Figurative Language

- **Allusion**: An indirect reference to something (usually a literary text) with which the reader is expected to be familiar. Allusions are usually literary, historical, Biblical, or mythological. E.g. “She’s an Einstein!”

- **Analogy**: An analogy is a comparison to a directly parallel case. When a writer uses an analogy, he or she argues that a claim reasonable for one case is reasonable for the analogous case. E.g. “The structure of an atom is like a solar system. The nucleus is the sun and electrons are the planets revolving around their sun.”

- **Conceit**: An often unconventional, logically complex, or surprising metaphor whose delights are more intellectual than sensual. Basically, a deeper, more complex extended metaphor. E.g. the compass image from John Donne’s metaphysical poem “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning.”

- **Hyperbole**: Conscious exaggeration used to heighten effect. Not intended literally, hyperbole is often humorous. E.g. “I could eat ten million cupcakes right now!” See litotes and understatement.

- **Irony**: Generally speaking, a discrepancy between expectation and reality.
  - Dramatic irony: When the reader/viewer is aware of an inconsistency between a character's perception of a situation and the truth of that situation.
  - Situational irony: When the direct result of an action that is contrary to the desired or the expected outcome. E.g. a police man is sent to jail for not paying his speeding tickets.
  - Verbal irony: When the reader is aware of a discrepancy between the real meaning of a situation and the literal meaning of the writer's words.

- **Litotes**: An understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of the contrary. E.g. “not a bad singer” or “not unhappy.” See hyperbole and understatement.

- **Metaphor**: A comparison of two things, often unrelated or unalike. A figurative verbal equation results where both "parts" illuminate one another. E.g. “I am swimming in a sea of grief.” See simile.
  - Dead metaphor: One so overused that its original impact has been lost.
  - Extended metaphor: One developed at length and involves several points of comparison.
  - Mixed metaphor: When two metaphors are jumbled together, often illogically.

- **Metonymy**: The use of the name of one thing for that of another of which it is an attribute or with which it is associated. E.g. “Washington controls the country” (where “Washington” stands for the U.S. government). See synecdoche.

- **Oxymoron**: Juxtaposing two opposing or contradictory terms, like “wise fool” or “deafening silence.”
• **Paradox**: A seemingly contradictory statement or situation that is actually true. E.g. being cruel to be kind.

• **Personification**: Figurative language in which inanimate objects, animals, ideas, or abstractions are endowed with human traits or human form. E.g. “The stars winked at us in the sky.”

• **Simile**: A figurative comparison of two things, often dissimilar, using “like” or “as.” E.g. “Her presence lit up the room as the sun.”

• **Symbol**: A thing, event, or person that represents or stands for some idea or event. Symbols also simultaneously retain their own literal meanings. E.g. the river in *Huckleberry Finn* symbolizes the external and internal journey Huck goes on in the story.

• **Synecdoche**: When part of something is used to stand for the whole. E.g. “threads” for clothes or “wheels” for cars. *See metonymy.*

• **Synesthesia**: An attempt to fuse different senses by describing one kind of sense impression in words normally used to describe another. E.g. “a loud aroma,” “her voice sounded sweet.”

• **Understatement**: Deliberately representing something as much less than it really is. E.g. Saying “It’s kind of chilly out today” when it is -20F outside. *See litotes and hyperbole.*

**Diction**

• **Colloquial**: Ordinary or familiar type of conversation. A “colloquialism” is a common or familiar type of saying, similar to an adage or an aphorism. E.g. “If I must be sold, or all the people on the place, and everything go to rack, why, let me be sold. I s’pose I can b’ar it as well as any on ’em” (*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe).

• **Connotation**: Rather than the dictionary definition, the associations associated by a word. Implied meaning rather than literal meaning or denotation. E.g. the difference between “house” – a building in which one lives – versus “home” (safety, peace, belonging, etc.). *See denotation.*

• **Denotation**: The dictionary definition or literal meaning of the term. *See connotation.*

• **Diction**: Word choice, particularly as an element of style. Different types and arrangements of words have significant effects on meaning.

