

Refresher of Literary Terms

Theme - The central idea, topic, or point of a story, essay, or narrative is its theme.

Example: A boy and a girl fall in love. The boy is forced to join the army and fights to survive in a war-torn country as his beloved waits at home. When he returns from war, the two are united and married.

The love story also has many common themes in literature:

- (a) the power of true love
- (b) fate, which sometimes tears lovers apart and then joins them together
- (c) war

Symbol - A symbol is a literary device that contains several layers of meaning, often concealed at first sight, and is representative of several other aspects, concepts or traits than those that are visible in the literal translation alone. Symbolism is using an object or action that means something more than its literal meaning.

Examples: the American flag symbolizes patriotism, black cats are superstitious symbols of bad luck, and a cross is a symbol of Christianity

Conflict - The main problem in the story is the conflict. The three main types are:

- (a) person vs person - conflict with another person or people
- (b) person vs nature - person struggling to survive in a hostile environment, ex: blizzard
- (c) person vs self - internal conflict, the character is battling with him/herself in some way, perhaps to change a behavior or lifestyle

Setting - Setting is the time and place (or when and where) of the story. Most people just think of it as place, but time is also very important. For example, Tallahassee 2020 is very different from Tallahassee 1920, and far more different from this spot of land in 1520.

Protagonists - Protagonist (pronounced pro-TAG-oh-nist) is just another word for “main character.” The story circles around this character’s experiences, and the audience is invited to see the world from his or her perspective. Note that the protagonist is not necessarily a “good guy.” Although most of the time the protagonist is some kind of hero, sometimes we see the whole story from the perspective of a villain.

Antagonist - In a story, the antagonist (pronounced an-TAG-oh-nist) is the opposite of the protagonist, or main character. Typically, this is a villain of some kind, but not always! It’s just the opponent of the main character, or someone who gets in their way.

Questions about Theme

1. How do the characters in the story develop or enhance the theme?

2. How does the conflict of the story develop or enhance the theme?

3. How do the symbols within the story develop or enhance the theme?

4. How does the author's tone of the story develop or enhance the theme?

Questions about Setting

1. How does the setting affect the plot?

2. How does the setting affect the conflict?

Questions about Characters

1. What is one of the protagonist's flaws or weaknesses?

2. What is one of the antagonist's flaws or weaknesses?

3. What motivates the protagonist to act?

4. What motivates the antagonist to act?
