

Appendix B

What We Talk About When We Talk About Stories: A Lexicon

action – the events of the story; what the characters do

allegory – a story with a second meaning hidden inside its literal one

allusion – within a story, a reference to a literary work or an event, person, or place outside of the story

ambiguous – uncertain; open to different interpretations

annotation – a reader’s written comments on a text

antagonist – the character who most strongly opposes the hero or heroine in a conflict; opposite of *protagonist*

anti-hero – a main character without the admirable qualities of a typical hero

atmosphere – the feelings a reader gets from a story based on its details, usually those related to its setting

attitude – see *tone*

black comedy – a story that makes light of a serious subject, such as death or war

cadence – a rhythmic pattern that’s based on the natural rhythms, repetitions, and emphases in speech

caricature – a character who is exaggerated or unconvincing as a real person

catharsis – an outpouring of emotion, usually at the end of a story

character – a person in a story

character development – the way an author describes the people in a story—their actions, speech, and thoughts

cliché – an expression that has been used so often it has lost its freshness or meaning, e.g., a rainbow of colors, as busy as a bee, a blanket of snow; note: the adjective form is *clichéd*

climax – the point in a story when the plot reaches its highest point of intensity

coherent – writing that sticks together, that’s consistent and doesn’t contradict itself

comic relief – a humorous element in a story that’s otherwise dramatic; usually used to relieve tension or draw a contrast

concrete – a real, tangible detail or example of something; opposite of *abstract* or *general*

conflict – the opposition of two characters or forces; the classic conflicts found in literature are person against person, person against society, person against nature, and the individual against himself or herself

consistent – a plot event or a character’s actions that agree with what has already happened in the story

copyright page – in a book, the page after the title page; it tells a reader who holds the rights to a book (usually the author), when it was first published, when it was published as a paperback, the name and address of the publisher(s), the Library of Congress number and ISBN for the book, and the number of times it has been reprinted so far, i.e., how well it has sold

denouement – the resolution or clearing up of the complications of a plot, found at the conclusion

deus ex machina – an improbable or contrived ending; translates to “god from the machine,” a device that was lowered onto the stage at the end of Greek plays to provide a tidy conclusion

dialogue – the words spoken among characters

diction – an author’s word choices

dystopian literature – a pessimistic depiction of life in the future

edition – a printed version of a book that’s distinguished from its other versions either in form (paperback vs. hardback) or content (first edition vs. second)

epigraph – a quotation placed at the beginning of a piece of writing to make the theme more resonant

epilogue – a final section of a story that explains what happens after the main events

epistolary novel – a story told through letters or emails

flashback – a scene that returns to an earlier time

flashforward – a scene that moves ahead in time

flat character – a person who is simple, predictable, and doesn’t change over the course of a story (E. M. Forster); opposite of *round character*

foreshadowing – when an author hints at what’s to come in a story

format – the structure of a book

formula/formulaic – a piece of writing in which the plot or format is so familiar, has been used so often, that the writing is stale and predictable

genre – a type of literature

hero – a main character with admirable qualities

image/imagery – a sensory response produced in the mind of a reader; not just mental pictures but any sensory impression evoked by language

intention – purpose

interior monologue – a sustained description of a character’s thoughts, written as though overheard directly from his or her mind

irony – when an author says one thing but means something else

marginalia – notes a reader writes in the margins of a book

meta- – a work that comments on its own status; in metafiction, the author directly addresses the conventions of fiction and acknowledges that this piece of writing is a part of them

mixed review – a critique that includes both positive and negative comments

motif – an event, situation, theme, character, or pattern that shows up in many literary works

motivation – the reasons behind a character’s actions; usually a combination of personality and situation

narrative – a true or fictional account of a series of events; a story

narrator – the voice that tells the story; see *point of view*

nom de plume – “pen name”; a name used by a writer instead of his or her real name

novella – a fictional story that, in length, falls between a short story and a novel

oeuvre – the works of an author taken all together

pace – the speed at which a story unfolds

pan – a negative review

paradox – a statement that contradicts itself although it appears to be true

persona – a character taken on by an author to narrate a story

perspective – the position from which a story’s events are observed

plausible – appearing to be true or realistic

plot – the events in a story

plot device – something used by an author to move the story forward, usually an object, event, or character

point of view – the position from which the narrator observes the events of a story; first-person (I), second person (you), third person (he or she), omniscient (can see everyone’s perspective), and limited omniscient (can see the thoughts and feelings of selected characters); also see *unreliable narrator*

post-apocalyptic literature – fiction set in a world or civilization after its destruction

premise – an idea that provides the basis of a plot

prologue – an introduction to a literary work

prose – writing that isn’t poetry; the ordinary form of written language

protagonist – the main character in a story; opposite of *antagonist*

pseudonym – a “false name” used by an author

quartet – a set of four books

rave – an enthusiastic positive review

realism – a true-to-life representation of a person or situation

reflections – the thoughts and feelings of a character

resolution – the part of a plot where the conflict is worked out, usually at the end of a story

roman à clef – a “novel with a key”: a story in which real people, thinly disguised, appear under fictional names

round character – a complex, dynamic person who changes over the course of a story (E. M. Forster); opposite of *flat character*

scene – one episode in a story

sensory details – descriptions that evoke one or more of the five senses: visual (sight), olfactory (smell), auditory (sound), tactile (touch), and gustatory (taste)

sequel – a book that continues the story of a previous book

series – a group of novels related by plot, characters, and/or setting

setting – the time and place in which a story occurs

stereotype – a too-simple, standardized idea about all the members of one group

stream of consciousness – a character’s thoughts written in a realistic, continuous flow

style – the way an author uses words; how an author’s diction, syntax, tone, punctuation, etc., work together in a story

suspend disbelief – put aside logic in order to enjoy a story

symbol – an object or action that represents a larger meaning

tense – the time in which the action takes place: past, present, or future

tension – a situation in a story that gives the reader a strong sense of worry, uncertainty, or fear

theme – an idea about life that emerges from a story

tone – the attitude the author takes toward his or her subject or audience

trilogy – a set of three books by one author

unreliable narrator – the voice telling a story when it doesn’t understand or know the truth, or is withholding it on purpose

utopian literature – a story set in an imagined perfect society

vignette – a very short story focused on one moment