

Literary Terms Glossary

with examples from *A Wrinkle in Time*

LITERARY ELEMENTS

- Characters are people or animals who take part in the action of a literary work
- Readers learn about characters from
 - what they say (dialogue),
 - what they do (actions),
 - what they think (interior monologue),
 - what others say about them, and
 - through the author's direct statement.
- The protagonist is the central character of a drama, novel, short story, or narrative poem.
- The adversary of these characters is the antagonist.
 - Examples
 - * Meg is the protagonist of the novel *A Wrinkle in Time*.
 - * The Black Thing is the main antagonist of the novel *A Wrinkle in Time*.
- An author may choose to emphasize a single important trait, creating what is called a flat character, or an author may present a complex, fully-rounded personality (round character).
 - Examples
 - * Meg's brothers Sandy and Dennys are good examples of flat characters.
 - They are one-dimensional (the reader gets to know only that they are popular and good at sports).
 - * Meg is the best example of a round character.
 - The reader gets to know many aspects of Meg's character: she is angry, a loner, is grieving over the loss of her "perfect" father, etc.
- A character that changes little over the course of a narrative is called a static character.
- A character that changes in response to the actions through which he or she passes is called a dynamic character.
 - Examples
 - * Meg's brothers Sandy and Dennys are good examples of static characters.
 - They do not change at all from the first page of the book to the last.
 - * Meg is the best example of a dynamic character.
 - Meg learns many things about herself and others throughout the encounters she has with the inhabitants of the many dimensions she visits on her journey.
- Epiphany is an event in which the essential nature of something—a person, a situation, an object—is suddenly realized. It is an spontaneous grasp of reality in a quick flash of recognition in which something usually commonplace is seen in a new light.
 - Example
 - * Meg's epiphany occurs when she suddenly realizes that anger and bitterness will not help her free Charles Wallace from the grip of evil, but love will.
- Motivation is a reason that explains a character's thoughts, feelings, actions, or behavior.
 - Examples
 - * Meg and Charles Wallace seek their father who has been absent from their family for two years. They miss him terribly.
 - * Later, Meg must rescue Charles Wallace from the grip of evil forces because she loves her brother deeply.

Literary Terms Glossary

with examples from *A Wrinkle in Time*

- Plot is the sequence of events or actions in a short story, novel, play, or narrative poem.
 - Freytag's Pyramid is a convenient diagram that describes the typical pattern of a dramatic or fictional work
- The structure of a work begins with the exposition, in which the author lays the groundwork for the reader by revealing the setting, the relationships between the characters, and the situation as it exists before conflict begins.
- Setting is the time and place in which events in a short story, novel, play, or narrative poem take place.
- The inciting incident (sometimes called the complication) interrupts the harmony and balance of the situation and one or more characters comes into conflict with an outside force, with his or her own nature, or with another character.
- Conflict is a term that describes the tension between opposing forces in a work of literature.
 - External conflicts:
 - * character vs. character
 - * character vs. nature/fate
 - * character vs. society
 - Internal conflict :
 - * character vs. self
- During the plot, events that constitute the rising action are things that happen in the work that build toward the climax.
- The climax is the pivotal moment (or turning point) of the story.
- The falling action is the event(s) that lead toward a revelation of meaning that occurs during the resolution.
- The resolution (denouement) is the unraveling or conclusion of the problem set up by the inciting incident.

