

English 11

Fiction Terms

Anti-climax

An anti-climax is where something which would appear to be difficult to solve in a plot is solved through something trivial.

Example. Destroying a heavily guarded facility would require advanced technology, teamwork and weaponry in a successful climax, but in an anti-climax, it may just consist of pushing a red button, which says, "Emergency Self-Destruct."

Denouement

The Denouement is the French term meaning "unraveling" or "unknotting," used to describe the resolution of the plot following the climax. It is also known as the "Falling Action."

Example. In To Kill A Mockingbird, the Denouement features the Sheriff covers for Boo Radley's stabbing of Bob Ewell, Boo retreats home, Jem comes to terms with the injustice of trial, Scout succumbs to sleep, and Atticus wraps it all up by repeating the famous line, "You never really know a man until you stand in his shoes."

Indeterminate Ending

Indeterminacy in literature can be when the ending of a story is not wrapped up entirely; there are still questions to be answered.

Example. In the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell, when the glass paperweight is broken the symbolism can be analyzed at multiple levels so the reader's interpretation of the event can be different from someone else's. Also, the reader may know less about O'Brien toward the end of the novel than at the beginning.

Surprise Ending

A surprise ending is a plot twist occurring near or at the conclusion of a story, an unexpected conclusion to a work of fiction that causes the audience to reevaluate the narrative or characters.

Example. Chuck Palahniuk's novel *Fight Club*, surprised its audience when it is revealed at the end that protagonist has been antagonizing himself. All of his fighting has been with himself and the persona he refers to was self-created.

Catastrophe

Catastrophe is the final resolution in a poem or narrative plot, which unravels the intrigue and brings the piece to a close. In comedies, this may be a marriage between main characters; in tragedies, it may be the death of one or more main characters. It is the final part of a play.

Example. A catastrophe ending occurs in *Oedipus Rex* when Oedipus makes his familial discovery which then affects the end of the play.

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External Conflict

External conflict is a struggle between the protagonist and another character against nature or some outside force. It can be broken down into the following categories:

- Person versus Person

Example. Boo Radley versus Bob Ewell

- Person versus Environment

Example. In Jack London's story "To Build a Fire."

- Person versus Society

Example. In The Giver when characters are unable to experience pain, they are devalued.

Internal Conflict

Internal conflict (person versus self) is a struggle that takes place in the protagonist's mind and through which the character reaches a new understanding or dynamic change.

Example. Best exemplified in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, as "too much thinking turns us all into cowards" (Act 1, Horatio). Hamlet spends the entire play deciding whether or not to kill his Uncle who killed his father and is now married to his mother. His indecision is a great conflict.

Third Person Point of View (POV)

Third-person narration provides the greatest flexibility to the author and thus is the most commonly used narrative mode in literature. In the third-person narrative mode, each and every character is referred to by the narrator as "he", "she", "it", or "they", but never as "I" or "we" (first-person), or "you" (second-person). In third-person narrative, it is necessary that the narrator is merely an unspecified entity or uninvolved person that conveys the story, but *not* a character of any kind within the story being told. Third-person singular (he/she) is overwhelmingly the most common type of third-person narrative.

The first is the subjectivity/objectivity axis, with "subjective" narration describing one or more character's feelings and thoughts, while "objective" narration does not describe the feelings or thoughts of any characters. The second axis is between "omniscient" and "limited," a distinction that refers to the knowledge available to the narrator. An omniscient narrator has omniscient knowledge of time, people, places and events; a limited narrator, in contrast, may know absolutely everything about a single character and every piece of knowledge in that character's mind, but it is "limited" to that character—that is, it cannot describe things unknown to the focal character.

Example. *The Alchemist* is written in Third Person Omniscient Point of View.

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Analogy

An analogy is a similarity between like features of two things, on which a comparison may be based.

Example. An analogy between the heart and a water pump can be created if one describes the pumping action of a water pump in order to allow water travel, just as the heart has a pumping action in order to allow blood to travel throughout the body.

Comic Relief

Comic relief is the inclusion of a humorous character, scene or witty dialogue in an otherwise serious work, often to relieve tension.

Example.

The use of the porter's character in *Macbeth* employs comic relief in that particular scene. The king has been murdered, and a drunken porter monologues about his drunken evening as he stumbles to open the door.

Dilemma

A dilemma is a problem offering at least two solutions or possibilities, of which none are practically acceptable. The dilemma is sometimes used as a rhetorical device, in that one must accept either A, or B; here A and B would be propositions each leading to some further conclusion.

Example. Being stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Dramatic Irony

Dramatic irony creates a discrepancy between what a character believes or says and what the reader or audience member knows to be true.

Example. In *Hamlet*, the audience knows that Hamlet knows that his uncle Claudius murdered his father. However, throughout the play, Claudius is unaware, including when he views a play that Hamlet has arranged to be performed that is about his father's murder. The reader almost waits for Claudius to figure it out and for Hamlet to act.

Hero

A hero or heroine, often called the protagonist, is the central character who engages the reader's interest and empathy.

Example. Harry Potter is a literary hero.

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Characterization

Characterization is the process of conveying information about characters in narrative or dramatic works of art or everyday conversation. Characters may be presented by means of description, through their actions, speech, or thoughts.

Example. “A giant of a man was standing in the doorway. His face was almost completely hidden by a long, shaggy mane of hair and a wild, tangled beard, but you could make out his eyes, glinting like black beetles under all the hair.” (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, Pg. 46)

Stereotype

A stereotype is a commonly held public belief about specific social groups or types of individuals. Stereotypes are standardized and simplified conceptions of groups based on some prior assumptions. Generally speaking, stereotypes are not based on objective truth but rather subjective and sometimes unverifiable content-matter. In literature, stereotypes are most commonly seen as clichéd or predictable characters or situations. Throughout history, storytellers have drawn from stereotypical characters and situations, in order to connect the audience with new tales immediately.

Example. Shakespeare’s character of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* is seen as a stereotypical Jewish man in that time period.

Myth

The main characters in myths are usually gods or supernatural heroes. As sacred stories, myths are often endorsed by rulers and priests and closely linked to religion. In the society in which it is told, a myth is usually regarded as a true account of the remote past. Similar to the myth is the legend or folktale.

Example. Greek and Roman Mythology is a sample of collection of myths based upon set cultures and religions. A famous Greek myth is that of the Trojan Horse.

The above definitions constitute the terms related to fiction that are examinable in English 11.

These definitions were gathered from public domain content at wikipedia.org, dictionary.com, for students in the Saint Thomas Aquinas High School English Department.

Fiction is a literary work based on the imagination and not necessarily on fact. The terms on this list apply mostly to the study of short stories and novels, but could also be used in connection to non-fiction, biography, narrative poetry, and drama.

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Chronological order	Foil
Climax	Indirect Presentation
Conflict (internal, external)	Protagonist
Exposition	Round Character
Falling Action	Static Character
Flashback	Stereotyped Character
Foreshadowing	Narration
Plot	Narrator
Resolution	Comedy
Rising action	Drama
Setting	Dialogue
Suspense	First Person POV
Antagonist	Limited Omniscient POV
Character	Objective POV
Direct Presentation	Omniscient POV
Dynamic Character	Point Of View (POV)
Flat Character	Tragedy
Atmosphere	

The above list constitutes the terms related to fiction that are have been taught this far in high school English and are examinable in English 11.