Literary Terms for Short Story Unit

By Stacie Kaminski
DENOTATION

- The **objective dictionary definition** of a word.

- Frugal and cheap mean the same but one is more positive.
CONNOTATION

The meaning, association, or emotion that a word suggests

Robust vs. Fat

Assertive vs. Bossy
A **literary reference** to something that the writer assumes the reader will be **familiar** with such as the Bible, Shakespeare, or mythology.

Sam was like the little boy who cried wolf.
CLIMAX

The turning point or the moment of greatest intensity which occurs near the end of story which helps determine the outcome of the conflict.

- It is often marked by a significant action, even a moment of violence.
- In *Romeo and Juliet* the climax comes right before they both kill themselves.
SYMBOL

- Person, place, thing, or event that stands for both itself and for something else

- Apple—education

- Rainbow—hope

- Black cat—bad luck
FORESHADOWING

The use of clues to hint at events that will occur later in the plot

In *Romeo and Juliet* Romeo’s death is foreshadowed when he says he had a dream that he died an untimely death.
INFERENCE

Something that is **not** directly stated but is **hinted** at or revealed **indirectly**

Inferences focus the **present** where foreshadowing gives hints or clues about the future.

In *Make Lemonade* it says Jolly’s door has three locks on it. This hints that it is a high crime neighborhood.
CONFLICT

The struggle between two opposing forces which can be internal or external

- **PERSON vs. PERSON** (Tim insults Mary)

- **PERSON vs. SELF** (internal conflict—should I stay out late?)
CONFLICTS CONT.

PERSON vs. NATURE (blizzard when driving home)

PERSON VS. SOCIETY (school system, legal system, etc.)
IMAGERY

Language which appeals to the senses as it describes the sights, sounds, textures, and smells in the story – creating a picture w/ words

“He would tell his mother how it smelled: mud and algae and cattle manure and chlorophyll…”
THEME

The central idea or insight revealed by the story

It is a general lesson we can apply to our own lives. Sometimes it is revealed through mistakes of the characters.

R&J: Don’t act impulsively.

Themes are stated in general terms and don’t mention characters’ names or actions.
IRONY

The contrast or difference between expectations and reality—may be verbal, situational, etc. Note paradox and oxymoron are sisters to irony.

The president of MADD gets arrested for drunk driving.

A tornado strikes an outdoor theater when the movie Twister is playing.
PROTAGONIST

- the main character in a piece of fiction which is involved in the main conflict

- Odysseus from *The Odyssey* is a protagonist.
ANTAGONIST

The character or force that comes into conflict with the protagonist. The protagonist is rarely all good and the antagonist is rarely all bad.

Tybalt is an antagonist in *Romeo and Juliet*. 
A series of events that make up a story
ANTONYM

Words that have **opposite meanings**

- Kind, Cruel
- Healthy, Sick
- Generous, Greedy
SYNONYM

- Words that have similar meanings
  - Loving, Caring
  - Satisfied, Fulfilled
  - Deceitful, Untruthful
POINT OF VIEW

The vantage point from which the story is being told

- **FIRST PERSON** (I made the winning shot.)
- **THIRD PERSON** (Matt made the winning shot.)
- **OMNISCIENT**—all knowing so it can reveal inner thoughts, feelings (Matt was nervous as he released the basketball.)
- **LIMITED OMNISCIENT**
ONOMATOPOEIA

The use of words whose sounds imitate their meaning

- Drip, gurgle, bang, buzz, honk
- Snap, crackle, pop, thud, sizzle
SIMILE

- A comparison between two unlike things using *like* or *as*

- The slowly moving and ever changing clouds were *like* a giant lava lamp in the sky.
METAPHOR

Comparing two unlike things saying that one thing literally is something else

Her positive attitude was a refreshing rain which rejuvenated everyone in her presence.

She lifted her concrete hands as she wearily finished the task.
ALLITERATION

- The repetition of the same sound at the beginning of the word
- long lost love
- Her sweet smile made my heart swell.
PERSONIFICATION

Giving human like characteristics to animals or non-living things.

The leaves danced in the wind.

The birds gossiped in the morning air.