

Jan

Zwicky

Wittgenstein

Elegies

with a new introduction  
by Sue Sinclair

TEACHER GUIDE

BRICK BOOKS CLASSICS 6 BRICK BOOKS

Brick Books has produced this Teacher Guide as an aid in discussing and studying the titles from its Brick Books Classics poetry series in secondary and post-secondary classrooms.

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# INTRODUCTION TO POETRY

## WHAT MAKES POETRY, POETRY?

Begin with some of your assumptions and preconceptions about poetry by answering the following questions as true or false. If you believe the statement to be false, you may indicate why with a brief explanation to the right of the statement. The final question invites you, in your own notebook, to write whatever else you believe to be true (or false) about poetry. Quiz someone close to you with your own suppositions.

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1. T/F **Poetry has a beat.**

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2. T/F **Poetry rhymes.**

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3. T/F **Poetry does not run margin to margin, as prose does, but has line breaks.**

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4. T/F **Poetry deals with imagery (allegory, symbol, metaphor, simile, etc.).**

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5. T/F **Poetry is difficult.**

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6. T/F **Poetry has stanzas.**

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7. T/F **Poetry has verses.**

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8. T/F **There is no difference between a stanza and a verse.**

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9. T/F **Songs that have words are poetry.**

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10. T/F **Poems, unlike short fiction, don't tell a story.**

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11. T/F **Free verse has no rules.**

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12. T/F **Blank verse has no rules.**

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13. T/F **All poems have a regular metre or cadence.**

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14. T/F **Poems have one valid interpretation.**

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15. T/F **All poets are extremely well-educated.**

---

16. T/F **Rap is poetry.**

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17. T/F **Poetry is/isn't...**

## HOW DO POETS TALK ABOUT POETRY?

Read some of the quotations below to discover what published poets say about their own craft. In the box below their statements, create your own statement about poetry.

“Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity.”

—**William Wordsworth**

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“Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”

—**Percy Bysshe Shelley**

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“Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.”

—**T. S. Eliot**

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“Poetry is simply the most beautiful, impressive, and widely effective mode of saying things, and hence its importance.”

—**Matthew Arnold**

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“The poet is the priest of the invisible.”

—**Wallace Stevens**

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“If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?”

—**Emily Dickinson**

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“Poems come out of wonder, not out of knowing.”

—**Lucille Clifton**

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“Poetry isn’t a profession; it’s a way of life. It’s an empty basket; you put your life into it and make something out of that.”

—**Mary Oliver**

---

“When an angel carries away my soul / all shrouded in fog, folded in flames / I have no body, no tears to weep / just a bag in my heart, full of poems.”

—**Elena Svarts**

---

I think that poetry is ...



# TEACHER GUIDE TO WITTGENSTEIN ELEGIES: BRICK BOOKS CLASSICS 6

by JAN ZWICKY

For each of the selections, before you respond to the questions, keep in mind the following important considerations for each piece:

- a) Imagine the identity of the speaker.
- b) Imagine an audience for the address.
- c) What imagery (sensory detail, metaphors, similes, symbols, etc.) does the poet use?
- d) What technical elements are in play (structure, rhythm or its lack, rhyme or its lack)?
- e) What allusions does the poet make to ideas/people/places (historical figures, works of art, scientific terms, etc.) that have a life outside the poem?
- f) Are there elements of the poet's biography (family life, profession, relationships, etc.) that inform the work? If so, how do they inform the poetry?

## **Introduction: *The Poem as Ally*, by Sue Sinclair (page 9)**

### **1. On Misunderstanding**

- ▶ How can a poem be an ally?
- ▶ What exactly is **reflective listening** and why is it helpful?
- ▶ Why offer a poem “as ally” if the poet is no longer living?

### **2. Philosophy as Poetry**

- ▶ Identify the following references:
  - a) Ray Monk
  - b) the Vienna Circle
  - c) Logical Positivism
  - d) George Trakl.
- ▶ Explain how they relate to one another in the context of the *Wittgenstein Elegies*.