• **Euphemism**: The use of a word or phrase that is less direct, but is also considered less distasteful or less offensive than another. *E.g.* "He is at rest" instead of "He is dead."

• **Jargon**: The diction used by a group which practices a similar profession or activity. Lawyers speak using particular jargon, as do soccer players.

• **Pun**: A play on words that are identical or similar in sound but have sharply diverse meanings. E.g. “You have dancing shoes / With nimble soles. I have a soul of lead” (*Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare).
• **Vernacular**: 1. Language or dialect of a particular country. 2. Language or dialect of a regional clan or group. 3. Plain everyday speech.

**Syntax**

• **Anadiplosis**: Repetition of the last word of one clause at the beginning of the following clause. E.g. “Aboard my ship, excellent performance is standard. Standard performance is sub-standard. Sub-standard performance is not permitted to exist.” (Captain Queeg, Herman Wouk’s *The Caine Mutiny*)

• **Anaphora**: Repetition of a word, phrase, or clause at the beginning of two or more sentences in a row. E.g. “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, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair” (*A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens).

• **Anastrophe**: Another name for inversion (where the order of the noun and the adjective in the sentence is exchanged so that the noun is followed by the adjective). This reversed order creates a dramatic impact and lends weight to the description offered by the adjective. E.g. “This is the forest primeval” (from Longfellow’s poem “Evangeline”), instead of “This is the primeval forest.” Yoda talks this way 😊

• **Antanaclasis**: Repetition of a word or phrase whose meaning changes in the second instance. These are often “puns” as well. E.g. "If you aren't fired with enthusiasm, you will be fired with enthusiasm" (Vince Lombardi).

• **Antimetabole**: A pattern in which the second half of an expression is balanced against the first but with the words in reverse grammatical order (A-B, B-A). E.g. “You have to know how to accept rejection and reject acceptance” (Ray Bradbury). *See chiasmus.*

• **Antithesis**: A balancing of two opposite or contrasting words, phrases, or clauses. E.g. “Give me liberty or give me death” (Patrick Henry).

• **Asyndeton**: A series of words separated by commas (with no conjunction). E.g. "I came, I saw, I conquered." The parts of the sentence are emphasized equally and the use of commas with no intervening conjunction speeds up the flow of the sentence. *See polysyndeton.*

• **Chiasmus**: Arrangement of repeated thoughts in the pattern of X Y Y X. Chiasmus is often short and summarizes a main idea. E.g. “Fair is foul, and foul is fair” (Shakespeare). *See antimetabole.*

• **Cumulative sentence**: Sentence which begins with the main idea and then expands on that idea with a series of details or other particulars. E.g. “The lion emerged across the stream, beyond the clearing, from behind a fallen tree.” *See periodic sentence.*

• **Declarative sentence**: States an idea. It does not give a command or request, nor does it ask a question. E.g. “The ball is round.”
• **Ellipsis**: The omission of a word or words. It refers to constructions in which words are left out of a sentence but the sentence can still be understood. E.g. “John can speak seven languages, but Ron can speak only two [languages].”

• **Epanalepsis**: Repetition of the same word or words at both beginning and ending of a phrase, clause, or sentence. Like other schemes of repetition, epanalepsis often produces or expresses strong emotion. E.g. “Blood hath bought blood, and blows have answer’d blows;/ Strength match’d with strength, and power confronted power” (Shakespeare’s *King John*).

• **Epistrophe**: Repetition of the same word or group of words at the ends of successive phrases. Like anaphora, epistrophe produces a strong rhythm and emphasis. E.g. “As long as the white man sent you to Korea, you bled. He sent you to Germany, you bled. He sent you to the South Pacific to fight the Japanese, you bled” (“Message to the Grass Roots” speech by Malcolm X).

• **Imperative sentence**: Issues a command. E.g. “Kick the ball.”

