English II:

Quarter 2: Rhetorical and Literary Terms

Terms you should know and be able to identify/explain in literature:

*Ambiguity*: Words or statements that lead to vagueness and confusion; sometimes ambiguities shape the basis for instances of unintentional humor.

i.e. (From J. D. Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye)

“I ran all the way to the main gate, and then I waited a second till I got my breath. I have no wind, if you want to know the truth. I’m quite a heavy smoker, for one thing—that is, I used to be. They made me cut it out. Another thing, I grew six and a half inches last year. That’s also how I practically got t.b. and came out here for all these goddam checkups and stuff. I’m pretty healthy though.”

The words “they” and “here” used by the speaker are ambiguous. But the readers are allowed to presume from the context that “they” might be the professionals helping out Holden and “here” might be a rehabilitation center.

*Antithesis:* As a rhetorical device, when two opposite ideas are put together in a sentence to achieve a contrasting effect.

i.e. (From J. Milton’s Paradise Lost)

“Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav’n.”

The contrasting ideas of “reign”/ “serve” and “Hell”/ “Heav’n” are placed in a sentence to achieve an antithetical effect.

*Aphorism*: A statement of truth or opinion expressed in a concise and witty manner. The term is often applied to philosophical, moral and literary principles.

i.e. “A proverb is no proverb to you till life has illustrated it” -- John Keats

“Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind” -- Rudyard Kipling

*Apostrophe*: When a writer or a speaker detaches oneself from reality to addresses an imaginary character, or non-existent person/ abstract idea as if it were present/capable of understanding feelings

i.e. (from M. Shelley’s Frankenstein)

“Oh! Stars and clouds and winds, ye are all about to mock me; if ye really pity me, crush sensation and memory; let me become as nought; but if not, depart, depart, and leave me in darkness.”

*Asyndeton*: A stylistic device used in literature and poetry to intentionally eliminate conjunctions between the phrases and in the sentence, yet maintain the grammatical accuracy.

A. One type of asyndeton is used between words, phrases and a sentence.

For example: “Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils, Shrunk to this little measure?”

(Julius Caesar, Act 3, Scene 1 by William Shakespeare)

B. Second type is used between sentences or clauses.

For example: “Without looking, without making a sound, without talking..”

(Oedipus by Sophocles)

*Colloquialism:* Use of informal words, phrases or even slang in a piece of writing.

i.e. in Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck:

“Sure I will, George. I won’t say a word.”

“Don’t let him pull you in—but—if the son-of-a-bitch socks you—let ‘im have it.”

“Never mind, never mind. I’ll tell you when. I hate that kind of guy. Look, Lennie, if you get in any kind of trouble, you remember what I told you to do?”

Lennie raised up on his elbow. His face contorted with thought. Then his eyes moved sadly to George’s face. “If I get in any trouble, you ain’t gonna let me tend the rabbits.”

In the above example, the writer shows how vulgar colloquial expressions can be depending upon who uses them and when they use them. The above colloquial expressions are realistic enough as they are uttered by middle-aged men of a working class who are not well educated and refined.

*Diction*: Diction is the specific choice and use of words to create thoughtful and coherent sentences.

*Syntax*: Syntax is the arrangement – the ordering, grouping, and placement of words and phrases to create well-structured sentences and paragraphs.

**-What’s the difference between syntax and diction?**

Syntax and diction are closely related. Diction refers to the choice of words in a particular situation while syntax determines how the chosen words are used to form a sentence. Every essay or piece of writing contains syntax and diction; however, not all pieces of writing use these latter items correctly.

*Euphemism*: A mild or indirect word or expression substituted for one considered to be too harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing

i.e. In William Shakespeare’s *Othello,* Act 1 Scene 1, Iago tells Brabantio:

“I am one, sir, that comes to tell you your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs.”

Here, the expression “making the beast with two backs” refers to the act of having sex.

*Figurative Language*: (AKA “Figure of Speech”) An expression of something other than what is literally meant for an effect (i.e. simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, etc.)

*Hyperbole*: exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally

i.e. “I had to wait in the station for ten days-an eternity.” --- John Conrad (from *The Heart of Darkness*)

*Juxtaposition*: A literary technique in which two or more ideas, places, characters and their actions are placed side by side in a narrative or a poem for the purpose of developing comparisons and contrasts.

Charles Dickens uses the technique of juxtaposition in the opening line of his novel, *A Tale of Two Cities* :

“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 belief, 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 to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way…”

In order to give us an idea of the factors responsible for the French Revolution, Dickens uses juxtaposition throughout the novel in which the “have not’s” and the “haves” are put side by side to highlight the presence of severe disparity and discord in the then French society that paved the way for the revolution. By examining the given juxtaposition, readers can vividly imagine the catastrophic atmosphere before the revolution and understand its need at that time.

