**Definitions**

Setting – The time, place, and social circumstances in which a story takes place. Helps establish the “atmosphere” of a work, indicating the tone or manner in which the story is to be read. Often associated with genre: a foggy, gas-lamp lit street brings to mind the detective genre. Beyond establishing atmosphere and genre, the setting of a story can often play an active role in the story that follows.

Diction – The choice and use of words and phrases in speech or writing.

* **Monosyllabic** or **polysyllabic**
* **Simple** or **sophisticated**
* **Familiar (colloquial) language** or **less quotidian sources (poetical, scientific, legal, other specialist discourses)**
* **Modern and up to date** or **antiquated and archaic**
* **Connotative (range of possible meanings) or denotative (pointing to very specific references)**

Syntax – The arrangements of words and phrases to create grammatically complete sentences.

* **Simple and plain (subject – verb – object)** or **complex (with numerous dependent clauses, qualifying phrases, and parentheses)** or **varying between both to produce multiple, shifting effects of rhythm and tone**

Atmosphere – The mood or general feeling of a literary work, especially as it relates to the physical setting. Produced from diction and syntax and establishes the genre of a work (paranoia + uncertainty = horror fiction).

Character – The agents of a narrative, someone who acts, appears, or otherwise is seen to advance the plot. The most common distinction to be made is between the protagonist and the antagonist. Characters are often divided between two types: flat and round. Flat characters represent a stock set of attitudes in a convention, while round characters are more psychologically complex.

Narrative style - The author’s personal matter of expression. It is the result of the choices an author makes, with respect not only to subject matter, but to its presentation: elements of diction (word choice), syntax (the grammatical arrangement of words), figurative language (use of similes, metaphors, personification, alliteration, etc.), literary allusion, paragraph construction, and organization all contribute to the development of an author’s manner of expression. In some cases, an author’s narrative style is highly individualistic, so much so that a reader can almost immediately recognize a passage as having been written by a particular writer, or in imitation of his or her style. In other cases, a style may have no telltale marks of a strong personality, as in the “plain style” encouraged in the expository essay. In assessing an author’s narrative style it is useful to consider such adjectives as:

* **Formal** or **unformal**
* **Denotative** or **connotative**
* **Abstract** or **concrete**
* **Simple** or **complex**
* **Elaborate** or **spare**
* **Literary** or s**cientific**
* **Passionate** or **dispassionate**
* **Ironic** or **sincere**

Story – The chronological order of events from beginning to end. The story exists before the narrative. The story is “what” happened.

Plot – The ways in which a narrator chooses to rearrange the events that make up a “story” to produce specific artistic and emotional effects. The plot is concerned with the underlying logic or patterns that connect one event to another. Similar to the story, but can reject the chronological order of events to draw out different aspects (flashbacks, multiple viewpoints) to even change the genre. The plot indicates “why” things happen.

Narrative perspective – The standpoint from which a story is told. Can be a direct view through a lens or through a fully developed consciousness that alters our access to the events described.

* Distance – judged by space or time, where the perspective is close to the events or far (or between the two), or events are described as they are happening or in the past.
* Focus – The way in which the author arranges our point of view so we see the events being described in a certain way (close or far)
* Omniscient perspective – Narrator is placed outside the events being described
* First-person narrator – Speaks as an “I” and may have a role, either as a protagonist or an observer, within the story.

Absurd - The existential world view that each person is an isolated being cast into an uncaring universe which possesses no inherent truth or higher purpose. The absurd carries the connotations of the grotesquely comic, laughing in the face of the apparent meaninglessness of human actions and beliefs. A world without redemption.

Symbol – A word or phrase that signifies something beyond itself. Usually an abstract concept or idea of significant cultural, historical, or conceptual importance. They are more suggestive than allegory; it can generate multiple meanings.

* Conventional – Shared or understood by most speakers familiar with customs of the society in which they live (ex. Maple leaf)
* Private – Accrues within the web of connections developed within a specific text (White whale in Moby Dick)

Epic – ­A long narrative poem that typically recounts the history or legends of a national hero. Literary critics distinguish between traditional and literary epics. Traditional epics were written versions of what had earlier been oral poems about a tribal or national hero during a war-like age. Literary epics, by contrast, were composed as written texts in imitation of the conventions of traditional epics.

