, the stark colors of the morning were smoothed in pearl and opalescence; and the heat—as though the impending sun's height gave it momentum—became a blow that they ducked, running to the shade and lying there. . . " (Golding, 1954/2006, p. 58).

- *implied metaphor:* An implied metaphor is a symbolic comparison that the author does not state outright, but instead simply suggests by using words connotative of the comparison. In Coleridge's (1798/1973) "Kubla Khan," for instance, phrases such as "oh! that deep romantic chasm" (ln. 12), "woman wailing for her demon lover" (ln. 16), "this earth in fast thick pants were breathing" (ln. 18), and "a mighty fountain momently was forced" (ln. 19) imply a biological subtext quite distinct from Kubla's attempt to build a riverside home in Xanadu.

- *inciting incident:* The moment when a story's complication is introduced, an inciting incident follows the narrative's exposition and begins the rising action.

- *internal rhyme:* Internal rhyme occurs, apropos of its name, internally within individual lines of poetry. Consider this description of ice from line 61 of Coleridge's (1798/1973) "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner": "It cracked and growled, and roared and howled." There is no need to look at any other lines for evidence of rhyme, since "growled" and "howled" here fit the bill within their own singular line.

- *irony:* Irony generally is defined as a difference between expectation and reality. If one walks into a restaurant, then he or she expects the presence of food, dishes, and utensils, so a restaurant devoid of these staples is an example of irony. There are also specific variants, including dramatic irony, occurring when an audience knows something that characters on stage do not, and verbal irony, whereby what a person says is different than what he or she actually means.

- *jargon:* Jargon is diction that is characteristic of a particular group of people or an activity. It is commonly confused with the term *dialect*, which refers to larger patterns of speech, rather than to individual words. Many of the words and terms in this small glossary are themselves the jargon of literary scholars and students.

- *juxtaposition:* The placement of disparate objects, characters, or other elements in close proximity is called juxtaposition, the purpose of which is to highlight the differences between the two things juxtaposed, often identifiable as foils.

- *legend:* A legend is a story that has some basis, however small, in historical fact, but that has grown over time. The famous story of George Washington cutting down his father's cherry tree is one such tale. The story of King Lear and his three daughters is another.

- *loaded language:* Diction that conveys strong emotional, social, or political connotations is called loaded language; such words and phrases are effectively loaded with meaning beyond that conveyed by a dictionary. Denotatively, the word *sissy*, for example, is simply a shortened form of "sister," but at least on elementary school playgrounds throughout much of the country, it is connotatively loaded with much more social and emotional meaning.

- *metaphor:* A metaphor is a figurative comparison between two things or their qualities, made without the words "like" or "as." "Bob is a riot!" is a simple metaphor describing a humorous student. As a metaphor does not explicate two things' *likeness*, implying by the omission of "like" or "as" their *sameness*, it is arguably more figurative than a simile.

- *meter:* A thorough explication of poetic meter, including all of its potential variations and subtleties, requires much more space than this short entry allows, perhaps even than this entire book provides. Nevertheless, it is important not to neglect the fact that Shakespeare wrote the majority of his dialogue in metrical verse, predominantly in iambic pentameter. An iamb is a two-syllable pattern wherein the second syllable is more strongly or highly stressed than the first; its converse is the trochee. Examples of iambic words are "forget," "regard," "askew," and "around," all of which are naturally said with greater stress on the last syllable. The word "pentameter" is just a simple way to denote the fact that there are five iambs in one line of verse, as "penta-" comes from the Greek word for five. Thus, one line of iambic pentameter contains 10 syllables, the even-numbered of which are stressed; a clear example of iambic pentameter occurs in the second line of *Romeo and Juliet*'s Prologue: "In fair Verona, where we lay our scene." Another example occurs in the King Lear's famous response to Cordelia's honesty, "Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again" (1.1.99). It is perhaps important to note for students, moreover, that

Shakespeare sometimes also composed in trochees (e.g., *Macbeth*'s three witches) and in metrical patterns other than pentameter (e.g., the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*).

