



the literary terms handbook

An Easy-to-Use Source of Definitions,
Examples, and Exercises
for Students and Teachers



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*Exceptional Books for Teachers
and Parents™*

A Great Way to Teach Literature!

Literary terms are the building blocks of literature. Give students a firm grasp of them with this well thought out handbook that features an in-depth look at 29 literary terms. Each lesson follows an easy-to-use format: a definition of the term is followed by a discussion using two excellent examples in prose or poetry. Questions promote and ensure understanding. A writing exercise for each term provides an opportunity for application. Gives students the knowledge and experience to interpret literature with confidence!

Grades 9-12. Meets National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association Standards for the English Language Arts.

58 Pages of Activity Sheets • Complete Answer Key

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To The Teacher

Welcome to *The Literary Terms Handbook: An Easy-to-Use Source of Definitions, Examples, and Exercises for Students and Teachers*. This book was written with the belief that literature is fun, and it is designed to inspire and maintain a love of literature in your students.

Literary Terms: The Key to Literature

Literary terms are also known as literary elements because they are the building blocks of literature. They apply to all kinds of literary works. A firm grasp of these elements will help students analyze the works they read and improve the works they write. Terms in this book range from the technical, such as meter, to the more conceptual, like symbolism. All are essential keys for unlocking an author's intent in any story or poem.

The Literary Terms Handbook: A Teacher and Student-Friendly Tool

This book is designed to strengthen your students' grasp of literary elements. *The Literary Terms Handbook* offers an in-depth look at 29 different elements in a way that lets students focus on each one individually.

How This Book Is Organized Each lesson follows an easy-to-use format featuring a definition of the term and two examples of that term from outstanding pieces of prose or poetry. Each lesson also includes four questions and a writing exercise to ensure students' understanding. Answers to these questions can be found in the Answer Key. Terms in boldface have their own lessons.

How to Use This Book *The Literary Terms Handbook* will easily fit into any classroom or homeschooling routine. You may wish to use this book to accompany a particular text your students are reading or with a particular writing unit they are working on. You may also wish to use this book on its own. Here is a suggested lesson cycle to follow for each term:

- **Introduce:** Read each definition aloud. Invite students to identify examples of the term in use. Ask: what is the value of this concept in creating and understanding literature?
- **Discuss:** Discuss the examples in the introductory essay. Encourage students to ask questions. Ensure that they understand the examples themselves, as well as understand how they relate to the literary element they illustrate.
- **Explore:** Ask your students why they think that literary element is important. Find examples of it in other texts, or have students come up with their own versions of the element.
- **Evaluate:** Have students answer the questions at the end of each section, either on their own or with a group.

Why Study Literary Terms? Invariably, high school students ask, "when will I use this?" They wonder how the work they do in school will help them in the real world.

The Literary Terms Handbook is meant to be useful for students as they continue in their studies and work. Studying literary terms will improve their critical thinking skills. When students can analyze a poem, it ceases to be a blur of words, and students are able to ask questions that are to-the-point and effective. Their communication skills are enhanced as they learn how to decipher others' meaning.

The Literary Terms Handbook addresses the National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association Standards for the English Language Arts. These standards equip students with real-life communication skills, helping them to become independent, critical thinkers.

Now that you know a little bit about *The Literary Terms Handbook*, you're ready to begin! We wish you luck as you share the wonders of literature with your students.

"The answers you get from literature depend on the questions you pose."

—Margaret Atwood



1. ALLEGORY

*A story in which characters, actions,
or settings represent abstract ideas*

Symbolism comes to life in an allegory. Allegories are fictional tales where characters, their actions, and the story's setting symbolize an abstract idea. These characters breathe life into the ideas they represent.

Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a lengthy, complex allegory. Vivid in its **imagery** and memorable in its language, Dante's poem describes an imaginary journey through hell, purgatory, and finally through heaven. This journey is an allegory of Dante's search for salvation and the obstacles he has to surmount before he can achieve his goal.