**3. Clarity**

- ▶ Define the elegy as a literary form. What are its conventions?
- ▶ What are the essential differences between this edition of Zwicky's *Wittgenstein Elegies* and the last?

**4. On Difficulty**

- ▶ What does Sue Sinclair mean by the use of “resonance-sensitive structure” in Zwicky's *Wittgenstein Elegies*?
- ▶ In what way does Wittgenstein assert that “what poetry reaches for is silence”?

**5. Why Elegies?**

- ▶ If elegies are meant to mourn, what do Zwicky's *Wittgenstein Elegies* mourn?

**Author's Foreword (page 23)**

- ▶ In Wittgenstein's foreword to *Philosophical Remarks* he suggests that the manuscript was written “for such men as are in sympathy with its spirit.” What spirit is he talking about?

**Philosophers' Stone (page 25)**

- ▶ What is the philosophers' stone? Predict its relevance to the poem that follows.
- ▶ Choose two words from this poem that you have never looked up in a dictionary and find their meanings. How do these meanings inform their use in this poem?
- ▶ Choose one quotation from this poem that you find intriguing and explain your interpretation of it.
- ▶ According to the author's afterword, the words in the margin name the speaker in each section. Why are the beginning and ending sections labelled *Stillness* and the other two labelled for the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (one with square brackets and one without)?
- ▶ What is “Webern's paradox”?
- ▶ According to Wittgenstein, what is the world? And what is love?

**The Death of George Trakl (page 31)**

I

- ▶ Who was George Trakl and what is his relationship to Wittgenstein?
- ▶ How can something be “darkly luminous”?
- ▶ There is a talent that Trakl has that Wittgenstein feels he does not. What does Wittgenstein mean when he says “I cannot help these words as [Trakl] can”?

- ▶ What emotions are conveyed by the use of the simile of the dead mice?
- ▶ Reflect on the line “dream bodies move, but real ones do not stir” as it relates to Trakl.

## II

- ▶ How does wealth corrupt one’s ability to see?
- ▶ What does the phrase **a priori** mean? What is its etymology?
- ▶ What does the phrase **simplex sigillum veri** mean? What is its etymology?
- ▶ In *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein stipulates that the world is constituted of atomistic facts in relation to each other, but here he says, “what is seen in essence cannot be / immediately open to our view.” What has accounted, do you think, for this shift in perspective?
- ▶ Why, according to the *Tractatus*, is “all that happens . . . accidental”?

## III

- ▶ What were Wittgenstein and Trakl’s experiences with war?
- ▶ In the section *George Trakl*, using his words, surmise what his attitude was toward war.
- ▶ In the section *Stillness*, what does the speaker wish to change about the way that George Trakl saw himself in his final days?

## IV

- ▶ When Trakl asked for help, his patron Wittgenstein failed to reach him in time to prevent his suicide. What imagery does Zwicky use to describe this failure?
- ▶ How does the selection from *Tractatus* resonate with the above imagery?
- ▶ Why are Trakl’s own remarks particularly poignant here?
- ▶ By the end of section IV, what shift can you sense in Wittgenstein’s philosophical stance?

### In the Elder Days of Art (page 41)

#### I

- ▶ Search the source of the phrase “In the elder days of Art.” How does it resonate with the last section of *The Death of George Trakl*?
- ▶ How is Wittgenstein’s disenchantment with his former clarity (now lost) expressed?
- ▶ Piero Sraffa is credited with the shift in Wittgenstein’s philosophy. However, the indented section at the end of this part of the poem suggests that other influences were at play long before the gesture of “Italian disrespect” occurred

that supposedly triggered Wittgenstein's disenchantment with his previous theory of the overhanging "crystal arch" of understanding (first outlined in *Philosophers' Stone*). What else prodded Wittgenstein to alter his philosophical views?