- *metonymy:* A figure of speech with which an author refers to something indirectly, metonymy references the name of something else with which it is associated; it differs from a regular symbol in its reliance on a name, not an object, as the associative link. Uncle Sam is a clear use of metonymy, for rather than being an actual person, Uncle Sam is simply a name with which the United States Government is associated.

- *monologue:* A monologue is a long speech by one person to an audience of any number of people. Any extended speech to another character qualifies. In Shakespeare, Antony's "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears" speech from *Julius Caesar* (1599/1971) is a fine example of a monologue, as is every political speech ever made (3.2.73).

- *motif:* An object, idea, phenomenon, or circumstance that communicates figurative value or meaning in a work of literature is symbolic, but a symbol does not become a motif unless it appears repeatedly, accruing interpretability as it continues to arise in different situations. F. Scott Fitzgerald's continual emphasis on characters' (and even disembodied) eyes in *The Great Gatsby* is a fine example.

- *motivation:* Simply stated, one's motivation is the reason why he or she pursues a particular course of action; one's motivation for riding a bicycle rather than walking to a destination, for example, is probably speed.

- *oxymoron:* A phrase that seems to contradict itself, composed of contrasting parts, is an oxymoron. The phrases "jumbo shrimp," "black light," and even "Biggie Smalls" are clear examples of such self-contradictory construction.

- *paradox:* A paradox (often called a catch-22) is a close cousin of the oxymoron, yet they differ in that an oxymoron is strictly linguistic in nature, while a paradox is actually a situation, a combination of factors in life, that is seemingly self-contradictory. A paradox to which many teenagers can relate concerns the quest for employment: one needs work experience to get a job, but one needs a job to gain work experience.

- *parallel plots:* Narrative plots that occur simultaneously in "real time" in a work of literature, though their circumstances are separate, are called parallel plots. For most of *A Tale of Two Cities*, for example, the narrative line occurring in England is separate from, but concurrent with, the events happening in France.

- *parallelism:* Parallelism is a word that describes the construction of a piece of writing in some kind of repetitive or otherwise logically structured way. Compare-and-contrast essays are generally written utilizing parallelism, for they tend to alternate extendedly and repetitively between two considered items.

- *personification:* When a writer attributes human characteristics to inhuman things, it is called *personification*. A very simple example is an "angry storm."

- *prose:* The opposite of verse, prose is most easily described as "normal" sentence-and-paragraph-style writing. Novels and newspapers are written in prose, while poems are written in verse.

- *protagonist:* The protagonist of any narrative is the main character around whom the story revolves. I like to think of the protagonist as the central hub around which all of the spokes of a story's wheel rotate; remove that hub from the plot, and the story simply falls apart. By this calculus, Charles Dickens explicitly identifies Lucie Manette-Darnay, rather than any of his male characters granted considerably more dialogue, as the

protagonist of *A Tale of Two Cities*; if Lucie were not present, then the story's concentration of characters, and thus its plot, would simply never cohere.

- *proverb:* A proverb is an old, common saying that makes a wise observation about life. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" is an English proverb; ironically enough, many of Shakespeare's more quotable observations about life have actually reached proverbial status, such as King Claudius's poignant observation in *Hamlet* (1600/1970), "When sorrows come, they come not single spies, / But in battalions" (4.5.78–79), which actually echoes another, much more common, proverb: "when it rains, it pours."

- *pun:* A pun is a play on like-sounding, but distinctly meaningful words (homonyms). Much of the sexual humor extant in *Romeo and Juliet* arises from characters' punning, as does its introductory banter concerning coals, choler, and colliers (1.1).

- *redundancy:* Although technically not a literary device, but a syntactical error, redundancy is an element of dialogue that is somewhat common in Shakespeare's plays, usually to emphasize some point. Mercutio's description of Queen Mab's chariot, "drawn by a team of little atomi," is redundant, because atoms naturally are little (1.4.62).