* Large in scale, memorable, extraordinary
* Conventions: A national hero, set on an ample scale (both worldly and other worldly), grand action of superhuman deeds
* Gods and other supernatural beings take an active part
* Narrative style: elevated, ceremonial tone, highly formal

Tragedy – Stories that result in a disastrous conclusion for the protagonist. Aristotle suggests that the hero of a tragedy will better elicit both pity and terror if he is neither wholly good nor wholly bad, but rather a mixture of both. He must be a noble type, a man who in stature or status is evidently superior to the common lot of men. Tragedy details how such a noble figure suffers a change in fortune from his “tragic flaw.” Tragedy is first and foremost driven by its plot, the arrangement or sequencing of incidents. It was designed to amplify the audience’s pent up store of emotion, feelings which it would then release in a sudden cathartic “purging” that was thought to be healthy for both individuals and the society as a whole.

Catharsis – The violent release of pent up emotion. Defined by Aristotle in reference to tragedy’s in ancient Greek. Happens in the meeting of terror and pity. Thought to be important for the society.

The Novel – Grew out of prose romance, takes contemporary society and its manners as its subject matter. Tighter plot, deeper characters, more realistic than its predecessor. Proven to be a feminine genre, tells the story of ordinary characters.

Irony – A literary device that allows the reader to distinguish between the perception of an event and its underlying reality. The most obvious form, verbal irony, occurs when someone says something that literally means one thing, but which is intended to mean quite the opposite. The form that characterizes Austen’s novels is known as dramatic irony: saying or doing something while unaware of its ironic contrast to the whole truth. The truth is only available to the reader, who is able to infer from other scenes and the narrator’s own interpolations, that things are quite different to what the character believes they are.

Graphic Novel - The graphic novel combines the use of text and images most commonly associated with the comic book form with the long-form narrative of the novel. Features deep plot and complex and well-rounded characters that have become the hallmark of so much modern literature. They have an aesthetic, philosophical, or political dimension to them that makes them something more than merely disposable commodities. Two strands: one that comes out of comic books with superheroes, other comes out of the want to tell the stories of ordinary people.

Postmodernism – Refers to the experimental art and literature of the late twentieth century. This period was marked by an increasing skepticism to the idea that the world was a coherent and ordered domain, governed by rational laws, and hence knowable through human means. Truth was made rather than found or discovered. Postmodernism questioned ideas such as the “original,” the “authentic,” and even “reality” itself. Postmodern art celebrates the fake, the copy, and delights in the play of artificial surfaces over emotional depths, and privileges ironic distance over realism and sincerity.

**Stories**

The Zebra Storyteller – Spencer Holst

The Fall of the House of Usher – Edgar Allan Poe

Setting:

Diction:

Syntax:

Atmosphere:

Characters:

Narrative style: Abstract, literary, connotative, poetic

Narrative perspective:

Genre:

Plot:

Hills Like White Elephants – Ernest Hemingway

Setting: Train station in Spain, 1920’s, purgatory

Diction:

Syntax:

Atmosphere: Peaceful, uncertain, tense

Characters:

Narrative style: Denotative, spare, literary

Narrative perspective:

Genre:

Plot:

An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge – Ambrose Bierce

Setting: Railroad in northern Alabama during the civil war, around 1864

Diction:

Syntax:

Atmosphere:

Characters:

Narrative style:

Narrative perspective: Distance – Chronologically close to the event, spatially from a medium distance. Narrator appears to be someone watching the execution (restricted third person), switches to be focused in his mind (restricted first person)

Genre:

Plot: Begins on the bridge when he is about to be hung, includes his daring escape that happened in a split second when he was being hung. Story begins days before, ends when he dies on the bridge

The Metamorphosis – Franz Kafka

Setting: Modern world of the traveling salesman Gregor Samsa in his parents’ home, 1912.

Diction:

Syntax:

Atmosphere:

Characters:

Narrative style: Denotative, precise

Narrative perspective: 3rd person restricted to Gregor (free indirect discourse) both inside and outside; access to the interiority of the character

Genre: Absurd

Plot:

Gilgamesh – Stephen Mitchell

Setting: 2000 B.C.E

Diction:

Syntax:

Atmosphere:

Characters:

Narrative style:

Narrative perspective:

Genre: Epic

Plot:

Oedipus the King – Sophocles

Setting:

Diction:

Syntax:

Atmosphere:

Characters:

Narrative style:

Narrative perspective:

Genre: Tragedy

Plot:

Pride and Prejudice – Jane Austen

Setting:

Diction:

Syntax:

Atmosphere:

Characters:

Narrative style: Spare, elegant, neoclassical, light, witty, ironic

Narrative perspective: 3rd person omniscient with free indirect discourse through Elizabeth

Genre: Novel

Plot:

Ghost World – Daniel Clowes

Setting: Summer in the mid 90’s, contemporary world. Exact location not known because it doesn’t matter.

Diction:

Syntax:

Atmosphere:

Characters: Enid, Becky

Narrative style: Austere, minimalist, back to the basics of cartooning

Narrative perspective:

Genre: Graphic novel

Plot: