Language techniques and Literary devices
(Using examples from GCSE set texts)

ALLEGORY

- **Meaning**: When characters and plot represent ideas that relate to morality, politics, or religion.

- **Effect**: Allegory allows authors and creators to explore often overwhelming or controversial ideas in an approachable manner.

Example:
In 'An Inspector Calls', the characters represent the rigid class divides in the early twentieth century. Mrs Birling is an *allegory* for the way the upper classes saw themselves as socially superior to the lower classes.

ALLITERATION

- **Meaning**: Use of the same letter or sound at the beginning of consecutive words or words in close proximity.

- **Effect**: Alliteration draws attention to certain phrases or sentences. It not only draws the eye of the reader on the page, but the phrase has more emphasis when read.

Example:
In 'Macbeth' 1.1, the witches chant "Fair is Foul, Foul is Fair", and this sets the tone for the whole play; it implies what we perceive is good is often bad, and vice versa. The phrase has become an iconic quotation for the way it sets the tone of the play so memorably.

ALLUSION

- **Meaning**: A way of making reference to something else without explicitly stating what it is you're referring to.

- **Effect**: Allusion allows authors to infer meaning by creating parallels between their text and whatever it is they're alluding to. It can also be used in the opposite manner, to create contrast between the author's argument and their allusion.

Example:
In chapter 15 of 'Frankenstein', Shelley uses the phrase "Like Adam" to *allude* to the first man (from the Bible), creating a feeling of isolation much like Adam would've felt as the first person on earth.

ANAPHORA

- **Meaning**: When words (or a phrase) repeat at the beginning of consecutive sentences, clauses, or lines in poetry.

- **Effect**: Anaphora is used like alliteration to create emphasis and draw the eye of the reader, creating rhythm and injecting emotion into the text.

Example:
In Macbeth 1.3, the witches say "Thrice to thine and thrice to mine and thrice again to make up nine". The use of anaphora here creates a clear rhythm, and emphasises the power of the witches.

ARCHETYPES

- **Meaning**: An archetype is effectively a stereotype of a character or thing. It is a model around which certain character types are built (ie. a tragic hero).

- **Effect**: Archetypes are used to build a connection between the reader and the characters in the text. It prompts a feeling of familiarity which causes readers to become more emotionally invested in a text.

Example:
In 'A Christmas Carol, Ebenezer Scrooge fits neatly into the archetype of character transformation; he begins the text a rude and grumpy old man, and ends it a generous and changed man.

APHORISM

- **Meaning**: A short statement about a widely accepted truth. These are often amusing or witty in nature.

- **Effect**: Use of aphorisms builds trust between the reader and the writer; by making use of universal truths, the reader comes to understand the writer as trustworthy, thus increasing engagement and helping persuade them of the writer's argument.

Example:
'Pride and Prejudice' opens with an aphorism "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife". This particular aphorism not only establishes the writer as trustworthy, for making a statement about social norms of the time, but it establishes the tone of the entire text, foreshadowing the events to come.

ASSONANCE

- **Meaning**: Repetition of a similar vowel sound in consecutive words or words in close proximity

- **Effect**: Like alliteration and anaphora, assonance creates rhythm in a text. It allows readers to interpret a sentence the way the author intended by making clear which vowel sound should be stressed.

Example:
In 'Romeo and Juliet' 3.5, we can see assonance in a lot of Juliet's speech, like when she says "Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate tree. / Believe me, love, it was the nightingale". Repetition of the long E sound creates clear rhythm, and echoes the melody of the nightingale.

CAESURA

- **Meaning**: A stop in the middle of a metrical line. This usually comes in the form of commas, dashes, or colons in the middle of a line of poetry.

- **Effect**: Caesura gives a choppy and dysfunctional tone to the text, while simultaneously increasing reading pace. Increasing pace builds tension, and can help relay feelings of frustration or confusion to a reader.

Example:
in 'Romeo and Juliet' during the balcony scene, Shakespeare makes use of much caesura in order to accurately portray the overwhelming emotions felt by Romeo and Juliet.

CHIASMUS

- **Meaning**: The reversal of phrases or grammatical structures in consecutive phrases or sentences.

- **Effect**: Chiasmus adds emphasis to a portion of the text, drawing the reader's eye and making sentences stand out more. Reversing a phrase just after using it engages the reader's attention by disrupting the structure of the text.

Example:
In 'Macbeth' 1.1, the witches use chiasmus for emphasis when they chant "Fair is Foul, Foul is Fair". As previously mentioned, this sentence sets the tone for the play, and the use of chiasmus helps foreshadow the events to come.