## II

- ▶ The Kundmangasse is the street in Vienna where, together with Paul Engleman, Wittgenstein designed a house for his sister. It seems no one ever liked it, only admired it for its clean lines and perfection. What does the speaker suggest in the second stanza that is the true challenge of the architect?
- ▶ In stanza 3, how does the speaker describe the philosophy of language?
- ▶ In stanza 4, what metaphor outlines the dangers of linguistic limitations?
- ▶ In stanza 5, what metaphor shifts the philosopher from architect to something else?
- ▶ In stanzas 6 and 7, according to the speaker, what is the ultimate goal of philosophy? And what threatens to hamper it?

## III

- ▶ Thought can serve us well. What metaphor is used to make this idea clear?
- ▶ If we take "the fixed point of our need" to be that which we would like to express but have as yet failed to—"the watery image of our desire"—how does the speaker suggest articulating that vision?

### Confessions (page 49)

- ▶ What does the speaker identify as the error in previous assumptions about logical analysis in philosophy?
- ▶ While the snippets from *Tractatus* reiterate and elaborate upon the seven major propositions of Wittgenstein's philosophy, how do the segments from *Philosophical Investigations* that reverberate around them function? Comment on:
  - a) assumptions about clarity
  - b) language
  - c) living speech
  - d) indefiniteness
  - e) grammar
  - f) pictures
  - g) doubt
  - h) being human

- i) speech designed for gods
- j) order
- k) boundaries.
- ▶ In the section *Stillness*, what is posited as “the very answer”? How do you interpret these images?

### **Rosro, County Galway (page 59)**

- ▶ How is the speaker’s chosen ascetic existence at the cottage in County Galway described?
- ▶ How successful has the speaker been at articulating his vision?
- ▶ How does the speaker suggest that the unification of mind and heart could happen?
- ▶ Why does the speaker say that “our mouths must move like fishes”?
- ▶ In Wordsworth’s *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, we read in lines 57–58: “Whither is fled the visionary gleam? / Where is it now, the glory and the dream?” Read Wordsworth’s poem. Make connections between the poem and Zwicky’s speaker’s ideas about wholeness.
- ▶ The speaker’s vision is described as a “[g]reat twisted rope, / the vision we will ride in flight / above the twilit world.” Draw or find photographic images which capture your imagined idea of this vision.
- ▶ What is the paradox inherent in the last 8 lines?

### **Afterword (page 71)**

- ▶ Do you agree with Zwicky’s description of her work as being read best in a “collagist” manner? Why or why not?
- ▶ Zwicky claims that “[i]n many quarters the idea of moral integrity has itself become a fiction—quaint, if not laughable.” Agree or disagree with this statement and support your claim with specific points and examples.

**What other questions would you like to discuss that were not asked above?**



# GLOSSARY OF POETIC TERMS

For a more comprehensive list of literary terms related to poetry, consider the online Oxford or Abrams glossaries.

## **Alliteration**

Repeated consonant sounds in close proximity.  
ex: *Bugsy borrows bouncing baby buggies.*

## **Allusion**

A reference to a person, place, or event outside the text.  
ex: *"There is no need to become Woody Allen." Gwyneth Paltrow, Sliding Doors.*

## **Analogy**

A comparison between unlike things to show an underlying similarity.  
ex: *"And the night is clear and empty / as a lake of acid rain." Bruce Cockburn, Don't Feel Your Touch.*

## **Anecdote**

A funny little story.  
ex: *Any story that begins "When I was your age..."*

## **Antagonist**

The obstacle to the protagonist (the character with whom the reader sympathizes).  
ex: *The shark in Jaws.*

## **Archetype**

A type of character universally recognized across many cultures.  
ex: *"Follow the dreamer, the fool and the sage / back to the days of the Innocent Age." Dan Fogelberg, The Innocent Age.*

**Argument**

Any writing which attempts to convince or sway the reader.

ex: *Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own, which outlines the needs of the female writer.*

**Ballad**

A lengthy poem, often in song form, having many stanzas and a refrain.

ex: *Gordon Lightfoot's The Canadian Railroad Trilogy.*

**Character**

A person or animal in a story.

- *Static Character*: like a piece of furniture, just there.
- *Dynamic Character*: changes or develops as the story unfolds.
- *Flat*: like cardboard, having only two dimensions, not well-developed.
- *Round*: an interesting and complex character whom the reader gets to know well.

