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message or theme that the author wishes to convey. Some common types in literature include light and dark, journeys, love, betrayal, and death. For example, in Shakespeare's play "Macbeth," the motif of blood is used to symbolize guilt and the consequences of one's actions. The repeated appearance of blood throughout the play underscores the tragedy of Macbeth's actions and the consequences that he must face. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby," the motif of the green light that shines across the water serves as a symbol of Gatsby's unattainable dream of winning back his lost love, Daisy. The repeated appearance of the green light throughout the novel underscores the theme of the American Dream and the impossibility of achieving it. Motifs can be subtle or obvious, and their significance may only become apparent upon repeated readings or analysis. By repeating certain images, ideas or symbols throughout a literary work, authors can create a sense of coherence and unity, and deepen the reader's understanding of the work's overall message or theme. The narrator is the voice that tells a story or conveys information to the reader. They can be a character within the story or an external voice that is not part of the story. The narrator's perspective and level of involvement can have a significant impact on the reader's understanding and interpretation of the story. There are several types of narrators, each with its own characteristics and limitations. A first-person narrator is a character in the story who refers to themselves as "I" and can only describe events and experiences that they witness or participate in. A third-person narrator is not a character in the story and can provide a more objective view of the events and characters. A third-person limited narrator focuses on the thoughts and feelings of one character, while a third-person omniscient narrator knows the thoughts and feelings of all characters. The choice of narrator can have a significant impact on the story's tone, mood, and overall impact. A first-person narrator can create a sense of intimacy and immediacy, while a third-person narrator can provide a more detached and objective view of events. The narrator's reliability or unreliability can also shape the reader's understanding of the story and its characters. In some cases, the narrator may be an unreliable or ambiguous presence, leaving the reader uncertain about the truth of the story. Alternatively, the narrator may be a highly reliable and authoritative source of information, providing the reader with a clear and accurate account of events. Ultimately, the narrator plays a crucial role in shaping the reader's experience of the story and its characters. Onomatopoeia is a literary device where a word is used to imitate a sound that it describes. The word itself creates or mimics the sound of the thing it is describing, making the reader better understand and visualize the scene or action in the text. This device is commonly used in poetry, but it can also be used in prose. Examples of onomatopoeia include words like buzz, crackle, hiss, moo, meow, chirp, rustle, and pop. Here are a few examples of how onomatopoeia can be used in literature: The bees buzzed around the flowers in the garden. The leaves rustled in the wind. The thunder rumbled in the distance. The fire crackled and popped as it burned. The cat meowed loudly for its food. Onomatopoeia can add depth and sensory appeal to a piece of writing. It helps to create a more vivid and immersive experience for the reader, allowing them to hear the sounds of the story in their mind as they read. Oxymoron is a literary device that brings together two contradictory terms in order to create a meaningful phrase. It is often used for emphasis or to create a dramatic effect. The word "oxymoron" comes from the Greek words "oxys" meaning "sharp" and "moros" meaning "dull". Examples of oxymoron include: Jumbo shrimp Bittersweet Living dead Pretty ugly Awfully good Open secret Virtual reality Deafening silence Act naturally Wise fool These examples all bring together two contrasting terms that create a vivid and memorable image in the reader's mind. The use of oxymoron can be particularly effective in poetry or prose that deals with complex or contradictory themes. A paradox is a statement or situation that appears to be self-contradictory or absurd but in reality, it holds a hidden truth. Paradoxes are often used in literature to create an element of intrigue or challenge the reader's expectations. They can also be used to bring attention to the complexity of a theme or to highlight the paradoxical nature of human existence. One famous example of a paradox is the statement "less is more." On the surface, it seems contradictory, as "less" and "more" are opposites. However, the statement can be interpreted to mean that simplicity and clarity can often be more effective than complexity and excess. Another example of a paradox is the classic time travel paradox, in which a person goes back in time and changes something that affects their own existence, such as preventing their parents from