- *refrain:* Anything that is repeated or returned to constantly can be called a refrain. If asked, many teenagers are likely to identify daily refrains of showering and brushing their teeth, weekly refrains of Saturday sleep-ins, monthly refrains of full and new moons, and annual refrains of holiday celebrations. A strong example of a literary refrain is Charles Dickens's continued mention of the golden thread in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

- *rhetorical question:* A rhetorical question is one to which the inquirer actually expects no response. "What's up?" is a standard rhetorical question, often asked in passing, as is the affixation of "you know?" at the ends of sentences.

- *rhyme, feminine and masculine:* Children learn about rhyme as they learn to talk and read. Few students, however, recognize the difference between the two major types of rhyme. Feminine rhyme occurs when multiple syllables at the ends of words are rhymed, such as "toaster" and "roaster," or "pigeon" and "religion." Masculine rhyme, by contrast, occurs when only the last syllable shared by words is rhymed, such as "principal" and "recital," or "Shakespeare" and "dear." The effect of feminine rhyme often is faster-paced and/or more comedic than masculine rhyme, which is simpler and probably less forced.

- *rhyme scheme:* A poem or dramatic excerpt's rhyme scheme is the pattern created by an author's use of end rhyme. The first rhyme used in any pattern is labeled rhyme A, the second rhyme used, regardless of the line on which it arises, is labeled rhyme B, and so on. Thus, poems written strictly in rhyming couplets utilize a rhyme scheme labeled AABBCC, while lines of alternating rhyme, such as the first three quatrains of any Shakespearean sonnet, are classifiable according to an ABAB scheme. Not all verse, of course, rhymes according to regularized schemes, such as blank verse, which by definition incorporates no rhyme scheme.

- *rising action:* The rising action of any plot occurs after the inciting incident's introduction of the main complication. This name, rising action, effectively describes the period of any story between its inciting incident and climax, wherein tension, drama, and action supposedly rise parallel to the progress of time. In *Macbeth*, every event that occurs following Macbeth's midnight murder of King Duncan qualifies as part of the rising action, leading the power-hungry, paranoid Scotsman ultimately and inevitably to his climactic confrontation with Macduff.

- *setting:* Details regarding where and when a story takes place contribute to that story's setting. *Romeo and Juliet* is set in Verona, Italy, circa 1590, while the setting of *The Great Gatsby* is New York City during the Roaring Twenties. Not all narratives require clearly distinguishable settings (e.g., *Waiting for Godot*), and it is certainly possible for a story to have more than one.

- *simile:* Like a metaphor, a simile is a figurative comparison between two things or their qualities, though a simile makes that comparison more explicit, incorporating the comparative words "like" or "as." Describing students, I might say that "Jessica is as sharp as a tack," while "Joe has a memory like a steel trap."

- *slant rhyme:* Slant rhyme, also known as approximate rhyme, occurs when authors attempt to rhyme words that, well, simply do not rhyme exactly. "What immortal hand or eye/Could frame thy fearful symmetry?" Blake (1789/1979) asks in an infamous example of slant rhyme from "The Tyger" (lns. 3–4). Readers generally are supposed to overlook slant rhyme's inexactness, granting the poet or author artistic license for the sake of making his or her literary point.

- *soliloquy:* Commonly confused with monologue, a soliloquy is a long speech wherein a person speaks to no one but himself or herself, thinking privately but aloud. The two most famous soliloquies in all of Shakespeare occur in *Romeo and Juliet*'s balcony scene and *Hamlet* (1600/1970)—"To be or not to be—that is the question" (3.1.56).