• **Interrogative sentence**: Sentences incorporating interrogative pronouns (what, which, who, whom, and whose) and/or ask questions. E.g. “To whom did you kick the ball?”

• **Parallelism**: The use of successive constructions in poetry or prose that correspond in grammatical structure, sound, meter, meaning, etc. E.g. “Maggie rode the llamas, saw Machu Picchu, and ate Peruvian foods.” Frequently appears as listing; can give a sense of multiplicity.

• **Periodic sentence**: Sentence that places the main idea or central complete thought at the end of the sentence, after all introductory elements. E.g. “Across the stream, beyond the clearing, from behind a fallen tree, the lion emerged.” *See cumulative sentence.*

• **Polyptoton**: Repetition of words derived from the same root. E.g. “But in this desert country they may see the land being rendered useless by overuse” (*The Voice of the Desert* by Joseph Wood Krutch).

• **Polysyndeton**: Sentence that uses “and” or another conjunction, with no commas, to separate the items in a series, usually appearing in the form X and Y and Z, stressing equally each member of the series. E.g. “We have ships and men and money and stores.” *See asyndeton.*

• **Repetition**: Word or phrase used two or more times in close proximity.

• **Syntax**: Sentence structure.

• **Zeugma**: Using one word to govern several successive words are clauses. E.g. “We were partners, not soul mates, two separate people who happened to be sharing a menu and a life” (*The Hundred Secret Senses* by Amy Tan).

**Genres and Types**

• **Allegory**: A narrative or description having a second meaning beneath the surface one. A story, fictional or nonfiction, in which characters, things, and events represent qualities or concepts. The interaction of these characters, things, events is meant to reveal an abstraction or a truth. These
characters, etc. may be symbolic of the ideas referred to. E.g. *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, *The Lord of the Flies* by William Golding.

- **Archetype**: A term borrowed by psychologist Carl Jung who described archetypes as "primordial images" formed by repeated experiences in the lives of our ancestors, inherited in the "collective unconscious" of the human race and expressed in myths, religion, dreams, fantasies, and literature. These "images" of character, plot pattern, symbols recur in literature and evoke profound emotional responses in the reader because they resonate with an image already existing in our unconscious mind. E.g. The Hero (character), Good vs. Evil (situation/plot), The Fall (situation/plot), etc.

- **Bildungsroman**: A novel about the moral and psychological growth of the main character. E.g. *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger.

- **Comedy**: In general, a story that ends with a happy resolution of the conflicts faced by the main character or characters. E.g. *As You Like It* by Shakespeare.

- **Didactic**: A form of fiction or nonfiction that teaches a specific lesson or moral or provides a model of correct behavior or thinking. E.g. morality plays, many children’s stories, etc.

- **Fable**: A short story, typically with animals as characters, conveying a moral. E.g. Aesop’s “The Fox and the Grapes.”

- **Farce**: A type of comedy in which one-dimensional characters are put into ludicrous situations; ordinary standards of probability and motivation are freely violated in order to evoke laughter. E.g. *Comedy of Errors* by Shakespeare or *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde.

- **Gothic**: A genre marked by fantastic tales dealing with horror, despair, the grotesque and other “dark” subjects. Popularized by American Romantics during the 19th century. E.g. “The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe.

- **Novel of manners**: A work of fiction that re-creates a social world, conveying with finely detailed observation the customs, values, and mores of a highly developed and complex society. E.g. *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen.

- **Parable**: A short story that teaches a moral or spiritual lesson, especially one of the stories told by Jesus Christ and recorded in the Bible. E.g. the parable of the Good Samaritan, “The Boy Who Cried Wolf.”

- **Parody**: An exaggerated imitation of a usually more serious work for humorous purposes. The writer of a parody uses the quirks of style of the imitated piece in extreme or ridiculous ways. E.g. *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* by Seth Grahame-Smith.