meeting. This paradox creates a logical inconsistency that cannot be resolved, as it questions the very fabric of cause and effect. In literature, paradoxes can add depth and complexity to characters and themes. For example, in Shakespeare's play "Hamlet," the titular character states "I must be cruel only to be kind." This paradoxical statement reveals Hamlet's inner conflict between his desire for revenge and his sense of duty to do what is ultimately best for those around him. Parallelism is a literary device where the writer uses a series of words or phrases with similar grammatical structure and length to emphasize and draw attention to an idea or concept. It is also known as parallel structure or parallel construction. Example: Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous speech "I Have a Dream" is an excellent example of parallelism: "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.' I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood." In this excerpt, King repeats the phrase "I have a dream" to emphasize his message of hope and equality, while also using parallel structure in the phrases "rise up and live out" and "sons of former slaves and sons of former slave owners" to highlight the importance of unity and brotherhood. Parataxis is a literary device in which coordinating conjunctions are used to link phrases or clauses in quick succession, without the use of subordination. This creates a simple and direct style of writing or speech. Parataxis is often used in poetry, where the brevity of the lines lends itself to a quick, staccato rhythm. An example of parataxis can be found in William Carlos Williams' poem "The Red Wheelbarrow": so much depends upon a red wheel barrow glazed with rain water beside the white chickens Here, the poet uses short, simple phrases with coordinating conjunctions ("so much depends upon," "glazed with rain water") to create a sense of immediacy and clarity. The paratactic structure emphasizes the simplicity and importance of the image presented, while the line breaks provide a sense of pause and emphasis on each phrase. Personification is a literary device in which an inanimate object, animal or abstract idea is given human-like qualities or attributes. This is done in order to make the object or idea more relatable, and to add depth and emotion to the writing. Examples of personification include words like "The sun smiled down on us" or "The wind howled in the night". In this sentence, the wind is personified as it is given the human-like quality of being able to howl. "The sun smiled down on us" is given the human-like quality of being able to smile. "The flowers danced in the breeze" is the omission of conjunctions between phrases or clauses. Here's an example of polysyndeton: "I ate pancakes and bacon and eggs and toast and orange juice for breakfast." In this sentence, the conjunction "and" is used repeatedly to connect all of the items the speaker ate for breakfast. The use of polysyndeton creates a sense of accumulation or buildup, and can give the sentence a sense of urgency or excitement. In literature, a protagonist is the central character or leading figure in a story, often referred to as the hero or heroine. The story revolves around this character, and their actions and decisions drive the plot forward. The protagonist is usually portrayed as having strengths and weaknesses, and they often face challenges and obstacles that they must overcome in order to achieve their goals. In some cases, the protagonist may also undergo a significant transformation or character development throughout the course of the story. Examples of protagonists in literature include Harry Potter in the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling, Elizabeth Bennet in Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen, and Santiago in The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho. A pun is a form of wordplay that exploits multiple meanings of a term, or of similar-sounding words, for an intended humorous or rhetorical effect. It usually involves a play on words that sound similar but have different meanings, or on words with multiple meanings. Puns can be used to add humor or wit to a sentence or a conversation, or to create a memorable phrase or catchphrase. For example, "Time flies like an arrow; fruit flies like a banana" is a classic pun that plays on the multiple meanings of the words "flies" and "like". Another example is "I'm reading a book on anti-gravity. It's impossible to put down." This pun exploits the multiple meanings of the phrasal verb "put down," which can mean "to stop reading" or "to place something on a surface". Red herring is a literary device that is used to distract the reader or audience from an important issue. It involves introducing a false clue or character that misleads the reader or audience and leads them away from the real solution or plot point. Red herrings are often used in mystery, suspense, and thriller genres to throw the reader off the trail of the real culprit or solution. For example, in the classic mystery novel "Murder on the Orient Express" by Agatha Christie, the detective Hercule Poirot is presented