**Characterization**

4 ways to develop characters:

- By what they say.
- By what they do.
- By what others in the text say.
- By what the speaker/narrator/author says.

**Chronological Order**

Events arranged in the time order in which they occurred.

ex: *Lists of Canadian Prime Ministers from first to last.*

**Cliché**

An overused expression that has lost its effectiveness over time.

ex: *"Avoid clichés like the plague."*

**Conflict**

Forces in opposition.

- *External*: another character, society, nature (*Person vs. Person, Person vs. Society, Person vs. Nature*).
- *Internal*: within a character; a choice or decision (*Person vs. Self*).



**Description**

Writing meant to conjure up a person, place, thing, event, or experience for the reader using adjectives or imagery. Pays close attention to sensory details.

**Dialect**

Way of speaking characteristic of a geography or a people.

ex: *"I's the b'y that builds the boat."* Newfoundland folk song.

**Dialogue**

Conversation between or among characters.

ex: *"Dude, where's my car?" "Where's your car, dude?"*

**Diction**

Choice of wording.

ex: *"Jen and I were accustomed to our father's last-will-and-testament diction, and were at times free to interrupt Atticus for a translation when it was beyond our understanding."* Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

**Drama**

Writing meant to be performed on stage.

ex: *Any play by Shakespeare.*

**Essay**

Nonfiction writing that is arguable, provable, worth proving, with a limited scope.

- *Subjective*: from the essayist's point of view.
- *Objective*: an attempt to remove bias from the subject.
- *Argument/Persuasive*: the focus is swaying or convincing the reader.

**Exposition**

Writing that informs.

ex: *An article about how to improve your golf swing.*

Part of the plot of a narrative in which characters and setting are established. (see also **PLOT**)

ex: *Once upon a time, there were three little pigs and the time came for them to leave home and seek their fortunes.*

**Euphemism**

The exchange of an offensive or embarrassing term for a more polite one.

ex: *"XYZ!" for Examine your zipper; your fly is down!*

**Fable**

A story with a widely applicable life story. It often conveys a moral.

ex: *The Tortoise and The Hare tells the story of how slow and steady tends to win the race more often than speed.*

**Fiction**

Stories created from the imagination.

ex: *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial.*

**Figure of Speech**

An idiomatic expression which, when taken literally, does not make sense.

ex: *"Hit the road, Jack!" is not an instruction for someone named Jack to go outside and slap the road.*

**Flashback**

Insertion of an event prior to the actions currently happening.

ex: *The film Forrest Gump begins with Forrest waiting for a bus. As he waits, he goes backward in time to tell stories of his life that happened before that moment.*

**Foreshadowing**

Hints that suggest future events.

ex: *In Jurassic Park, Dr. Grant, during a moment of turbulence in a helicopter, hastily ties two female ends of a seat belt together. Her action foreshadows the female dinosaurs who will later reproduce regardless of the lack of male dinosaurs.*

**Free Verse**

Poetry with rhythm but without a regular metre or rhyme scheme.

ex: *"For all this sea-hoard of deciduous things, / Strange woods half sodden, and new brighter stuff: / In the slow float of differing light and deep, / No! there is nothing! In the whole and all, / Nothing that's quite your own. / Yet this is you." Ezra Pound, "Portrait D'Une Femme."*

**Historical Fiction**

A created story set in a real historical time period.

ex: *Braveheart or Shakespeare in Love.*

**Humour**

Something funny or amusing.

ex: *Anything published by the Onion.*

**Hyperbole**

An exaggeration.

ex: *We've heard this story a million times!*

**Idiom**

An expression not meant to be taken literally.

ex: *Don't get your knickers in a twist.*

**Imagery**

Descriptive words and phrases that appeal to the senses (sight, taste, smell, hearing, touch); often uses figurative language.

ex: *"I wandered lonely as a cloud." William Wordsworth.*

**Inference**

A deduction about the text based on evidence.

ex: *Someone slams a door and you infer that the person must be upset or angry.*

**Irony**

A contrast between expectation and reality.