CONNOTATION

- **Meaning**: When a word, phrase, or other component of a text is intended to carry a certain meaning (ie. the way the colour red is intended to convey anger).

- **Effect**: Writers often use connotations to help convey emotions or feelings, allowing them to invoke a deeper emotional response in the reader.

Example:
in 'Frankenstein', Shelley repeatedly uses the word "creature" to cast Frankenstein's monster in a negative light. The word "creature" carries negative *connotations*, implying he is monstrous and bruteish.

CONSONANCE

- **Meaning**: Repetition of a similar consonant sound in consecutive words or words in close proximity.

- **Effect**: Consonance is remarkably similar to assonance, and it also helps create rhythm in a text. It makes a sentence more pleasing to the ear, thus increasing reader engagement.

Example:
In the prologue of 'Romeo and Juliet', Shakespeare writes "From forth the fatal loins of these two foes", repeating the F *consonant* to emphasise that Romeo and Juliet were destined to fail.

CONTRAST

- **Meaning**: A rhetorical device in which a writer draws attention to the difference between two characters, things, or events.

- **Effect**: Through comparing and contrasting, writers can make stronger arguments and create stronger statements, further engaging the reader

Example:
The *contrasting* personalities of Mr Wickham and Mr Darcy are used to build tension throughout 'Pride and Prejudice', while also emphasising Jane Austen's disdain for unjust judgement.

DICHOTOMY

Meaning: A division into two opposite groups (ie. peace and war, love and hate).

- **Effect**: Dichotomies are often used to create and build tension in a storyline; they allow the reader to clearly understand both groups, increasing emotional engagement.

Example:
Throughout 'Jane Eyre', Bronte establishes a clear dichotomy of male oppression and female rage in the way Jane interacts with male characters in the text.

DICTION

Meaning: The words a writer chooses to use to best convey their message.

- **Effect**: Diction is responsible for the way a reader interprets a text, and can be used in any way a writer pleases. It can be used to emphasise characters' emotions, or repression of emotions. It can be used to create a more romantic tone, or an aggressive tone

Example:
Shakespeare uses diction to emphasise Macbeth's attempt to justify his own actions, particularly in the dagger soliloquy. He personifies Murder to create a distance between his crimes and his responsibility.

DIDACTICISM

- **Meaning**: When the main purpose of a text is to teach the reader a lesson, often a moral one. It can also apply to characters in a text.

- **Effect**: Didactic tone is often applied throughout an entire text, as in 'To Kill a Mockingbird', and it prompts deeper thought by the reader. It encourages a deeper understanding of the text, which in turn increases their engagement.

Example:
'A Christmas Carol' is a didactic text filled with moral messages. Scrooge's moral improvement teaches the reader a similar message to the one he learns himself - as readers, we are on a journey of moral development with him.

DISSONANCE

- **Meaning**: Use of harsh and interrupting sounds in text, particularly with use of words that generally do not work together.

- **Effect**: Dissonance creates a tone of tension and unease, building suspense for the reader and relaying emotions felt by the characters.

Example:
In tense moments in 'Macbeth', Shakespeare uses blank verse and variant vowel sounds to create dissonance. This is particularly evident when Macbeth says ""Of all men else I have avoided thee. // But get thee back. My soul is too much charged // With blood of thine already."

DRAMATIC IRONY

- **Meaning**: When the reader or audience are aware of something the characters are not.

- **Effect**: Dramatic irony creates suspense, because it is inevitable that the characters will come to understand what the audience/reader already knows. Tension builds as readers wait for the truth to come to light.

Example:
'The Merchant of Venice' is filled with dramatic irony, because the characters frequently disguise themselves. When the characters are in disguise, the audience are aware of what is happening, while the other characters are not.

ELLIPSIS

- **Meaning**: Often represented as "..." or "–", it used to pause for dramatic effect.

- **Effect**: When used as a pause, ellipsis builds tension by creating a silence not often found in literature. It is often used when characters trail off, and it often holds some implied meaning. In this case, it encourages deeper engagement by the readers, who must consider the meaning of the ellipses.

Example:
In 'An Inspector Calls', Sheila says "Oh - Gerald - you've got it - is it the one you wanted me to have?". The ellipsis used here builds tension by implying a degree of discomfort or awkwardness on Sheila's part.

ENJAMBMENT

- **Meaning**: when a sentence continues beyond the end of a line without use of punctuation. This is often seen in poetry and rhymed verse.

