

Glossary

ABSTRACT Possessing qualities apart from an object. Referring to intangible attributes, like love, death, happiness, rather than concrete ones, like frog, desk, or chair.

AMBIGUITY Allowing for multiple interpretations.

ANTICLIMAX The "falling action" that takes place after a climax. A sudden drop in tension, often unintentional.

ATMOSPHERE The mood of a piece, related to setting. It can include everything from descriptions of place, to weather, to time of day.

BACKSTORY The history of a character or characters as relevant to the present events of a story.

CHARACTER A made-up person. Considered one of the key ingredients of fiction.

CLICHÉ An overused, familiar phrase, often of figurative language, that has lost its ability to inform due to excessive use.

COMPLICATION Often used as a synonym for "conflict," that aspect of plot that creates tension and sustains the reader's interest, frequently leading to a climax, or epiphany.

CONCRETE DETAIL Particular material objects, rendered with one or more of the five senses. The opposite of **ABSTRACT**.

CONFLICT Tension arising from opposite forces that is considered necessary by some to sustain a reader's interest. Others feel that this word doesn't adequately describe all the nuanced ways in which a writer can hold the reader's attention.

CONVENTION An accepted means of expression within a particular form. A tried-and-true means of doing something in literature.

- CREATIVE NONFICTION** Fact-based writing that uses fictional techniques to bring the subject to life.
- CRISIS** Also known as the climax. The point in a narrative where things are at the highest point of tension. The moment after which nothing can ever be the same again.
- DEAD METAPHOR** a metaphor that has been so overused that it has sunk into our language; the comparison is no longer fresh or surprising. For example, "he ran for office" no longer evokes the image of someone actually running.
- DENOUEMENT** The falling action, following a climax or crisis, after which things in a narrative are resolved.
- DIALOGUE** Words spoken between characters in a scene. Specifically, words spoken between two or more characters.
- DISTANCE** The sense of how close (or far) the narrator is from the characters or the action in a narrative.
- EPIPHANY** A literary revelation, or lifting of appearances in order to reveal meaning and truth. A moment of realization by a character, or the reader, or both.
- EXPOSITION** Explanation, usually in narration, of information essential to the story.
- FALLING ACTION** Denouement, or the wrapping up of loose ends that follows the climax or crisis of a narrative.
- FICTION** Made-up events presented as if true in a narrative. Can be either a novel, a novella, or a short story.
- FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE** Expressing one thing in terms of something else. Major figurative language includes metaphor, simile, allegory, symbol, and personification.
- FLASHBACK** Scene of a prior event juxtaposed against a current scene. Usually triggered by a current event or by a character's memory.
- FREWRITE** A kind of writing exercise when you don't think about a specific subject or worry about what comes next, but just write whatever comes into your head.
- GENRE** A literary form such as novel, short story, poem, or play.
- IMAGE** Anything that has been rendered by any one (or more) of the five senses. Images are the building blocks of both fiction and creative nonfiction.
- IRONY** An apparent contradiction or incongruity that dissembles or hides a "truth," not to deceive, but to achieve an effect. *Dramatic irony* is when the reader knows something the character doesn't.
- MELODRAMATIC** When action dominates over characterization. From the Greek "melo" for song; melodrama originally referred to any drama that was set to music.

- METAPHOR** Figurative language in which two unlike things are directly compared. "The dog days of August" is a metaphor.
- NARRATIVE** The events and characters that make up a story.
- NARRATOR** The intelligence that is telling the story. Can be first person, second person, or third person (see **POINT OF VIEW**).
- NOVEL** A work of prose of extended length.
- OMNISCIENCE** Knowing everything there is to know. An omniscient narrator is a godlike intelligence that knows everything about the universe of the story or novel.
- PERSONIFICATION** The technique of giving human traits to natural objects.
- PLOT** That series of events and/or actions that make up the story, arranged in a particular order, and told in a particular way by a narrator.
- POINT OF VIEW** The vantage point from which the events of the story or novel are narrated. Can be first person, second person, or third person.
- RESOLUTION** The denouement, or falling action. When the story's elements come together in an emotionally satisfying way.
- SCENE** Dramatic part of a story, taking place at a specific place at a specific time, between specific characters.
- SENTIMENTALITY** An excess of sentiment, or feeling, that hasn't been "earned" by a story or novel or nonfiction piece. A clichéd or overly familiar rendering of events or circumstances rather than a rendition that is fresh and surprising.
- SETTING** The place in which a story or novel takes place. The physical surroundings, as described by a narrator.
- SIMILE** A comparison of two unlike things, using "like" or "as." "My love is like a red red rose," and "She had a face as round and as innocent as a cabbage" are similes.
- STEREOTYPE** A clichéd character. A stock character, familiar to the reader through a standard set of traits. The whore with the heart of gold, or the browbeaten husband, are two examples of stock characters that appear in fiction as well as creative nonfiction.
- STOCK CHARACTER** See **STEREOTYPE**.
- STORY** A work of prose with no minimum length and (usually) not exceeding 20,000 words.
- STYLE** A particular writer's way of expressing himself or herself, dependent on such things as choice of point of view, syntax, or material he/she chooses to explore.
- SUBTEXT** Meaning that is implied rather than stated. All text has a subtext—the meaning that lies beneath the actual words.
- SUSPENSE** The state of being uncertain, unresolved. The sense that something of dramatic importance is about to happen.

SYMBOL A concrete object or image (something that can be rendered with the five senses) that stands for something larger than itself. The cross stands for Jesus, Christianity, and all its related tenets; the white whale, in *Moby-Dick*, stands for some forbidden thing that mankind should not attempt to pursue or possess.

TENSION The juxtaposition of two opposing forces.

VOICE The specific way that a writer has of putting his or her thoughts on paper.
See **STYLE**.