AP LITERARY TERMS

Allegory: a tale in prose or verse in which characters, actions, or settings represent abstract ideas or moral qualities; a story that uses symbols to make a point.

Alliteration: the repetition of similar initial sounds, usually consonants, in a group of words.

Allusion: a reference to a person, a place, an event, or a literary work that a writer expects a reader to recognize.

Ambiguity: something uncertain as to interpretation.

Anachronism: something that shows up in the wrong place or the wrong time.

Analogy: a comparison made between two things to show the similarities between them.

Analysis: a method in which a work or idea is separated into its parts, and those parts given rigorous and detailed scrutiny.

Anaphora: a device or repetition in which a word or words are repeated at the beginning of two or more lines, phrases, clauses, or sentences.

Anecdote: a very short story used to illustrate a point.

Antagonist: a person or force opposing the protagonist in a drama or narrative.

Antithesis: a balancing of one term against another for emphasis or stylistic effectiveness.
Aphorism: a terse, pointed statement expressing some wise or clever observation about life

Apologia: a defense or justification for some doctrine, piece of writing, cause, or action; also apology

Apostrophe: a figure of speech in which an absent or dead person, an abstract quality, or something inanimate or nonhuman is addressed directly

Argument(ation): the process of convincing a reader by proving either the truth or the falsity of an idea or proposition; also, the thesis or proposition itself

Assumption: the act of supposing, or taking for granted that a thing is true

Audience: the intended listener or listeners

Characterization: the means by which a writer reveals a character’s personality

Chiasmus: a reversal in the order of words so that the second half of a statement balances the first half in inverted word order

Circumlocution: a roundabout or evasive speech or writing, in which many words are used but a few would have served

Classicism: art, literature, and music reflecting the principles of ancient Greece and Rome: tradition, reason, clarity, order, and balance

Cliché: a phrase or situation overused within society
Climax: the decisive point in a narrative or drama; the pint of greatest intensity or interest at which plot question is answered or resolved

Colloquialism: folksy speech, slang words or phrases usually used in informal conversation

Comedy: originally a nondramatic literary piece of work that was marked by a happy ending; now a term to describe a ludicrous, farcical, or amusing event designed provide enjoyment or produce smiles and laughter

Conflict: struggle or problem in a story causing tension

Connotation: implicit meaning, going beyond dictionary definition

Contrast: a rhetorical device by which one element (idea or object) is thrown into opposition to another for the sake of emphasis or clarity

Denotation: plain dictionary definition

Denouement (pronounced day-new-mahn): loose ends tied up in a story after the climax, closure, conclusion

Dialect: the language of a particular district, class or group of persons; the sounds, grammar, and diction employed by people distinguished from others.

Dialectics: formal debates usually over the nature of truth.

Dichotomy: split or break between two opposing things.

Diction: the style of speaking or writing as reflected in the choice and use of words.
Didactic: having to do with the transmission of information; education.

Dogmatic: rigid in beliefs and principles.

Elegy: a mournful, melancholy poem, especially a funeral song or lament for the dead, sometimes contains general reflections on death, often with a rural or pastoral setting.

Epic: a long narrative poem unified by a hero who reflects the customs, mores, and aspirations of his nation of race as he makes his way through legendary and historic exploits, usually over a long period of time (definition bordering on circumlocution).

Epigram: witty aphorism.

Epitaph: any brief inscription in prose or verse on a tombstone; a short formal poem of commemoration often a credo written by the person who wishes it to be on his tombstone.

Epithet: a short, descriptive name or phrase that may insult someone's character, characteristics.

Euphemism: the use of an indirect, mild or vague word or expression for one thought to be coarse, offensive, or blunt.

Evocative (evocation): a calling forth of memories and sensations; the suggestion or production through artistry and imagination of a sense of reality.

Exposition: beginning of a story that sets forth facts, ideas, and/or characters, in a detailed explanation.
Expressionism: movement in art, literature, and music consisting of unrealistic representation of an inner idea or feeling(s).