- **Effect**: Enjambment increases the pace of a section of text by forcing the reader to continue reading without a break. Increasing the pace builds tension and suspense, and it can be used to indicate a character's state of mind.

Example:
In 'Macbeth', Shakespeare uses enjambment in "The raven himself is hoarse // That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan Under my battlements". The use of enjambment builds on the tension of the statement, thus further engaging the reader.

EPIGRAPH

- **Meaning**: A quote, poem, or phrase set at the beginning of a piece of text. This may just be at the beginning of a section.

- **Effect**: Epigraphs are generally not mentioned in the main body of the text, so their sole purpose is to set the tone of the text. They establish a certain mood and let readers know what they should expect from the text.

Example:
in the 1918 edition of 'Frankenstein', Shelley uses "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay / To mould me man?" as her epigraph. This sets the tone for the novel, establishing a theme of creation and disdain.

EPITOME

- **Meaning**: A person or item which is a perfect representation of something else, particularly a quality or concept.

- **Effect**: Epitomes are used to draw attention to the argument the writer is making that a certain person is the perfect example of something else. It makes the argument more impactful.

Example:
in 'Frankenstein', Victor Frankestein is portrayed as the epitome of speciesism, prioritising his own morbid interests over the interests of his monster.

EUPHEMISM

- **Meaning**: Language used to imply something unpleasant or impolite.

- **Effect**: Euphemisms are used to mask the impoliteness or rudeness of a remark, and it softens an uncomfortable topic. It is often used in Shakespeare as a symbol of a character's superior intellect.

Example:
In 'Julius Caesar' 1.2, Casca says that two men have been "put to silence". This is a euphemism for death. Use of a euphemism makes the murder of two men seem much less harsh, and it ensures the reader doesn't linger on the point for too long.

FORESHADOWING

- **Meaning**: A warning of events to come in a text.

- **Effect**: Foreshadowing increases narrative. tension by giving readers an implication of what is to come. This is especially potent when used to foreshadow a distressing event while the plot is calm.

Example:
In 'Lord of the Flies', Piggy's death is foreshadowed when he tells Ralph he can't swim because of his asthma, and Ralph replies "Sucks to your ass-mar". The lack of concern for Piggy's health and vulnerability makes his coming death clear.

HYPERBOLE

- **Meaning**: Figurative speech used for exaggeration.

- **Effect**: Hyperbole often adds an element of comedy and amusement to a text, and it allows an author to add excitement to a tedious or mundane subject.

Example:
In 'An Inspector Calls', Preistley uses hyperbole when he says "millions and millions and millions of John Smiths and Eva Smiths". His exaggeration is intended to emphasise to both the characters and the reader how common exploitation of the lower classes is.

IDIOM

- **Meaning**: An expression used by native speakers to mean something other than its literal meaning.

- **Effect**: Idioms are used to increase reader engagement by establishing similarities between the text and normal speech. They are also used to establish character backgrounds and personality, because idioms vary from region to region.

Example:
In 'Macbeth', Lady Macbeth says "What's done is done", which emphasises that we cannot change the past. It adds to the gravity of the situation by implying there is nothing that can be done to fix it.

IMAGERY

- **Meaning**: Visually descriptive language used to appeal to the reader's senses.

- **Effect**: Using imagery increases reader engagement by allowing them to use their imagination to put themselves in the scene. If they can visualise the scene, they will become more invested in the storyline.

Example:
Shelley uses imagery throughout 'Frankenstein', both in her description of the scenery and in her description of the monster. Using imagery helps convey the horror of the monster, which has an effect on the emotions of the reader.

IRONY

- **Meaning**: expression of an emotion or thought by using language which typically means the opposite. It is often amusing, which injects a degree of comedy into a text.

- **Effect**: Irony draws attention to a statement by bringing humour to a situation. It often also introduces a degree of foreboding.

Example:
In 'A Christmas Carol', Scrooge describes his father as cold, in an obvious bit of irony. The entire text revolves around Scrooge's coldness, so it is ironic that his father's coldness is something he considered definitive.

JUXTAPOSITION

- **Meaning**: Two opposing things placed next to each other for contrast.

- **Effect**: Juxtaposition is used to draw attention to the differences between two things. It is useful for establishing character personalities in the context of each other.

Example:
Juxtaposition is used consistently throughout 'The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde' - the entire text is a juxtaposition. Jekyll and Hyde are juxtaposed to draw attention to the overt differences between the two, and to highlight good and evil.

METAPHOR

- **Meaning**: A figure of speech in which an object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a similarity between them.