Plot in *A Wrinkle in Time*

- Exposition
 - * The reader is introduced to Meg Murry and her family and gets to know their situation and her problems.
- Setting
 - * In *A Wrinkle in Time*, the initial setting is small New England Town, with Meg Murry's safe, loving home, and boring rural high school. The action takes place during the latter half of the twentieth century. Later, the setting changes to wild interplanetary landscapes, most notably the rigid totalitarian planet Camazotz.
- Inciting Incident
 - * A strange woman, who turns out to be Mrs. Whatsit, comes to the Murry house for a late-night snack. In the process, she mentions a mysterious word, "tesseract," that is somehow connected to Meg's missing father and his highly secret government work.
- Conflict
 - * In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Meg, Charles Wallace, and Calvin oppose the forces of darkness to save both Meg and Charles's father and the world as we know it. The children fight particularly against the aspect of society that seeks conformity and uniformity of all its members; they fight for individuality and free will. In addition to this conflict, Meg herself is internally conflicted, fighting against her own insecurity and fear.
- Rising Action
 - * During the rising action of the story, Meg and Charles Wallace investigate the three "witches," meet Calvin, and set off on their journey, finally arriving at Camazotz, the "shadowed" planet where Meg's father is being held captive.
- Climax
 - * In a dramatic confrontation with the hideous disembodied "IT," Meg battles for her freedom and that of her family and friends, using emotion (anger and impatience) as a weapon to counter her antagonist's monstrous insistence on isolated reason and restrictive order. She is able to resist, but Charles Wallace falls into the antagonist's trap because of his overconfidence in his own intelligence.

Literary Terms Glossary

with examples from *A Wrinkle in Time*

- **Falling Action**
 - * The falling action takes place as Meg, Calvin, and Meg's father escape from Camazotz, leaving Charles Wallace held captive by "IT." They again encounter the three "witches," and Meg is sent back to the shadowed planet to try to release Charles Wallace from the spell that holds him.
- **Resolution**
 - * In the resolution, or denouement, Meg encounters the antagonist's logical order with the power of her love, forgives her father for not being all-powerful, accepts her own strengths and weaknesses, and triumphs over "IT." The children and Mr. Murry are returned to their home and reunited with their loved ones.
- **Point of View** is the perspective from which a narrative is told. In the first person point of view, the narrator is a character in the story. When the narrator's knowledge is limited to one character, either major or minor, he/she has a limited point of view. When the narrator knows everything about all the characters is all knowing, he/she is omniscient.
 - **Example**
 - * In *A Wrinkle in Time*, L'Engle uses the third-person limited point of view. The story focuses on Meg Murry and her perspective. We know how she thinks and feel, but we do not know how the other characters think and feel.
 - * "Meg had almost forgotten the flowers, and was grateful to realize that she was still clasping them, that she hadn't let them fall from her fingers." Calvin and Charles also hold their flowers, but we do not know their thoughts or feelings about the experience (Chapter 4).
- **Theme** is the central message of a literary work. It is not the same as a subject, which can be expressed in a word or two: courage, survival, war, pride, etc. It is expressed as a sentence or general statement about life or human nature. A literary work can have more than one theme. Most themes are not directly stated but are implied. The reader must think about all the elements of the work and use them to make inferences as to which themes seem to be implied.
 - **Examples**
 - * In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Meg rescues her brother through the power of love. Therefore, the theme in the novel is "Love can conquer the greatest evil." Or "Expressing anger and hate only makes situations worse."
- **Flashback** is a scene that interrupts the action of a work to show a previous event.
 - **Example**
 - * Near the beginning of *A Wrinkle in Time*, the author shows the reader Meg Murry remembering an incident in which her absent father had reassured her about her own intelligence and that of her little brother.
 - * The scene is presented as though it is taking place now, with dialogue and description, even though it is really a memory that Meg is recalling.
- **Foreshadowing** is the use of hints or clues in a narrative to suggest future action.
 - **Example**
 - * Even though the main character Meg Murry is safe in her bed in her family, the author foreshadows the fearsome nature of the task that is about to confront her by describing the storm that is battering the house, personifying its natural phenomena when she shows the clouds "scudding frantically" across the sky and the moon "ripping" through the clouds, making "wraithlike shadows" that "race" across the ground.
 - * The use of these frightening images and scary diction foreshadows the ominous events that lie in store for Meg.