*“Midway upon the journey of our life
I found myself within a forest dark,
For the straightforward pathway had been lost.
Ah me! how hard a thing it is to say
What was this forest savage, rough, and stern,
Which in the very thought renews the fear.”*

—from *The Inferno*, by Dante Alighieri

In this passage, Dante describes how he found himself lost in a dark forest. It soon becomes clear, however, that this dark forest isn't really a place, but a state of mind in which “the straightforward pathway had been lost.”

Allegories and *parables*, which are allegories used to teach morals, are often religious. The New Testament, for example, is filled with parables which help relate heavenly concepts to life on earth.

Allegories and parables are not limited to religious topics. In his imaginative autobiography *Bound for Glory*, folksinger Woody Guthrie writes about a tornado, which he calls “Mister Cyclone,” that ripped through his hometown when he was a young boy. The young Woody and his father fight for their lives, trying to reach a storm shelter. When they finally get there, Guthrie says:

*“And I drifted off to sleep thinking about all of the people in the world that have worked
hard and had somebody else come along and take their life away from them.”*

Guthrie goes through a long description of the tornado as a force of nature that destroys people's houses and farms. Then, in the above passage, it's finally clear that the tornado represents more than a tornado, and that the story is an allegory. Like Dante's *Divine Comedy*, it's a vivid story, the lessons of which stay with us long after we finish reading.



Understanding ALLEGORY

- ❶ **ANALYZE** If the “straightforward pathway” represents the path toward God for Dante, then what does the “dark” forest represent?

- ❷ **EXPLAIN** As the passage from *The Inferno* continues, Dante describes how he found himself in the dark woods:

*“I cannot well repeat how there I entered,
So full was I of slumber at the moment
In which I had abandoned the true way.”*

What do you think this means?

- ❸ **IN YOUR OWN WORDS** What does the tornado symbolize in the excerpt from *Bound for Glory*?

- ❹ **EVALUATE** Do you think the tornado is a fitting symbol in this work?



2. ALLITERATION

When two or more words begin with the same sound, usually a consonant

Even before we understand the meaning of words, we hear the sounds. Dylan Thomas recounts what it was like each time he heard a word for the first time as a young child. These words were “as the notes of bells, the sounds of musical instruments, the noises of wind, sea, and rain, the rattle of milk-carts...the fingering of branches on a window pane...might be to someone, deaf from birth, who has miraculously found his hearing.” Thomas recognized early on the importance of sounds in literature.

There are many literary elements that reflect how poetry and prose utilize the sound of words; one of these is alliteration. Alliteration is often used to draw attention to something, as in this poem about Isaac Newton:

*“Nature and Nature’s laws lay hid in night.
God said, Let Newton be! And all was light.”*

—from “Epitaph, Intended for Sir Isaac Newton in Westminster Abbey,”
by Alexander Pope

Pope begins several words in the poem with the letter N and others with the letter L; in the first line, he creates tension as we wait for what is hidden to be revealed. Then Newton comes along, and “all was light.”

William Shakespeare also uses alliteration in the play *Macbeth*.

*“To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.”*

There are many instances of alliteration in this speech, including the repetition of the T-sound in the first line and the D-sound in the second. The plodding repetition of these words imitates the “petty pace” of days marching on. Shakespeare even hints at the power of sound in the third line, where days “creep” to “the last syllable of recorded time.” The sound of words can enhance our reading experience or the actual meaning of the literary work. Whenever we hear and see words in a new context, it’s almost as if we are struck by them anew, like a deaf person who can suddenly hear (as Thomas wrote).



Understanding ALLITERATION

- ❶ **UNDERSTAND** Why does Alexander Pope claim that “Nature and Nature’s laws lay hid in night” before Newton?

- ❷ **HEARING IT ALOUD** Read Pope’s “Epitaph” for Newton aloud. Does this enhance the alliteration? Explain.

- ❸ **EXAMPLE** Provide an example of alliteration from a popular song or other work.

- ❹ **MEMORIZE** Memorize the famous passage from William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. Recite it for your class or for a small group of classmates.