Fable: a short, simple story, usually with animals as characters, designed to teach a moral truth.

Fallacy: from Latin word “to deceive”, a false or misleading notion, belief, or argument; any kind of erroneous reasoning that makes arguments unsound.

Falling Action: part of the narrative or drama after the climax.

Farce: a boisterous comedy involving ludicrous action and dialogue.

Figurative Language: apt and imaginative language characterized by figures of speech (such as metaphor and simile).

Flashback: a narrative device that flashes back to prior events.

Foil: a person or thing that, by contrast, makes another seem better or more prominent.

Folk Tale: story passed on by word of mouth.

Foreshadowing: in fiction and drama, a device to prepare the reader for the outcome of the action; “planning” to make the outcome convincing, though not to give it away.

Free Verse: verse without conventional metrical pattern, with irregular pattern or no rhyme.
Genre: a category or class of artistic endeavor having a particular form, technique, or content.

Gothic Tale: a style in literature characterized by gloomy settings, violent or grotesque action, and a mood of decay, degeneration, and decadence.

Hyperbole: an exaggerated statement often used as a figure of speech or to prove a point.

Imagery: figures of speech or vivid description, conveying images through any of the senses.

Implication: a meaning or understanding that is to be arrive at by the reader but that is not fully and explicitly stated by the author.

Incongruity: the deliberate joining of opposites or of elements that are not appropriate to each other.

Inference: a judgement or conclusion based on evidence presented; the forming of an opinion which possesses some degree of probability according to facts already available.

Irony: a contrast or incongruity between what is said and what is meant, or what is expected to happen and what actually happens, or what is thought to be happening and what is actually happening.

Interior Monologue: a form of writing which represents the inner thoughts of a character; the recording of the internal, emotional experience(s) of an individual; generally the reader is given the impression of overhearing the interior monologue.

Inversion: words out of order for emphasis.
Juxtaposition: the intentional placement of a word, phrase, sentences of paragraph to contrast with another nearby.

Lyric: a poem having musical form and quality; a short outburst of the author’s innermost thoughts and feelings.

Magic(al) Realism: a genre developed in Latin America which juxtaposes the everyday with the marvelous or magical.

Metaphor(extended, controlling, and mixed): an analogy that compare two different things imaginatively.
Extended: a metaphor that is extended or developed as far as the writer wants to take it.
Controlling: a metaphor that runs throughout the piece of work.
Mixed: a metaphor that ineffectively blends two or more analogies.

Metonymy: literally “name changing” a device of figurative language in which the name of an attribute or associated thing is substituted for the usual name of a thing.

Mode of Discourse: argument (persuasion), narration, description, and exposition.

Modernism: literary movement characterized by stylistic experimentation, rejection of tradition, interest in symbolism and psychology

Monologue: an extended speech by a character in a play, short story, novel, or narrative poem.

Mood: the predominating atmosphere evoked by a literary piece.
Motif: a recurring feature (name, image, or phrase) in a piece of literature.

Myth: a story, often about immortals, and sometimes connected with religious rituals, that attempts to give meaning to the mysteries of the world.

Narrative: a story or description of events.

Narrator: one who narrates, or tells, a story.

Naturalism: extreme form of realism.

Novelette/Novella: short story; short prose narrative, often satirical.

Omniscient Point of View: knowing all things, usually the third person.

Onomatopoeia: use of a word whose sound in some degree imitates or suggests its meaning.

Oxymoron: a figure of speech in which two contradicting words or phrases are combined to produce a rhetorical effect by means of a concise paradox.

Pacing: rate of movement; tempo.

Parable: a story designed to convey some religious principle, moral lesson, or general truth.

Paradox: a statement apparently self-contradictory or absurd but really containing a possible truth; an opinion contrary to generally accepted ideas.
Parallelism: the principle in sentence structure that states elements of equal function should have equal form.