Literary Terms Glossary

with examples from *A Wrinkle in Time*

- Suspense is the quality of a short story, novel, play, or narrative poem that makes the reader or audience uncertain or tense about the outcome of events.
 - Example
 - * In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Madaleine L'Engle creates suspense by withholding certain information about the three "witches" and about Meg's father, thus making the reader question the witches' motives and wonder about Mr. Murry's actions and whereabouts.
- Mood is the atmosphere or predominant emotion in a literary work. In other words, the mood is the emotional response of the reader to the text.
 - Example
 - * In *A Wrinkle in Time*, the description of the house where the three "witches" live establishes an ominous mood:
 - * "The elms were almost bare, now, and the ground around the house was yellow with damp leaves. The late afternoon light had a greenish cast which the blank windows reflected in a sinister way. An unhinged shutter thumped. Something else creaked" (Chapter 2).
- Tone is the writer's or speaker's attitude toward a subject, character, or audience, and it is conveyed primarily through the author's choice of diction, imagery, details, figurative language, and syntax. Tone can be serious, humorous, sarcastic, indignant, objective, etc.
 - Example
 - * L'Engle, in *A Wrinkle in Time*, clearly establishes a tone of horror when Meg confronts IT on the planet Camazotz:
 - * "A dismembered bodied brain. A living brain. A brain that pulsed and quivered, that seized and commanded. No wonder the brain was called IT. IT was the most horrible, the most repellent thing she had ever seen, far more nauseating than anything she had ever imagined with her conscious mind, or that had ever tormented her in her most terrible nightmares" (Chapter 9).
- Diction is word choice intended to convey a certain effect.
 - Example
 - * In *A Wrinkle in Time*, no one on the planet of Camazotz "suffers." When Meg's little brother, Charles Wallace, falls under the spell of the evil force on the planet, he tells Meg and Calvin, "We let no one suffer. It is much kinder simply to annihilate anyone who is ill. Nobody has weeks and weeks of runny noses and sore throats. Rather than endure such discomfort, they are simply put to sleep" (Chapter 9). Arguing with Charles' use of these words—kinder, simply, annihilate, simply, put to sleep—Calvin points out that this practice is murder.
- Denotation refers to the dictionary definition of a word.
- Connotation refers to the feelings and attitudes associated with a word.
 - Example
 - * In *A Wrinkle in Time*, the author writes that in the Murry's house, "the furnace purred like a great, sleepy animal" (Chapter 1).
 - * The word "purred" denotation refers to a low, wordless noise, but it's connotation is one of comfort, contentment, satisfaction—it is a warm word that the reader associates with cats and pleasure.
- Imagery consists of the words or phrases a writer uses to represent people, objects, actions, feelings, and ideas descriptively by appealing to the senses.
 - Examples
 - * Sight: "And though it was warmer than it had been when they so precipitously left the apple orchard, there was a faintly autumnal touch to the air; near them were several small trees with reddened leaves very like sumac, and a big patch of gold-enrod-like flowers" (Chapter 5).
 - * Sound: "'Oh, my dears,' came the new voice, a rich voice with the warmth of a woodwind, the clarity of a trumpet, the mystery of an English horn" (Chapter 4).

Literary Terms Glossary

with examples from *A Wrinkle in Time*

- * Taste: “The table was set up in front of them, and the dark smocked men heaped their plates with turkey and dressing and mashed potatoes and gravy and little green peas with big yellow blobs of butter melting in them and cranberries and sweet potatoes topped with gooey browned marshmallows and olives and celery and rosebud radishes and—” (Chapter 7)
- * Touch and Smell: “But with the tentacle came the same delicate fragrance that moved across her with the breeze, and she felt a soft tingling warmth go all through her that momentarily assuaged her pain” (Chapter 9).
- Details are the facts, revealed by the author or speaker, that support the attitude or tone in a piece of poetry or prose.
 - Example
 - * In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Meg discovers her father trapped in a transparent column. The details of her father’s appearance reinforce her increasing despair over their situation and her disappointment in her father.
 - * “He had grown a beard, and the silky brown was shot with gray. His hair, too, had not been cut. It wasn’t just the overlong hair of the man in the snapshot at Cape Canaveral; it was pushed back from his high forehead and fell softly almost to his shoulders, so that he looked like someone in another century, or a shipwrecked sailor” (Chapter 9).