- *Verbal*: the gap between what appears to be true and what is actually true in spoken word.
- *Situational*: an expected outcome differs greatly from the actual outcome.
- *Dramatic*: the audience knows something which the character(s) on stage or in the work do not.

**Legend**

A story passed down culturally with historical roots but without authentication.

ex: *Sasquatch, The Loch Ness Monster.*

**Limerick**

A five-line poem with an AABBA rhyme scheme meant to be funny.

ex: *There once was a lady from York / who had an aversion to pork. / When piglets were born / with face all forlorn, / she hid both her knife and her fork.*

**Literal Language**

Language that has no interpretation other than the intended meaning.

ex: *“Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth.”* Bitzer’s definition of a horse, given to his literally-minded teacher, Mr. Gradgrind.

**Lyric Poem**

A poem that expresses feelings, originally accompanied by a lyre.

ex: Catullus’s *“Odi et Amo”* (*I hate and I love*) is an excellent example.

**Metamorphosis**

A complete shift in physical form.

ex: *The overnight change of Gregor Samsa in Kafka’s Metamorphosis from human to insect. A caterpillar becomes a butterfly.*

**Metaphor**

An identification of two unlike things to suggest a commonality.

ex: *Simon and Garfunkel’s “I Am a Rock.”*

**Mood**

The emotions evoked in the reader by an author’s words.

ex: *The often-used opening “It was a dark and stormy night” is clearly an establisher of mood.*

**Motif**

Any object or idea repeating itself throughout a literary work.

ex: *The scars in J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter repeatedly point to both destiny and love.*

**Myth**

A story that typically explains the creation of the world and/or why it is the way it is. Generally involves gods or supernatural forces.

ex: *Sisyphus, Hercules, Romulus and Remus.*

**Narrative**

Writing that tells a story.

ex: *“Boy meets girl. Boy loses girl. Boy sucks thumb.”* Dennis Lee.

**Narrative Poem**

A poem that tells a story.

ex: *"The Highwayman"* by Alfred Noyes.

**Narrator**

The person telling the story.

ex: *The entire story of The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald is told through the character Nick Carraway.

**Onomatopoeia**

Words that imitate or resemble the sounds they describe.

ex: *Bang, plop, fizzle, hiss, ding.* "The moan of doves in immemorial elms, / And murmuring of innumerable bees." Tennyson, "Come down, O Maid."

**Oxymoron**

A juxtaposed contradictory term.

ex: *Just war, adult child, loose tights, paid volunteer.* "I like a smuggler. He is the only honest thief." Charles Lamb.

**Personification**

The attribution of human feelings, thoughts, behaviours, or attitudes to the non-human.

ex: *Justice is blind.*

**Playwright**

The author of a play.

ex: *Norm Foster.*

**Plot**

The series of events that make up a story.

- *Exposition (Introduction):* introduces conflict, characters, and setting.
- *Initial Incident:* the first action that happens in the story.
- *Rising Action:* the events which increase the conflict and the suspense.
- *Climax:* the most emotional moment in the story.
- *Crisis:* the turning point of the story. (Sometimes crisis and climax occur at the same time.)
- *Falling Action:* events which decrease the conflict and the suspense.
- *Resolution/Denouement:* conflicts are resolved, and mysteries are unravelled.

**Point of View**

The eyes or lens through which a story is told:

- *First Person*: we only know, see, and feel what the narrator knows, sees, and feels.
- *Second Person*: the narrator addresses “you”—who might be another character in the work, or the reader, or even the narrator him/herself. Often “I” as the teller of the story is implied.
- *Third Person Limited*: the reader is told the story through the eyes of only one character.
- *Third Person Omniscient*: the reader learns everything about all the characters through an all-seeing, god-like narrator.