with multiple suspects who each have a motive for committing the murder. However, the real solution involves a complex plot involving multiple people, and the murderer turns out to be someone who was not initially suspected. Throughout the novel, Christie uses various red herrings to throw the reader off the trail of the real culprit, including false clues and misleading character traits. Repetition is a literary device that involves repeating a word, phrase, or sentence for emphasis or emphasis on a particular idea or theme. It is commonly used in poetry, prose, speeches, and song lyrics to create rhythm and enhance the meaning of a text. Repetition can take many forms, such as the repetition of a single word, the repetition of a phrase, or the repetition of an entire sentence. Some common types of repetition include anaphora, epiphora, and symplece. An example of repetition is the famous speech by Martin Luther King Jr., where he repeats the phrase "I have a dream" throughout the speech to emphasize his vision for a better future: "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'" "I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood." "I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice." Rhyme is a literary device that involves the use of similar or identical sounds in two or more words, usually at the end of lines in poetry or at the end of phrases in prose. Rhyme is used to create a musical quality to the writing and can add emphasis or impact to certain words or phrases. There are different types of rhyme including: End rhyme: The most common type of rhyme where the ending sounds of words in a line match with the ending sounds of words in another line. Example: "I saw a cat/ In a big straw hat." Internal rhyme: Words within a line of poetry that rhyme with one another. Example: "Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary." Slant rhyme: Words that are similar in sound but not identical. Example: "Soul" and "all." Eye rhyme: Words that look like they should rhyme but do not because of pronunciation. Example: "Love" and "move." Rhyme is used in poetry to create rhythm, emphasize certain words or phrases, and create a musical quality to the writing. In addition, it can be used to create a sense of closure or completeness to a poem or to connect different ideas and concepts. Rhymef is a literary device that refers to the recurring pattern of sounds and silences in poetry and prose. It is created by the arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables in a sentence or line of poetry. Here is an example of rhythm in poetry: The woods are lovely, dark, and deep, But I have promises to keep, And miles to go before I sleep, And miles to go before I sleep. In this poem "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" by Robert Frost, the rhythm is created by the repetition of stressed and unstressed syllables in each line. The pattern of the stressed syllables creates a rhythm that gives the poem a musical quality. Sarcasm is a form of verbal irony that is intended to mock, criticize or ridicule something or someone. It is often characterized by a tone of voice that is opposite of the speaker's intended meaning. Here's an example: Imagine a rainy day, and someone says, "Oh great, just what I needed today." The tone of their voice suggests annoyance or frustration, but their words literally say the opposite, as rain is often seen as beneficial for plants and the environment. This is a sarcastic remark because the speaker is using irony to convey a different message than what is literally said. Satire is a genre of literature or art that uses humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to criticize and expose societal flaws or issues. The goal of satire is often to bring about change or encourage people to think more critically about a particular subject. For example, the television show "The Daily Show" is a satirical news program that often pokes fun at politicians and the media, using humor and irony to point out flaws in the political system and highlight the absurdities of contemporary society. Similarly, the novel "Animal Farm" by George Orwell is a satirical allegory that critiques the Soviet Union and the dangers of totalitarianism. A simile is a figure of speech that compares two things using "like" or "as". Similes are used to make a comparison between two things that are seemingly unrelated, but share common traits. By using similes, writers can create vivid and imaginative descriptions, which can help readers to understand the text in a more engaging and interesting way. For example, "Her eyes were like sparkling diamonds," is a simile that compares the brightness and brilliance of a person's eyes to the sparkle of a diamond. Another example is "He was as quiet as a mouse," which is a simile that compares a person's silence to the quietness of a mouse. Similes are commonly used in literature, poetry, and everyday language to add depth and color to descriptions, and to create powerful imagery that engages the reader's imagination. She sings like an angel. His eyes sparkled like diamonds in the sun. The runner was as fast as a cheetah. Her hair was as