

## ENG 102 Literary Terms

- **Theme** - The central idea or universal truth that the story examines; the story's overall meaning
- **Plot** - A series of actions; the plan or groundwork of the story
- **Conflict** - the opposition between forces in a story
- **Protagonist** - the central character
- **Antagonist** - whatever opposing force the protagonist struggles with, such as another character, environment, or something within the protagonist
- **Crisis** is the moment of highest tension in a story, just before the turning point, when a decision has to be made that will determine the story's outcome.
- **Climax** is the turning point, the action or decision that determines the outcome. *Sometimes the crisis and climax appear to be the same moment.*
- **Exposition** - The work's introduction in which background information is given for the plot development
- **Complication** - The point at which major conflicts or problems are presented; the rising action of a drama
- **Dénouement or Resolution** - The final stage or unraveling of the plot; usually very brief. Here the tension is over, and unanswered questions may be explained.
- **Character** - A reasonable facsimile of a human being; the inner self that determines thought, speech, behavior. Characters may be called **round** if they display depth and are described in detail and **flat** if they appear limited and one-dimensional. A question to ask about characters is whether they change or show capacity to change in the course of a story. Developing characters are called **dynamic** and those who don't change are **static**.
- **Foil** - usually a minor character who highlights the major character. The foil may present contrasting characteristics or behavior. Examples are Laertes in *Hamlet*, Christine in *A Doll House*, June in *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?*
- **Setting** - The environment of the story, including objects
- **Irony** -
  - **Verbal irony** occurs when we use words with meanings different from or opposite from their literal definitions. This may also involve **understatement**, language which minimizes a situation or **overstatement**, language which exaggerates a situation.
  - **Situational irony**: an outcome which is opposite of what is expected
  - **Dramatic irony**: a situation in a literary work when the reader understands more than the characters; the characters are in a state of ignorance
- **Symbol**: a story element that means what it is literally but represents something more. A literary symbol can be an object, a place, a character, an action, or a situation. Examples are the cathedral in "Cathedral," the setting in "Hills Like White Elephants," the bird and bird cage in *Trifles*. To explore a symbol's meaning, look for support in the entire context of the story.