- *sonnet, Shakespearean or English:* My experience is that high school students somehow pick up the misconception that Shakespeare "invented" the sonnet. While he may have perfected it, depending on one's literary tastes, the poetic form itself arose long before the Bard ever took his first breath. Moreover, the form known as the Shakespearean or English sonnet, written in iambic pentameter and incorporating the rhyme scheme

ABABCDCDEFEFGG, is far from the only style extant; technically, all that a poet requires in order to pen a sonnet is 14 lines, a rhyme scheme, and a regularized metrical pattern. Thus, there are potentially as many sonnet forms in the world as there are creative sonneteers. Nevertheless, Shakespeare's is by far the most recognizable and common type of sonnet in English, three examples of which he incorporated into *Romeo and Juliet*, the two speeches spoken by the Chorus and the initial 14-line exchange between Romeo and Juliet at the Capulets' feast.

- *stage directions:* Stage directions in Shakespearean plays are scant, which is one reason why directors and actors so love the creative license afforded them by the Bard. In his dramas, however, they serve the same purposes that they do in other plays: to direct actors' movements and emotions, as well as to describe stage settings. The most famous stage direction in all of Shakespeare occurs in Act III, scene iii of *The Winter's Tale* (1611/1971), where Antigonus is directed to "*Exit, pursued by a bear.*"

- *stereotype:* It is perhaps easier for teenagers to identify examples of stereotypes than it is for them to define exactly what they are. Specifically, a stereotype is a belief that all members of a given group share a certain characteristic, in terms of which they can be described homogeneously. The beliefs that all stereotypes concern people and that no stereotypes are true are actually stereotypes themselves; to wit, the belief that all coffee is caffeinated is a stereotype that has nothing to do with people, and the statement that all licensed high school teachers graduated high school themselves is a true stereotype.

- *stream of consciousness:* Stream of consciousness is a style of writing aimed at imitating the discursive meanderings of human thought patterns, rather than following any kind of tightly focused organizational pattern. Beat writers, such as Jack Kerouac, commonly

utilized stream of consciousness in their works, as did Walt Whitman in many of his longer poems.

- *suspense:* Everything from fearful anxiety and apprehension to pleasant excitement, suspense is the quality felt by a reader or audience that is engaged in a narrative, unknowingly anticipating its outcome. We can imagine the suspense that *Romeo and Juliet*'s first audiences felt as Romeo descended into the Capulets' crypt in Act V, scene iii, ready to take his own life just as Juliet was about to wake up from her intoxication.

- *synecdoche:* Synecdoche is a figure of speech whereby something is identified only by mention of a smaller part of itself. "I soared into the air as the wheels left the runway" is an example of synecdoche used to describe an airplane's departure, for while the entire aircraft became airborne, only its wheels are mentioned.

- *syntax:* The placement of words in a logical order to create communicative meaning, syntax follows diction as the next step in the linguistic process; once one has chosen the words "dog," "ran," "my," "door," "to," and "the," they need to be placed syntactically into a sensible order to communicate meaning.

- *theme:* A literary theme is a philosophical idea, conjecture, or belief that is communicated through a work's dialogue, events, circumstances, or outcome. The difficulty of love (not just love itself) is a clear theme in *Romeo and Juliet*.

- *tone:* The word *tone* usually is associated with speaking voice, but a person's tone can come across on paper just as easily as it can face-to-face. What someone's tone illuminates is his or her attitude toward a subject; on the printed page, that attitude is communicated via a writer's choice of words. One author's description of the "banal, anachronistically cute soiree" differs significantly from another's "enjoyably lighthearted

picnic," though both writers may be describing the same event, toward which their attitudes obviously differ.

- *verse, blank and rhymed:* Verse is a synonym for metrical poetry (i.e., poetic lines that adhere strictly to patterns of meter). Because all verse, therefore, must by definition contain meter, the only issue is whether that verse rhymes (rhymed verse) or does not rhyme (blank verse). Percy Shelley's "Ozymandias" is an example of a near-sonnet written in blank verse, for while it contains 14 lines and is written in iambic pentameter, there is no regularized rhyme scheme to be found.