- **Satire**: A work that reveals a critical attitude toward some element of human behavior by portraying it in an extreme way. Satire doesn't simply abuse (as with invective) or get personal (as with sarcasm). Satire usually targets groups or large concepts rather than individuals; its purpose is customarily to inspire change. E.g. “A Modest Proposal” by Jonathan Swift.
• **Tragedy:** In general, a story in which a heroic character either dies or comes to some other unhappy end.

**Drama**

• **Apostrophe:** An address to the dead as if living; to the inanimate as if animate; to the absent as if present; to the unborn as if alive. E.g. "O Julius Caesar thou are mighty yet; thy spirit walks abroad" (Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*).

• **Aside:** A dramatic convention by which an actor directly addresses the audience but it is not supposed to be heard by the other actors on the stage.

• **Deus ex machina:** an unexpected power or event saving a seemingly hopeless situation, especially as a contrived plot device in a play or novel. Literally, “a god from the machine.”

• **Monologue:** A long speech by one actor in a play or movie, or as part of a theatrical or broadcast program.

• **Soliloquy:** When a character in a play speaks his thoughts aloud — usually by him or herself.

• **Stage direction:** A playwright’s descriptive or interpretive comments that provide readers (and actors) with information about the dialogue, setting, and action of a play.

• **Staging:** The spectacle a play presents in performance, including the position of actors on stage, the scenic background, the props and costumes, and the lighting and sound effects.

**Poetry**

• **Ballad:** A narrative poem written as a series of quatrains in which lines of iambic tetrameter alternate with iambic trimeter with an ABAB, CDCD rhyme scheme with frequent use of repetition and often including a refrain. The “story” of a ballad can be a wide range of subjects but frequently deals with folklore or popular legends. E.g. “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” by Coleridge.

• **Blank verse:** A poem written in unrhymed iambic pentameter. (Many of the plays of Shakespeare are written in this form.)

• **Caesura:** A break in the flow of sound in the middle of a line of verse, usually by punctuation.

• **Elegy:** A formal sustained poem lamenting the death of a particular person.

• **End rhyme:** When the last word of two different lines of poetry rhyme. E.g. “Roses are red, violets are blue, / Sugar is sweet, and so are you.”

• **Enjambment:** The continuation of a sentence or clause over a line-break.

• **Epic poem:** A long poem, typically one derived from ancient oral tradition, narrating the deeds and adventures of heroic or legendary figures or the history of a nation. E.g. *The Odyssey* by Homer.
• **Foot:** Metrical unit that consist of a particular arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables.
  
  o Common types of feet:
    • Iamb/Iambic (unstressed-stressed) e.g. invite
    • Trochee/Trochaic (stressed-unstressed) e.g. deadline
    • Anapest/Anaplectic (unstressed-unstressed-stressed) e.g. to the beach
    • Dactyl/Dactylic (stressed- unstressed-unstressed) e.g. frequently
    • Spondee/Spondaic (stressed-stressed) e.g. true blue
  
  o Common line lengths:
    • monometer: one foot
    • dimeter: two feet
    • trimeter: three feet
    • tetrameter: four feet
    • pentameter: five feet
    • hexameter: six feet
    • heptameter: seven feet
    • octameter: eight feet

• **Free verse:** Poetry that does not rhyme or have a regular meter.

• **Heroic couplet:** A couplet of rhyming iambic pentameters often forming a distinct rhetorical as well as metrical unit. E.g. “The time is out of joint, O curséd spite / That ever I was born to set it right!” *(Hamlet* by Shakespeare).

• **Iambic pentameter:** Poetry that is written in lines of 10 syllables, alternating unstressed and stressed syllables. “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?” *(Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 18”).

• **Internal rhyme:** When a line of poetry contains a rhyme within a single line. E.g. “To the rhyming and the chiming of the bells!”

• **Lyric:** A verse or poem that is, or supposedly is, susceptible of being sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument (in ancient times, usually a lyre) or that expresses intense personal emotion in a manner suggestive of a song. Lyric poetry expresses the thoughts and feelings of the poet and is sometimes contrasted with narrative poetry and verse drama, which relate events in the form of a story.

• **Meter:** A regular pattern to the syllables in lines of poetry.