curly as a spring. The clouds floated by like cotton candy in the sky. In each of these examples, one thing is being compared to another using "like" or "as" to create a vivid image or to emphasize a particular quality or trait. Soliloquy is a literary device that refers to a dramatic monologue spoken by a character in a play, often revealing their inner thoughts and feelings to the audience. The character speaks as if they are alone, and their words are not intended to be heard by anyone else in the scene. Soliloquies are a common feature of Shakespearean plays, and are often used to reveal the inner turmoil of a character, their motivations and their plans. For example, in Shakespeare's play "Hamlet", the character Hamlet delivers several soliloquies throughout the play, including the famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy, in which he contemplates the nature of existence and the possibility of suicide. Soliloquies allow the audience to gain a deeper understanding of the character's thoughts and feelings, and can add depth and complexity to a play. A sonnet is a type of poem that consists of 14 lines and follows a strict rhyme scheme and meter. There are two main types of sonnets: the Italian or Petrarchan sonnet, and the English or Shakespearean sonnet. The Italian sonnet is composed of an octave, or eight lines, and a sestet, or six lines, while the English sonnet is composed of three quatrains, or four-line stanzas, and a final couplet. Both types typically use iambic pentameter, which consists of ten syllables per line with a pattern of unstressed and stressed syllables. Here is an example of an English sonnet: Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate: Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May, And summer's lease hath all too short a date: Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines, And often is his gold complexion dimmed; And every fair from fair sometime declines, By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed; But thy eternal summer shall not fade Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest; Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade, When in eternal lines to time thou growest: So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, So long lives this and this gives life to thee. This is a famous sonnet by William Shakespeare, known as Sonnet 18. In this poem, the speaker is comparing his beloved to a summer's day, but ultimately concludes that his beloved is more lovely and everlasting than any seasonal beauty. The poem follows the traditional English sonnet structure with three quatrains and a final couplet, and uses iambic pentameter throughout. Stream of consciousness is a literary technique that involves presenting a character's thoughts, feelings, and emotions as they occur, without any editing or structure. It aims to reveal the character's innermost thoughts and feelings in a continuous flow, allowing readers to experience the character's mind as if they were inside it. This technique often involves the use of long, uninterrupted passages of thought and can be challenging for readers to follow. An example of stream of consciousness can be found in James Joyce's novel "Ulysses," which uses this technique to portray the inner lives of its characters as they navigate through a single day in Dublin. In literature, style refers to the way an author uses words and language to convey their message or story. It includes elements such as sentence structure, diction, tone, and literary devices. The style of a writer can often be recognized by their unique use of language, syntax, and the way they structure their sentences. For example, Ernest Hemingway is known for his simple, direct style that uses short, declarative sentences, while William Faulkner is known for his complex, poetic style that uses long, meandering sentences with intricate syntax. The style of a writer can greatly impact the reader's experience and perception of the story being told. Symbolism is a literary device used to imbue objects, actions, or characters with a deeper meaning that goes beyond their literal interpretation. Through the use of symbolism, writers can evoke emotions, convey themes, and add depth to their works. A symbol can take many forms, such as an object, color, or even a sound, and its meaning can vary depending on the context and the reader's interpretation. For instance, a red rose can symbolize love, passion, or even blood, depending on the context. Similarly, a white dove can symbolize peace or the Holy Spirit, while a black cat can symbolize bad luck or witchcraft. Symbolism can be found in all types of literature, from poetry to novels to plays. It is often used to enhance the overall meaning and impact of a work by adding a layer of complexity and nuance. Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a part of something is used to refer to the whole or vice versa. It's a type of metonymy, which is a broader term for the use of one word to refer to something closely related to it. Examples of synecdoche include: "All hands on deck" - "hands" refers to the entire crew or people on board the ship. "Nice wheels" - "wheels" refers to the entire car. "The pen is mightier than the sword" - "pen" represents writing or written communication, while "sword" represents military force or violence. "Gray beard" - "beard" represents the entire person or the old age they symbolize. "Check out my new threads" - "threads" refers to an entire outfit or clothing. In each of these examples, a part of something is used to represent the whole, or the whole is used to represent a part. The use of synecdoche can add complexity and nuance to language and literature. Synesthesia is a literary device that involves the blending of multiple sensory experiences, such as seeing colors while hearing music or feeling tastes while reading words. It is used to create a vivid and sensory-rich experience for the reader or listener. An example of synesthesia can be found in the famous opening line of Vladimir Nabokov's novel "Invitation of a Beethoven": "Invitation, light of my life, fire of my loins." In this line, the speaker is combining the visual image of light with the physical sensation of fire to create an intense and memorable description of his love for the title character. By using synesthesia, Nabokov is able to evoke a powerful emotional response from the reader and create a memorable and sensory-rich opening to his novel. In literature, a theme refers to the central idea or message that a writer wishes to convey through their work. It is a universal concept or idea that is explored and developed throughout the story. Themes can range from broad, overarching concepts like love, loss, or power, to more specific ideas like the importance of family or the dangers of prejudice. For example, in Harper Lee's novel "To Kill a Mockingbird," the theme of racial injustice is central to the story. Through the experiences of the protagonist, Scout Finch, and her family, the novel explores the devastating effects of racism and the importance of standing up for what is right, even in the face of overwhelming opposition. The theme is not explicitly stated, but rather woven throughout the novel, providing a deeper meaning and resonance to the characters and events. Tone is the attitude or mood that an author conveys in their writing. It refers to the way the author expresses their feelings towards the subject matter, which can be conveyed through the use of language, style, and other literary devices. For example, a writer may use a somber tone to express sadness or grief, or a humorous tone to convey amusement or satire. Tone can also vary depending on the intended audience or purpose of the writing. For instance, a persuasive essay may use a persuasive or authoritative tone, while a personal narrative may use a reflective or nostalgic tone. In summary, tone is an essential aspect of a writer's style, as it helps to create a certain emotional response or reaction from the reader. Tragedy is a type of drama that deals with serious, often somber and distressing events that lead to a disastrous or fatal conclusion for the protagonist or the main character. It explores the darker aspects of the human experience and often involves the tragic flaw or error in judgment of the protagonist, which leads to their downfall. The themes of tragedy may include fate, power, morality, love, and the struggle of the human condition. Tragedies often evoke a sense of pity and fear in the audience, as they witness the tragic events unfolding before them. Examples of well-known tragedies include William Shakespeare's "Hamlet," Sophocles' "Oedipus Rex," and Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman." Understatement is a figure of speech that intentionally downplays the significance or exaggerates the triviality of something to create emphasis or a humorous effect. It involves stating less than what is actually meant or expected. For example, if someone just won the lottery and says, "I guess this will help me pay a few bills," it is an understatement because winning the lottery is much more significant than simply paying a few bills. Another example is if someone receives a standing ovation and says, "I don't deserve this," it is also an understatement because they clearly do deserve it. Understatement is often used for comedic effect or to create an ironic contrast between what he said and what is actually meant. Zeugma is a literary device in which a single word or phrase is used with two or more parts of a sentence but must be understood differently in relation to each part. This creates a semantic incongruity in the sentence, often for humorous or dramatic effect. For example, in the sentence "She opened her door and her heart to the orphan," the word "opened" is used with "door" and "heart" but is understood differently in each instance. In the first case, "opened" means physically opening the door, while in the second case, it means emotionally opening up to the orphan. Another example of zeugma is the sentence "He lost his coat and his temper," where the word "lost" is used with both "coat" and "temper," but means something different in each case. More to read What is it: Ideas, people, images, ideas, or object placed next to one another to highlight their differences. Example: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the Spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct the other way." —Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities Here, Dickens juxtaposes multiple circumstances, uses opposites for emphasis. 