**Protagonist**

The character with whom our sympathy most lies. The conflict revolves around the protagonist. The protagonist is opposed by the antagonist.

ex: *Christ or Satan in Milton’s Paradise Lost (depending on your point of view).*

**Proverb**

A pithy saying that states an obvious truth.

ex: *Better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.*

**Pun**

A word with multiple, often humorous interpretations.

ex: *When you work in a calendar factory, it’s hard to take a day off.*

**Rhyme Scheme**

A coding of the rhymes in a poem with letters from the alphabet, beginning with ‘A.’ Each differing rhyme is labelled with the next letter and so on.

ex: *ABAB, AABB, ABBA, ABCB, etc.*

**Setting**

Where and when the story takes place.

ex: *Star Wars opening credits: “It is a period of civil war. Rebel spaceships, striking from a hidden base, have won their first victory against the evil Galactic Empire. During the battle, Rebel forces managed to steal secret plans to the Empire’s ultimate weapon, the Death Star, an armoured space station with enough power to destroy an entire planet.”*

**Simile**

A comparison between two unlike things using the words *like* or *as*.

ex: *"Loneliness in a woman is like hunger in a dog."* Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace*.

**Stanza**

A group of lines in a poem that form a unit, sometimes with a regular metric and rhyme pattern; similar to paragraphs in prose.

ex: *"True wit is nature to advantage dress'd; / What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd."* Alexander Pope, *"An Essay on Criticism."*

**Stereotype**

Assigning qualities to an individual based on membership in a group.

ex: *All Canadians are nice and constantly apologize.*

**Suspense**

Withholding information from the reader to create anxiety or anticipation for what may come next.

ex: *The situation in Stephanie Meyer's Twilight is a constant state of suspense: we know that Bella is in danger of being killed or turned into a vampire at some point by SOMEBODY but we don't know who and we don't know when.*

**Symbol**

Something with a universality about its meaning shared by many cultures.

ex: *Colours can have meaning almost universally understood: red can signify passion, anger, and love.*

**Syntax**

The accepted order in which words are commonly placed in a given language.

ex: *"Much to learn you still have."* Yoda, *Star Wars, Episode II: Attack of the Clones*. *His syntax, rather than subject-verb-object, is object-subject-verb. To English speakers, the syntax sounds alien.*

**Tall Tale**

An exaggerated, implausible story told as though it should be believed.

ex: *Paul Bunyan or Johnny Appleseed.*

**Text Structure**

How a piece of writing is constructed, in terms of how each part is placed.

*ex: In Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, the chapters alternate between day and night to create a rhythm that accentuates the emphasis on female cycles and rhythms.*

**Theme**

A theme is a recurrent idea that is threaded throughout a work of literature. In larger works there may be several themes.

*ex: In The Princess Bride, the themes are explicitly stated: "Are you kidding? Fencing. Fighting. Torture. Revenge. Giants. Monsters. Chases. Escapes. True love. Miracles." William Goldman, The Princess Bride script.*

**Tone**

The point of view is the lens through which the narrator sees the events, people, and places in the text; the tone is the attitude the narrator holds about those experiences.

*ex: An approach to a subject can be formal, informal, humorous, satirical, jaunty, serious, emotional, objective. There are as many tones as there are emotions. If you can identify what the narrator is feeling about what is happening, you can usually identify the tone. For example, "Those who reside in vitreous domiciles should refrain from hurling geological objects." Essentially, it's the same thing as "People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." However, the tone is much more formal and the diction more precise and scientific.*

**Tragedy**

A tragedy happens when, at the crisis, the fortunes of the protagonist take a negative turn and do not recover.

*ex: Great tragedies often involve irony: Romeo dies thinking Juliet is dead; she revives, finds Romeo dead, and kills herself. Lear, seeking signs of love and devotion from his daughter, divides his kingdom too early and loses her. Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman cannot make a success of anything in his life except his death, which leaves his wife "free and clear" with the insurance money but without the only thing that was ever important to her: Willy.*

**Understatement**

The opposite of hyperbole.

*ex: "Houston, we have a problem." Jim Lovell's summation of the situation in response to an exploded oxygen tank, 200 000 miles away from Earth on the Apollo 13 space mission.*