• **Ode:** A poem written in a style marked by a rich, intense expression of an elevated thought praising a person or object. E.g. “Ode to a Nightingale” by Keats.

• **Refrain:** A word, phrase, line, or group of lines that is repeated, for effect, several times in a poem.

• **Rhyme scheme:** The pattern of a poem’s end rhymes. E.g. the following lines have a rhyme scheme of ABAB: “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day? / Thou art more lovely and more temperate.”
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May. / And summer’s lease hath all too short a date.” (Shakespeare).

- **Rhythm:** An audible pattern in verse established by the intervals between stressed syllables.

- **Sestina:** A complex French verse form, usually unrhymed, consisting of six stanzas of six lines each and a three-line envoy. The end words of the first stanza are repeated in a different order as end words in each of the subsequent five stanzas; the closing envoy contains all six words, two per line, placed in the middle and at the end of the three lines.

- **Shift:** A rhetorical shift or dramatic change in thought and/or emotion in a poem. There may or may not be a stanza break at the same moment.

- **Slant rhyme:** When a poet creates a rhyme, but the two words do not rhyme exactly – they are merely similar. E.g. “I sat upon a stone, / And found my life has gone.”

- **Sonnet:** A 14 line poem written in iambic pentameter usually divided into three quatrains and a couplet. There are various types of sonnets, the most prominent being Italian/Petrarchan, Shakespearean, and Spenserian.

- **Stanza:** A division of a poem created by arranging the lines into a unit, often repeated in the same pattern of meter and rhyme throughout the poem; a unit of poetic lines (a “paragraph” within the poem). Oftentimes, stanzas within a poem are separated by blank lines. Note: terms below are not exclusive to stand-alone stanzas. For example, even though sonnets consist of one visual block of text, they are technically composed of three quatrains and one couplet (to make 14 lines total).
  - Couplet: stanza consisting of two lines
  - Tercet: stanza consisting of three lines
  - Quatrain: stanza consisting of four lines
  - Quintain: stanza consisting of five lines
  - Sestet: stanza consisting of six lines
  - Septet: stanza consisting of seven lines
  - Octave: stanza consisting of eight lines

- **Villanelle:** A nineteen-line poem with two repeating rhymes and two refrains. The form is made up of five tercets followed by a quatrain. The first and third lines of the opening tercet are repeated alternately in the last lines of the succeeding stanzas; then in the final stanza, the refrain serves as the poem’s two concluding lines. E.g. “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night” by Dylan Thomas).

**Sound**

- **Alliteration:** The repetition at close intervals of initial identical consonant sounds. Or, vowel sounds in successive words or syllables that repeat. E.g. The weeping willow waves.”
• **Assonance**: Repetition of a vowel sound within two or more words in close proximity. E.g. “lake” and “fate.”

• **Cacophony**: A discordant series of harsh, unpleasant sounds helps to convey disorder. This is often furthered by the combined effect of the meaning and the difficulty of pronunciation. E.g. “My stick fingers click with a snicker / And, chuckling, they knuckle the keys” (“The Piano Player” by John Updike).

• **Consonance**: Repetition of a consonant sound within two or more words in close proximity. Unlike alliteration, the consonant sounds are not *initial*. E.g. “Nick dropped the locket in the thick mud.”

• **Euphony**: A series of musically pleasant sounds, conveying a sense of harmony and beauty to the language. E.g. “Than Oars divide the Ocean, / Too silver for a seam—” (“A Bird Came Down the Walk” by Emily Dickinson).

• **Onomatopoeia**: The use of a word whose pronunciation suggests its meaning. “Buzz,” “hiss,” “slam,” and “pop” are commonly used examples.

**Narrative and Authorial Technique**

• **Conflict**: The struggle between opposing forces or characters in a story (can be internal and/or external).

• **Epigraph**: A quotation or aphorism at the beginning of a literary work that suggests the work’s theme.

• **Foreshadowing**: The use of hints or clues to suggest what will happen later in the plot.