- **Effect**: Metaphors draw the attention of the reader by engaging their imagination in their interpretation of the metaphor. They create more manageable images in the reader's mind, thus further prompting engagement.

Example:
In 'Lord of the Flies', the Scar is a metaphor for the darkness inside the boys on the island. It is a repeating metaphor used in a variety of different circumstances to continuously draw attention to this darkness.

MICROCOSM

- **Meaning**: A community or situation intended to represent the characteristics of something much larger.

- **Effect**: Microcosms are used to force the reader to consider the bigger picture, making them examine the wider picture as they read.

Example:
In 'An Inspector Calls', the Birling family's mistreatment of Eva Smith acts as a microcosm for the upper class's mistreatment of the lower classes.

MONOLOGUE

Meaning: A long, uninterrupted speech made by a character in a play.

- **Effect**: Monologues are often used to provide the audience with more detail about a character or plot point. They help to explain and progress the text's storyline.

Example:
'Much Ado About Nothing' is filled with monologues. In 4.1, Beatrice launches intoa to Benedict, asking him to murder Claudio as proof of his good nature.

MOTIF

Meaning: A repeating idea used to dictate tone and emphasise themes.

- **Effect**: Motifs help readers understand characters better and it establishes the mood of the text. It is a key way of increasing reader engagement with the text.

Example:
In 'Jane Eyre', the motif of fire and ice repeatedly appear to represent Jane's fiery resolve and the oppressive forces that would see this extinguished.

ONOMATOPOEIA

- **Meaning**: Words that sound like the sounds they are describing (ie. clap).

- **Effect**: Onomatopoeia is often used in poetry to add depth to the text. Using words that sound how they are written engages the reader's senses, encouraging deeper emotional involvement.

Example:
In 'Macbeth 5.8, use of the word "ripped" (in "Macduff was from his mother's womb Untimely ripped") is onomatopoeic, and instils a degree of horror in the reader.

OXYMORON

Meaning: A figure of speech in which two contradictory terms are used consecutively.

- **Effect**: Oxymorons are used to draw the reader's attention; the element of confusion they create causes readers to stop and ponder the meaning of the phrase.

Example:
In 'Romeo and Juliet', the phrase "civil brawls" is an oxymoron to describe the relationship between the Montagues and Capulets. The two words have opposite meanings, and so prompt deeper thought from the reader.

PARADOX

Meaning: A contradictory statement

- **Effect**: It creates a sense of confusion or discomfort or it can contrast two ideas, highlighting each idea.

Example:
The Witches speak in paradoxes. When they say "fair is foul and foul is fair" this is paradoxical and creates an air of mystery and chaos

PATHETIC FALLACY

Meaning: When the weather reflects the mood

- **Effect**: When a character's emotions are reflected in their environment, it is easier for the reader to understand and empathise with the character.

Example:
Pathetic fallacy is used throughout 'Jane Eyre' to emphasise Jane's mood. When Jane is sent away from Gateshead, it is foggy and cold, and when Rochester proposes to Jane, the sky is clear and the sun is shining.

PATHOS

- **Meaning**: Evoking a certain feeling in the reader/audience. Pathos is most often used for feelings of sadness, or pity.

- **Effect**: Pathos appeals to the emotions of the reader, strengthening connections between the reader and the characters, and thus increasing reader engagement.

Example:
In 'Animal Farm', Old Major employs pathos to scare the animals into accepting his ideas.

PERSONIFICATION

- **Meaning**: Giving human characteristics to non-humans or inanimate objects.

- **Effect**: Personification creates depth in a text by giving a voice to otherwise silent, unmoving objects. This allows the reader to become more fully immersed in the text, maximising engagement.

Example:
Personification is used throughout 'Macbeth', most commonly when Macbeth is battling his own guilt. In 1.7, Macbeth personified Duncan's virtues, stating "that his virtues / Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against / The deep damnation of his taking-off".

PLOSIVE SOUNDS

- **Meaning**: Harsh sounds associated with the letters p, t, k, b, d, and g which interrupt airflow by closing the mouth.

- **Effect**: Plosive sounds are harsh, and help convey complex emotions like frustration and anger. This allows readers to more deeply understand the emotions at play in a scene.

Example:
In 'Jane Eyre', Mr Brocklehurst's name begins with a plosive sound, foreshadowing his harsh and abrupt personality.

POLITICAL DIATRIBE

Meaning: The way a text is written to criticise a political system or belief.

- **Effect**: Political diatribes are used to encourage deeper thought from the reader about the topic at hand. They are intended to force readers to scrutinise their own understanding of the topic.