*Invective*: Denotes speech or writing that attacks, insults, or denounces a person, topic, or institution. It involves the use of abusive and negative use of language.

i.e. “I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth.” – Jonathan Swift

*Metonymy:* A figure of speech thatreplaces the name of a thing with the name of something else with which it is closely associated.

i.e. from W. Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar

“Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.”

Mark Anthony uses “ears” to say that he wants the people present there to listen to him attentively. It is a metonymy because the word “ears” replaces the concept of attention.

*Onomatopoeia*: A word or group of words that imitate the natural sounds of a thing. It creates a sound effect that mimics the thing described, making the description more expressive and interesting.

i.e. from E. Hemingway’s For Whom a Bell Tolls

“He saw nothing and heard nothing but he could feel his heart pounding and then he heard the **clack** on stone and the leaping, dropping **clicks** of a small rock falling.”

*Oxymoron*: A figure of speech where two opposite ideas are joined to create an effect. The common oxymoron phrase is a combination of an adjective proceeded by a noun with contrasting meanings, e.g. “cruel kindness” or “living death”.

i.e. (from W. Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, Act I, Scene I)

“Why, then, O brawling love! O loving hate!

O anything, of nothing first create!

O heavy lightness! Serious vanity!

Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms!

Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health!

Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!

This love feel I, that feel no love in this.

Dost thou not laugh?”

We notice a series of oxymoron being employed when Romeo confronts the love of an inaccessible woman. An intense emotional effect is produced to highlight his mental conflict by the use of contradictory pairs of words such as “hating love”, “heavy lightness”, “bright smoke”, “cold fire”, and “sick health.”

*Paradox*: A statement that appears to be self-contradictory or silly but may include a hidden or potential truth. It is also used to illustrate an opinion or statement contrary to accepted traditional ideas.

i.e. In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the protagonist, Hamlet says,

“I must be cruel to be kind.”

This announcement does not seem to make sense. How can an individual treat others kindly even when he is cruel? However, Hamlet is talking about his mother, and how he intends to kill Claudius to avenge his father’s death.

This act of Hamlet will be a tragedy for his mother who is married to Claudius. Hamlet does not want his mother to be the beloved of his father’s murderer any longer, and so he thinks that the murder will be good for his mother.

*Polysyndeton*: A stylistic device in which several coordinating conjunctions are used in succession in order to achieve an artistic effect. It makes use of coordinating conjunctions like “and”, “or”, “but” and “nor” (mostly and and or) which are used to join successive words, phrases or clauses in such a way that these conjunctions are even used where they might have been omitted.

i.e. (from M. Angelou’s I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings)

“Let the whitefolks have their money and power and segregation and sarcasm and big houses and schools and lawns like carpets, and books, and mostly–mostly–let them have their whiteness.”

*Sarcasm*: A literary and rhetorical device that is meant to mock with often satirical or ironic remarks to amuse and/or hurt someone or some section of society simultaneously.

i.e. (from W. Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Act I, Scene II)

“Thrift, thrift, Horatio! The funeral bak’d meats did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.”

The most disturbing issue to Hamlet in the play is his mother’s marriage to his uncle. While talking to Horatio in a sarcastic manner, Hamlet sums up the ridiculous affairs using this statement.

*Understatement*: the presentation of something as being smaller or less important than it actually is

i.e. “BENVOLIO: What, art thou hurt?

MERCUTIO: Ay, ay, a scratch, a scratch. Marry, ’tis enough.

Where is my page?—Go, villain, fetch a surgeon.

ROMEO: Courage, man. The hurt cannot be much.

MERCUTIO: No, ’tis not so deep as a well nor so wide as a church-door, but ’tis enough, ’twill serve. Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man. I am peppered, I warrant, for this world. A plague o’ both your houses! Zounds, a dog, a rat, a mouse, a cat to scratch a man to death!” --- William Shakespeare (from *Romeo and Juliet*)

*Rhetorical Appeals:* Methods of persuasion, which originated from Aristotle

 *-Ethos:* An argument based on credibility and/or authority

 *-Pathos:* An argument that evokes emotion (i.e. fear, anger, sympathy, desire, etc.)

 *-Logos*: An argument grounded in logic, facts, and figures

*Figurative language:* An expression of something other than what is literally meant for an effect (i.e. simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, etc.)

*Flashback:* Flashbacks are interruptions in the text past consisted of events to provide background or context to the current events of a literary work. By using flashbacks, writers allow their readers to gain insight into a character’s motivation and provide a background to a current conflict. Dream sequences and memories are common examples of flashbacks.

*Point of view*: The mode of narration or particular attitude of the author or speaker in relation to the literary piece; the p.o.v. might also reflect a specific opinion about something (Know the difference among 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person p.o.v., as well as 1st person “omniscient” versus “limited” p.o.v.)

i.e. “I gazed–and gazed–but little thought

What wealth the show to me had brought.” --- William Wordsworth (from “Daffodils”)