• **Frame story**: A story told within a frame or a story constituting a frame for another story or a series of other stories. E.g. In the film *Titanic*, we are first introduced to Rose as an old woman who then tells the story through a series of flashbacks.

• **Imagery**: The use of images, especially in a pattern of related images, often figurative, to create a strong unified sensory impression. Imagery appeals to our physical senses to create meaning.
  - Auditory: sound
  - Gustatory: taste
  - Kinesthetic: movement
  - Olfactory: smell
  - Organic: involving feelings of the body, like hunger, thirst, or lethargy.
  - Tactile: touch
  - Visual: sight

• **Mood**: The atmosphere created by the author’s words. E.g. peaceful, terrifying, etc.

• **Motif**: A frequently recurrent character, incident, or concept in literature. E.g. the “brooding gloom” over London in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. 
• **Persona:** A fictional voice used to tell a story. Persona or voice is usually determined by a combination of subject matter and audience.

• **Plot:** System of actions represented in a dramatic or narrative work.

• **Point of view:** The perspective from which a fiction or nonfiction story is told.
  - First person: the narrator exists within the world of the story, uses “I.”
  - Third person, limited: the narrator exists outside the world of the story, but doesn’t know everything.
  - Third person, omniscient: the narrator exists outside the world of the story and knows everything.
  - Unreliable: a narrator that gives the audience reason to doubt the veracity of the account.

• **Setting:** The context (e.g. locale and time period) in which the action takes place.

• **Stream of consciousness:** Technique of writing that undertakes to reproduce the raw flow of consciousness, with the perceptions, thoughts, judgments, feelings, associations, and memories presented just as they occur without being tidied into grammatical sentences or given logical and narrative order.

• **Style:** The distinctive choices in diction, tone, and syntax that a writer makes. E.g. Hemingway’s syntax is clipped and concise, whereas Faulkner’s is long and winding.

• **Tone:** A writer’s attitude toward his or her subject matter revealed through diction, figurative language, etc. E.g. disparaging, loving, etc.

• **Theme:** A central idea of a work of fiction or nonfiction, revealed and developed in the course of a story or explored through argument. The author’s serious message about life, humanity, love, relationships, etc. NOT a one-word answer, like “revenge” or “courage.”

**Characterization**

• **Antagonist:** Opponent who struggles against or blocks the hero, or protagonist, in a story. E.g. Iago in Shakespeare’s *Othello.*

• **Anti-Hero:** A central character in a story, movie, or drama who lacks conventional heroic attributes or is considered flawed. E.g. Jay Gatsby in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby.*

• **Characterization:** The method an author uses to develop characters in a work.
  - Direct characterization: The author states the character’s traits explicitly.
  - Indirect characterization: Traits are implied through what the character says, does, how the character dresses, interacts with other characters, etc.
- **Confidant(e):** Someone in whom the central character confides, thus revealing the main character’s personality, thoughts, and intentions. The confidant does not need to be a person. (Note: “confidante” is used for trusted female friends).

- **Dynamic character:** A character which changes during the course of a story or novel. The change in outlook or character is permanent. Sometimes a dynamic character is called a developing character. *See static character.*

- **Flat character:** A character who reveals only one, maybe two, personality traits in a story or novel, and the trait(s) do not change. *See round character.*

- **Foil:** A character who contrasts with another (usually the protagonist) in order to highlight particular qualities of the other character. E.g. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson.

- **Protagonist:** Chief character in a dramatic or narrative work, usually trying to accomplish some objective or working toward some goal.

- **Round character:** A well developed character who demonstrates varied and sometimes contradictory traits. Round characters are usually dynamic (change in some way over the course of a story). *See flat character.*

- **Static character:** A character that remains primarily the same throughout a story or novel. Events in the story do not alter a static character’s outlook, personality, motivation, perception, habits, etc. *See dynamic character.*

- **Stock character:** A conventional character types that recur repeatedly in various literary genres. E.g. the wicked stepmother or Prince Charming.