18. Malapropism What is it: An incorrect word intentionally or unintentionally used in place of a similar-sounding one, sometimes used for humorous effect. Example: "Our watch, sir, have indeed comprehended two auspicious persons." —William Shakespeare, Much Ado Without Nothing, Act 3, scene 5 The malapropisms, in this case, are the misuse of "comprehended" in place of "apprehended" and "auspicious" instead of "suspicious." 19. Metaphor What is it: A comparison of two ideas, events, objects, or people that does not use "like" or "as." An extended metaphor is a lengthy metaphor that continues the comparison for several sentences, paragraphs, or even pages. Example: "But soft! What light through yonder window breaks? It is the East, and Juliet is the sun! Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon, Who is already sick and pale with grief." —William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, Act 2, Scene 2 Here, the sun is a metaphor for Juliet. 20. Mood What is it: The general feeling the speaker evokes in the reader through the atmosphere, descriptions, and other features. Example: "Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing, Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before" —Edgar Allan Poe, The Raven Poe evokes an air of mystery in the opening lines of his poem, setting a dark mood. 21. Onomatopoeia What is it: A word the is closely associated or identical to the sound it describes. Example: Buzz 22. Oxymoron What is it: A pairing of seemingly contradictory terms used to convey emphasis or tension. Example: "A fine mess": this is an oxymoronic characterization because "fine" is typically associated with beauty and order, while "mess" is the opposite. 23. Paradox What is it: An apparent contradiction that, upon further unraveling, may contain truth, used for effect on the reader. Example: Hamlet: "I must be cruel to be kind." —William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 4 In this instance, Hamlet must, in fact, act in a seemingly cruel way in order to ultimately be kind. 24. Personification What is it: Lending descriptions generally applied to human beings to nonhumans. This term differs from anthropomorphism in that the nonhuman entities are not thought to behave in human-like ways but are merely described in these terms. Example: The shadows danced on the wall. Shadows do not actually dance, but the lending of the human action personifies them. 25. Repetition What is it: Multiple instances of a word or phrase, often in succession, used for emphasis. Example: "The woods are lovely, dark, and deep. But I have promises to keep, And miles to go before I sleep. And miles to go before I sleep." —Robert Frost's Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening The repetition emphasizes the length of the speaker's journey. 26. Satire What is it: A phrase or entire work that uses irony to critique behaviors, events, people, or vices. Example: Animal Farm is a work of satire, critiquing Stalinism and the politics Soviet Union. 27. Simile What is it: A comparison between objects, events, or people that uses "like" or "as." Example: "I wandered lonely as a cloud that floats on high o'er vales and hills." —William Wordsworth, Daffodils "Lonely as a cloud" is a simile, comparing the states of isolation. 28. Symbolism What is it: Something used to represent a larger concept or idea. Example: In Macbeth, the "spot" Lady Macbeth cannot get off her dress is a symbol of her guilt-stained conscience. 29. Synecdoche What is it: An instance of a part representing a whole or vice versa. Example: When someone refers to looking out at a "sea of faces," the faces represent whole people. 30. Tone What is it: The speaker or narrator's attitude toward the subject of the piece, distinct from mood in that it is not used to evoke a particular feeling in the reader. Example: "I shall be telling this with a sigh Somewhere ages and ages hence: Two roads diverged in a wood, and I, I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference." —Robert Frost, The Road Not Taken The speaker is evoking a tone of unhappiness and possible regret with the words "with a sigh." To learn more about using rhetorical devices, read How to Use Rhetorical Devices in Your College Essay. Looking for help navigating the road to college as a high school student? Download our free guide for 9th graders, and our free guide for 10th graders. Our guides go in-depth about subjects ranging from academics, choosing courses, standardized tests, extracurricular activities, and much more! Want access to expert college guidance — for free? When you create your free CollegeVine account, you will find out your real admissions chances, build a best-fit school list, learn how to improve your profile, and get your questions answered by experts and peers—all for free. Sign up for your CollegeVine account today to get a boost on your college journey.