Example:
Priestley uses 'An Inspector Calls' as a social and political diatribe to criticise the rigid class divides which are responsible for the exploitation of the lower classes.

REPETITION

- **Meaning**: Repeating something that has already been used. This applies to words, phrases, motifs etc.

- **Effect**: Repetition is used to emphasise a point or motif. By repeating something over and over, it makes it clear that it is important to the text. If the repetition is of words/phrases, it draws the eye of the reader while simultaneously emphasising the importance of the idea.

Example:
In 'Pride and Prejudice', Elizabeth employs repetition in her letter when she says "Dear Madam do not go. I beg you will not go". Her repetition reinforces her message.

RHYME

Meaning: When two words have a similar sound, particularly at the end of the word.

- **Effect**: Rhyming makes a text more interesting and more memorable, and it adds rhythm to a text. It can be used to invoke deeper emotion, or to emphasise how trivial an item/idea is.

Example:
In 'Much Ado About Nothing' 3.1, Hero finishes her monologue with a rhyming couplet to reinforce her message; "If it prove so, then loving goes by haps, / Some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps".

RYTHM

- **Meaning**: The way a writer arranges stressed and unstressed vowel sounds to dictate the way a text is read.

- **Effect**: Like rhyme, rhythm makes a text more semantically and verbally appealing to a reader. Placing stressed vowels in specific locations allows a writer to make much more powerful arguments.

Example:
Shakespeare uses a specific rhythm in most of his plays known as iambic pentameter, which consists of 10 syllables to a line.

SATIRE

- **Meaning**: Amusement towards a flawed subject as a commentary on its flaws.

- **Effect**: Satire is most often used in literature to draw attention to political and social events.

Example:
In 'A Christmas Carol', the ghost of Christmas present quotes Scrooge's own words back to him; previously, Scrooge thought the "surplus population" should simply die to solve the issue, though he changes his mind when he meets Tiny Tim.

SIMILE

- **Meaning**: A figure of speech in which an object or idea is compared to another to suggest a similarity between them.

- **Effect**: Similes work in much the same way as metaphors, drawing the attention of the reader by engaging their imagination. They create more manageable images in the reader's mind, thus further prompting engagement.

Example:
In 'An Inspector Calls', Mr Birling says "as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive". This simile makes clear that Mr Birling feels no sense of camaraderie with the lower classes; he can't even fathom them being in the same community, like bees in a hive".

SIBILANCE

Meaning: Repetition of hissing sounds, such as alliteration using the letter S.

- **Effect**: Like alliteration, sibilance draws attention to certain phrases or sentences. It is frequently used to create a negative atmosphere.

Example:
In 'Romeo and Juliet', Romeo says "sad hours seem long". The sibilance here emphasises the sadness Romeo feels.

SOLILOQUY

Meaning: A monologue intended only to be heard by the audience and the character speaking. They are most often used to explain the inner thoughts of a character.

- **Effect**: Soliloquies give us insight into the internal happenings of characters in the play, often explaining things we otherwise wouldn't have found out. Like monologues, soliloquies play a key role in progressing the storyline.

Example:
In 'The Tempest' 5.1, Prospero delivers a soliloquy in which he gives up magic, stating he will break his staff and destroy his books. This soliloquy gives us key insight into Prospero's mind, and helps us more deeply understand his feelings and actions.

SYMBOLISM

Meaning: Use of symbols to represent an idea or concept.

- **Effect**: Symbolism is used to convey complex ideas in a relatively simple way. It gives the reader a visual to focus on, which becomes synonymous with the symbol; the reader will begin to think of the meaning each time they encounter the symbol.

Example:
In 'Frankenstein', Shelley frequently uses light and fire as a symbol of knowledge and enlightenment, but also of the unknown that comes with enlightenment.

SYNTAX

Meaning: The way words are arranged in a sentence.

• **Effect**: Syntax helps writers establish mood and tone, and works in combination with diction to express the writer's thoughts and feelings on a topic.

Example:
The syntax used in 'A Christmas Carol' is incredibly descriptive, which is both a product of the novel's time, and Dickens's way of encouraging reader engagement.

TONE

• **Meaning**: The literary manifestation of an author's thoughts and feelings on a certain topic. This encompasses diction and use of other devices.

• **Effect**: Tone reflects the author's feelings, and thus it creates a connection between the reader and the author. Devices are often used to create a relationship between the reader and characters in the text, but tone gives us more of an insight into the writer.

Example:
The tone of 'Lord of the Flies' is slightly detached and aloof, which represents the boys' outlook on the world; they are not yet aware of the severity of their situation.