Parody: an imitation of mimicking of a composition or of the style of a well-known artist.

Pathos: the ability in literature to call forth feelings of pity, compassion, and/or sadness.

Pedantry: a display of learning for its own sake.

Personification: a figure of speech attributing human qualities to inanimate objects or abstract ideas.

Plot: a plan or scheme to accomplish a purpose.

Poignant: eliciting sorrow or sentiment.

Point of View: the attitude unifying any oral or written argumentation; in description, the physical point from which the observer views what he is describing.

Postmodernism: literature characterized by experimentation, irony, nontraditional forms, multiple meanings, playfulness and a blurred boundary between real and imaginary.

Prose: the ordinary form of spoken and written language; language that does not have a regular rhyme pattern.

Protagonist: the central character in a work of fiction; opposes antagonist.
Pun: play on words; the humorous use of a word emphasizing different meanings or applications.

Purpose: the intended result wished by an author.

Realism: writing about the ordinary aspects of life in a straightforward manner to reflect life as it actually is.

Refrain: a phrase or verse recurring at intervals in a poem or song; chorus.

Requiem: any chant, dirge, hymn, or musical service for the dead.

Resolution: point in a literary work at which the chief dramatic complication is worked out; denouement.

Restatement: idea repeated for emphasis.

Rhetoric: use of language, both written and verbal in order to persuade.

Rhetorical Question: question suggesting its own answer or not requiring an answer; used in argument or persuasion.

Rising Action: plot build up, caused by conflict and complications, advancement towards climax.

Romanticism: movement in western culture beginning in the eighteenth and peaking in the nineteenth century as a revolt against Classicism; imagination was valued over reason and fact.
Satire: ridicules or condemns the weakness and wrong doings of individuals, groups, institutions, or humanity in general.

Scansion: the analysis of verse in terms of meter.

Setting: the time and place in which events in a short story, novel, play, or narrative poem occur.

Simile: a figure of speech comparing two essentially unlike things through the use of a specific word of comparison.

Soliloquy: an extended speech, usually in a drama, delivered by a character alone on stage.

Spiritual: a folk song, usually on a religious theme.

Speaker: a narrator, the one speaking.

Stereotype: cliché; a simplified, standardized conception with a special meaning and appeal for members of a group; a formula story.

Stream of Consciousness: the style of writing that attempts to imitate the natural flow of a character's thoughts, feelings, reflections, memories, and mental images, as the character experiences them.

Structure: the planned framework of a literary selection; its apparent organization.

Style: the manner of putting thoughts into words; a characteristic way of writing or speaking.
Subordination: the couching of less important ideas in less important structures of language.

Surrealism: a style in literature and painting that stresses the subconscious or the nonrational aspects of man’s existence characterized by the juxtaposition of the bizarre and the banal.

Suspension of Disbelief: suspend not believing in order to enjoy it.

Symbol: something which stands for something else, yet has a meaning of its own.

Synesthesia: the use of one sense to convey the experience of another sense.

Synecdoche: another form of name changing, in which a part stands for the whole.

Syntax: the arrangement and grammatical relations of words in a sentence.

Theme: main idea of the story; its message(s).

Thesis: a proposition for consideration, especially one to be discussed and proved or disproved; the main idea.

Tone: the devices used to create the mood and atmosphere of a literary work; the author’s perceived point of view.

Tongue in Cheek: a type of humor in which the speaker feigns seriousness; a.k.a. “dry” or “dead pan”
Tragedy: in literature: any composition with a somber theme carried to a disastrous conclusion; a fatal event; protagonist usually is heroic but tragically (fatally) flawed

Understatement: opposite of hyperbole; saying less than you mean for emphasis

Vernacular: everyday speech

Voice: The textual features, such as diction and sentence structures, that convey a writer's or speaker's persona.

Zeitgeist: the feeling of a particular era in history