

Directions: Since it is not enough, in an AP class, to explicate poetry and prose in general terms, below are two lists key literary and poetic devices that can be used to strengthen any argument one makes about a text. An understanding of, and ability to apply, the terms listed below could prove the difference between success and failure on the AP exam. As such, you will be evaluated on your working knowledge of these terms throughout the school year.

Literary Devices

allegory—story with an underlying symbolic, metaphorical, or possibly ethical meaning

allusion—reference to a person, place, or event meant to enhance the meaning of a text

anachronism—person, scene, event, or other element that does not correspond to the time or era in which the work is set

apostrophe—a digression in the form of address to someone not present or to a personified object or idea; “Goodbye, cruel world, goodbye.”

bildungsroman— (German) novel concerned with the education, development, and maturing of a young protagonist

burlesque—a work of literature meant to ridicule a subject by vulgarizing lofty material or treating trite material with mock dignity

canon—works widely read, studied, and considered significant

catharsis—a purging and purification of emotion that results in renewal and restoration

climax—the high point, or turning point, of a story

conceit—a witty or ingenious concept (i.e. *Man in the High Castle*, *The Purge*, *Animal Farm*) OR a simile or metaphor that is exceedingly unlikely but intellectually imaginative

dénouement—the resolution at the end of a work

deus ex machina—(Latin—“God from the machine”) the use of an artificial plot device or gimmick to solve a problem

diction—word choice

didactic—intended for instruction

elliptical construction—a sentence composed with a deliberate omission of words, often signified by an ellipsis or a dash

empathy—a feeling of association or identification with an object or person

eponymous—character for whom a work is titled

euphemism—a mild or less negative usage for a harsh or blunt term; to *pass away* rather than to *die*

exposition—background that leads to the presentation of a work’s main idea

falling action—action that transpires after the climax and leads to the conclusion of a work

foil—character whose personality or attitude contrasts with that of another character (*foils often have traits in common with their counterparts that further emphasize their inherent differences*)

frame—structure that opens and closes with a larger premise or setting, providing for a thematically--or contextually--related narrative in between

Gothic—work in which supernatural horrors and/or an atmosphere of unknown terrors pervade the action

grotesque—strangely or fascinatingly distorted for comedic or dramatic effect

hyperbole—exaggeration for rhetorical effect

in medias res—(Latin—“in the midst of things”) narrative that does not start at the beginning of events but at some other critical point in the middle of the story

irony—state of affairs or events that is the reverse of what might have been expected

kenning—device employed in Anglo-Saxon poetry in which the name of a thing is replaced by one of its functions or qualities; “ring-giver” for king, “whale road” for ocean

litotes—a form of understatement in which the negative of the contrary is used to achieve emphasis or intensity. *She was not unattractive.*

loose sentence—sentence that begins with a main clause before cycling through other phrases and clauses that modify the main clause. *The fire alarm went off, making a loud clanging noise, startling everyone, and causing some people to knock over their chairs.*

metonymy—figure of speech that uses the name of one thing to represent something else with which it is associated; *The White house announced budget cuts in education; Pinned beneath the car he watched the life spill from his body.*

montage—a quick succession of images, impressions, or scenes used to express an idea

myth—traditional or legendary story, with or without a determinable basis of fact or natural explanation, that has become an accepted part of the cultural or religious tradition of a group or society

non sequitur—a statement or idea that fails to follow logically from the one before

oxymoron—a pairing of contradictory words juxtaposed to create a paradoxical effect; for example, “deafening silence,” “jumbo shrimp”

parody—an imitation of a work meant to ridicule its style and subject

pastoral—a work that displays the sprawling beauty of rural landscapes and the virtues of rural life

pathetic fallacy—rhetorical device that ascribes human feelings or emotions to inanimate objects of nature to create mood (*similar to personification, but pathetic fallacy only deals in feelings, emotions, and objects of nature*)

pathos—the element in a work of literature that stimulates pity or sorrow

periodic sentence—sentence that deviates from the customary syntax of English sentences by expressing its main thought only at the end. *In spite of heavy snow and cold temperatures, the game continued.*

picaresque—episodic novel about a roguelike wanderer who lives off his wits. *Indiana Jones. Pirates of the Caribbean. Forrest Gump. Guardians of the Galaxy.*

point of view (internal or external)—the relation in which a narrator/speaker stands to the story or subject matter; first person is *internal*, third person is *external*

realism—the depiction of people, things, and events as they really are without idealization or exaggeration for effect

rhetoric—language and style of a work

satire—literary style used to poke fun at, attack, or ridicule an idea, vice, or foible, often for the purpose of inducing change

stream of consciousness—style in which an author attempts to reproduce the random flow of thoughts in the human mind

synecdoche—figure of speech in which the part signifies the whole. *All hands on deck; Do you take her hand in marriage?; Lend me your ears.*

syntax—word order

tragedy—form of literature in which the hero is destroyed by some character flaw and a set of forces that cause the hero considerable anguish

verisimilitude—quality of realism in a work meant to convey a vision of life as it truly is

volta—any shift or turning point in a literary work

Poetic Devices

alliteration—repetition of a common *initial* sound in a group of words or lines of poetry or prose

assonance—repetition of a common vowel sound in a group of words or lines of poetry or prose

ballad—simple narrative verse that tells a story, could be sung or recited

blank verse—poetry written in unrhymed iambic pentameter

cacophony—grating, inharmonious sound; contrast with *euphony*

caesura—a pause somewhere in the middle of a line of verse, often marked by punctuation

consonance—repetition of a common consonant sound in a group of words or lines of poetry

couplet—pair of rhyming lines in a poem

elegy—work of poetry that laments or meditates on the passing or death of something or someone of value

end-stop—lines of poetry that end with a natural pause, often marked by punctuation

enjambment—successive lines of poetry with no punctuation or pause between them

epic—extended narrative poem that tells of the adventures and exploits of a hero who is generally larger than life and is often considered a legendary figure

euphony—pleasing, harmonious sounds; contrast with *cacophony*

explication—the interpretation or analysis of a text

foot—a unit of stressed and unstressed syllables used to determine the *meter* of a poetic line

free verse—poetry without rhyme, rhythm, or fixed metrical feet

heroic couplet—two rhymed lines written in iambic pentameter

idyll—poem that describes a kind of ideal life or place

meter—the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables found in poetry; also, *rhythm*

ode—lyric poem usually marked by serious, respectful, and exalted feelings toward the subject

onomatopoeia—use of words whose sounds suggest their meaning; “splash,” “bang”

pentameter—a verse with five poetic feet per line

quatrain—a four-line poem or a four-line unit of a longer poem

rhyme scheme—the pattern of rhymes within a given poem

sonnet—type of verse consisting of fourteen lines and a prescribed rhyme scheme

stanza—group of two or more lines in poetry combined according to subject matter, rhyme, or some other plan