FIGURES OF SPEECH

- Euphemism is the use of a word or phrase that is less expressive or direct but considered less distasteful or offensive than another.
 - Example
 - * Charles Wallace, under the spell of evil, says, “ ‘Nobody has weeks and weeks of runny noses and sore throats. Rather than endure such discomfort, they are simply put to sleep’ ” (Chapter 8).
 - * Of course, “put to sleep” is a euphemism for murder, but makes the evil force seem reasonable in its explanation.
- An accepted phrase or expression having a meaning different from the literal is an idiom.
 - Examples
 - * Calvin says about himself, “ ‘I’m blessed with more brains than opportunities than many people, but there’s nothing about me that breaks out of the ordinary mold’ ” (Chapter 3).
 - * He really means that he is an ordinary person, not that he literally would break a mold that shaped him.
 - * Calvin also says about Meg that “ ‘...you’re supposed to be dumb in school, always being called on the carpet’ ” (Chapter 3).
 - * Meg gets in trouble at school; she isn’t literally forced to stand on a rug when she is reprimanded.
- Metaphor is a comparison of two unlike things *not* using *like* or *as*.
 - Example
 - * In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Meg sees what Mrs. Whatsit really is, a beautiful creature with wings: “From the shoulders slowly a pair of wings unfolded, wings made of rainbows, or light upon water, or poetry” (Chapter 4).
 - * The author implies that the wings are special, rare, momentary things, blessings.
- Personification is a kind of metaphor that gives nonhuman objects or abstract ideas human characteristics.
 - Example
 - * In *A Wrinkle in Time*: “Directly ahead of her was the circular building, its walls glowing with violet flame, its silvery roof pulsing with a light that seemed to Meg to be insane” (Chapter 12).
 - * Meg enters the CENTRAL Central Intelligence building, fearful, and doubting whether she can rescue her brother Charles. The “insane” light reflects her state of mind and the insanity going on in the building.

Literary Terms Glossary

with examples from *A Wrinkle in Time*

- Simile is a comparison of two different things or ideas through the use of the words *like* or *as*. It is a definitely stated comparison in which the author says one thing is like another.
 - Example
 - * In *A Wrinkle in Time*, the author captures Meg's experience of being two-dimensional when the three "witches" accidentally stop on the wrong planet: "Without warning, coming as a complete and unexpected shock, she felt a pressure she had never imagined, as though she were being completely flattened out by an enormous steam roller" (Chapter 5).
- Hyperbole is a deliberate, extravagant, and often outrageous exaggeration. It may be used for either serious or comic effect.
 - Example
 - * In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Meg lacks self-confidence and self-esteem. She exaggerates things because she feels useless in her life right now: "On top of Meg Murry doing everything wrong" (Chapter 1); "A delinquent, that's what I am" (Chapter 1); "Why do I always have to show everything [on my face]?" (Chapter 1).
- Oxymoron combines a pair of opposite terms into a single unusual expression.
 - Example
 - * There are no examples of oxymoron in *A Wrinkle in Time*. Some general examples are "sweet sorrow," "cold fire," and "jumbo shrimp."

SOUND DEVICES

- Onomatopoeia is the use of words that mimic the sound they describe.
 - Example
 - * A good example of onomatopoeia occurs in *A Wrinkle in Time* when the Happy Medium falls asleep: "'Good-by, everyb—' and her word got lost in the general b-b-bz-z of a snore" (Chapter 6).
- Alliteration is the practice of beginning several consecutive or neighboring words with the same sound.
 - Example
 - * "Over a Bunsen burner bubbled a big earthenware dish of stew" (Chapter 2).
 - * The repetition of the "b" sound reproduces the motion of the stew simmering in its pot.
 - * It is a humorous moment, too, because Mrs. Murry cooks in the lab where she does her scientific experiments. This makes her children worry that a science experiment might get mixed up with the food.
- Rhyme is the repetition of sounds in two or more words or phrases that appear close to each other in a poem. End rhyme occurs at the end of lines. Internal rhyme occurs within one line. Rhyme scheme is the pattern of end rhymes in a poem.
 - Example
 - * In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Charles Wallace recites nursery rhymes, trying to save himself from mind control:

Mary had a little lamb.
Its fleece was white as snow.
And everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go.
 - * The second and fourth lines rhyme and help to connect the lines of the poem. The rhyme scheme is ABCB, showing the rhyme pattern.

Literary Terms Glossary

with examples from *A Wrinkle in Time*

LITERARY TECHNIQUES

- Characterization is the act of creating or developing a character.
- In direct characterization, the author directly states a character's traits.
 - Example
 - * In *A Wrinkle in Time*, L'Engle describes Meg's twin brothers: "The twins didn't have any problems. They weren't great students, but they weren't bad ones either. They were perfectly content with a succession of Bs and an occasional A or C. They were strong and fast runners and good at games, and when cracks were made about anybody in the Murry family, they weren't made about Sandy and Dennys" (Chapter 1).
- A writer uses indirect characterization when showing a character's personality through his or her actions, thoughts, feelings, words, and appearance, or through another character's observations and reactions.
 - Example
 - * L'Engle shows that Mrs. Whatsit has a sense of humor when she falls backward in her chair and says, "If you have some liniment, I'll put it on my dignity...I think it's sprained" (Chapter 1).
- Dramatic irony occurs when a character or speaker says or does something that has a different meaning from what he/she thinks it means, though the audience and other characters understand the full meaning of the speech or action.
 - Example
 - * In *A Wrinkle in Time*, though Meg holds a low opinion of herself through most of the story, L'Engle prepares us well for the ending of the novel when Meg is the only one, among many knowledgeable and seemingly more powerful and capable beings, who can rescue her brother. Her ineptitude in school and her relations with others matter little in comparison to the love and understanding she has for her brother.
- Situational irony occurs when a situation turns out differently from what one would normally expect—though often the twist is oddly appropriate.
 - Example
 - * In *A Wrinkle in Time*, when Meg, her father, and Calvin land on a strange planet, they find creatures there like none they have ever seen. They have no face, four arms, and tentacles on their hands. At first, they frighten Meg, Calvin, and Mr. Murry, but these creatures turn out to be highly sophisticated, caring, intellectual beings. They save Meg's life and help in the rescue of Charles Wallace from the evil force holding him captive.
- Verbal irony occurs when a speaker or narrator says one thing while meaning the opposite.
 - Example
 - * Meg and her mother and brother in *A Wrinkle in Time*, have this exchange about a so-called "tramp" in the area: "They were saying at the post office this afternoon that a tramp stole all Mrs. Buncombe's sheets.' 'We'd better sit on the pillow cases, then,' Mrs. Murry said lightly" (Chapter 1).
 - * Mrs. Murry employs irony to lighten Meg's fears and Charles' concerns.
- Symbolism is the use of any object, person, place, or action that has a meaning in itself while standing for something larger than itself, such as a quality, attitude, belief, or value.
 - Example
 - * *A Wrinkle in Time* contains many symbols. Light and Dark are two examples of symbols.
 - * Light can be positive or negative depending upon its color and context.
 - * Dark usually symbolizes danger and evil, but sometimes Meg finds comfort in the darkness
- Allusion is a reference to a *mythological, literary, or historical* person, place, or thing.
 - Example
 - * L'Engle employs numerous allusions in *A Wrinkle in Time*, especially references to *Alice in Wonderland*: When Mrs. Who disappears before her glasses do, "it reminded Meg of the Cheshire Cat" (Chapter 5).
 - * "Oh, dear, I shall be late," and Meg responds, "He's like the white rabbit" (Chapter 6).