



John  
Steffer  
**The**  
**Grey**  
**Islands**

TEACHER GUIDE

BRICK BOOKS CLASSICS 2 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.**

---

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.**

---

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

---

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

---

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

---

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

---

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

---

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

---

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

---

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**

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“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**

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I think that poetry is ...



# TEACHER GUIDE TO THE GREY ISLANDS: BRICK BOOKS CLASSICS 2

by JOHN STEFFLER

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: John Steffler's *The Grey Islands*, by Adrian Fowler**

- ▶ According to Fowler, how has Steffler's volume of poetry inspired other art?
- ▶ In one place Fowler describes Steffler's work as "the quest of the individual who retreats from civilization to find a more authentic self in nature." What other works of literature take this as their story type?
- ▶ What is the difference between tourist and traveller? Is there a third level, deeper than tourist or traveller? Identify it. Which label fits Steffler's narrator?

## **Introduction to the first Brick Books edition, by Don Coles**

- ▶ Coles implies that other writers have attempted to capture the stories of people pitting themselves against nature but that they have failed. What reason does he give for their failure?

- ▶ What is a “faux-noble attitude”?
- ▶ What is the “ore” of which Keats spoke? Quote the passage of the poem or letter in which he makes reference to rift and ore. Identify the source.

### **Map, pages 20-21**

- ▶ Where are the Grey Islands with respect to the larger island of Newfoundland?
- ▶ Name the two islands in this region.
- ▶ Contemplating the style of the map and its warning at the lower right side of page 20, approximately when do you think it was produced? Give reasons for your response.

### **page 23**

- ▶ Why would the narrator feel the need to “corner” himself?
- ▶ What is the nature of a “blunt” place?
- ▶ Take note of the name Leonard Quinton and speculate what his role is in the narrative.

### **Leonard Quinton, page 25**

- ▶ Revise your previous answer about Leonard Quinton and his role.
- ▶ Name two reasons why the Grey Islands were popular in the 1920s.
- ▶ How had the islands changed by the 1980s, the decade of these poems?

### **CENSUS OF NEWFOUNDLAND: 1921, page 27**

- ▶ Examine the document. Is its source authentic? Prove your response.
- ▶ Census information is used to plan the provision of health care, education, employment, and transport. It helps determine where to build new schools, roads, health care facilities, child care and senior centres. Based on this data, what conclusions would you draw as a national leader about the Groais Islands?
- ▶ What questions arise as you read the data beyond what government use it might provide?

## **ONE**

### **page 31**

- ▶ Choose one word to describe the landscape through which the speaker is driving. Defend your choice.
- ▶ Give reasons why the author has chosen to:
  - a) forego capitalization
  - b) use only periods for punctuation

c) avoid complete sentences completely.

- ▶ Where is Roddickton? Make a prediction about what the islands will be like once our narrator arrives there.

### **pages 32-34**

- ▶ How does the idea of the madman living on the island ruin the narrator's hopes for what he intends to achieve there?
- ▶ How does the narrator's point of view describing the horses underscore his insecurity about being on this adventure?
- ▶ Why is it significant that "the few side trails go by"? How does this fact identify the narrator as just a tourist?

### **pages 35-37**

- ▶ The narrator, Martin Hoffman, is being pulled north, like the needle of a compass. What is his true north?
- ▶ "The brutal mechanics of having a wish come true" is a fragment. Elaborate on it.
- ▶ What does the narrator mean by "I haven't even left the motel"?

### **pages 38-39**

- ▶ What is the motivation that has driven the narrator to leave his job and explore the islands?
- ▶ How has he become like a tourist in his own town of Toronto?
- ▶ The narrator describes himself and his partner, saying, "We fade slowly. Into ghosts." How does this parallel his view of the landscape of Newfoundland to which he is running?

### **pages 40-42**

- ▶ Why is the narrator afraid of running amok?
- ▶ How is the narrator's trip both a source of relief and apprehension to his wife?
- ▶ Who is Carm Denny and why is the narrator so upset by him?

### **pages 43-45**

- ▶ What massive assumption is the narrator making about what his encounter with Carm Denny might be like?
- ▶ According to the narrator, how is there a kind of radical democracy in the way people use roads in Newfoundland?
- ▶ What has the decline of the fishing industry done to the culture of Newfoundland?

**pages 46-49**

- ▶ Choose the details from the description of Englee that tell the reader how isolated it is.
- ▶ What is the narrator’s “last white minute” on page 47?
- ▶ Why does Nels cut his price in half to take the narrator out to the island?

**pages 50-52**

- ▶ Whose voice narrates page 50? What is the effect of including the music?
- ▶ Based on the details used by the narrator to describe Jeweleen’s room, write a brief character sketch of her.
- ▶ How does the narrator reveal his naïveté at the supper table of the boarding house?

**pages 53-55**

- ▶ What feminist work by Gilbert and Gubar discusses the *madwoman in the attic* trope? How has the narrator modified it for his own use in this context?
- ▶ Clarify the irony of a town planner who is relieved to find that Carm Denny will not be on the island after all.
- ▶ The narrator’s references to children are often only described in approximate numbers, like herds of livestock. Why?
- ▶ How is the narrator’s insecurity and lack of experience again evident in the squidding expedition?

**pages 56-58**

- ▶ How are the worlds above and below the water very similar?
- ▶ Against the grey backdrop of the sea, how does the lamp simile provide relief?
- ▶ The greatest colour in this landscape is provided by the description of the dying squid. Why?

**pages 59-61**

- ▶ Why is fear of failure such a motivating force in the narrator’s life?
- ▶ Beyond the literal journey to the island, what does the narrator mean by the phrase “tracing the same road two ways”?
- ▶ How does a family dispute at the boarding house make the narrator aware of the local attitudes toward him as a newcomer?

**pages 62-66**

- ▶ When the boarding-house keeper's wife tells the narrator to "have a nice sleep" after his harrowing experience, what is she telling him?
- ▶ When the narrator identifies with the absent Jeweleen, what language does he use to describe her?
- ▶ How is it that misfortune can bring out the best and the worst in us, according to the narrator's words on page 64?
- ▶ How is the narrator's trip out to the island?
- ▶ In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, when Ariel sings of the drowning of Ferdinand's father, s/he describes it this way:

Full fathom five thy father lies;  
 Of his bones are coral made;  
 Those are pearls that were his eyes:  
 Nothing of him that doth fade  
 But doth suffer a sea-change  
 Into something rich and strange. (I, ii, 560-565)

What evidence is there that the narrator is undergoing a similar transformation?

**TWO****pages 69-73**

- ▶ The expression **to feel centred** indicates a sense of balance, self-confidence, and serenity. Why is the image "no centre" in the exact middle of the narrator's description of the island?
- ▶ How is the narrator's purpose for coming to the island cabin different than those men who have come before him?
- ▶ How is the power balance between Nels and the narrator accomplished on page 71?
- ▶ Based on the descriptions of the island on pages 72 and 73, a storm is coming. In what way is the narrator also experiencing a storm?

**Nels, pages 74-75**

- ▶ What evidence is there that the narrative voice has switched to a local?
- ▶ Despite its ghost story quality, why is Nels's tale kind of funny?
- ▶ Read Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* and draw what parallels you can to decide why the cat was thrown overboard, rather than rescued.

**pages 76-78**

- ▶ The next section deals with a “good omen.” Is the narrator’s interpretation of this dream accurate? Why or why not, in your opinion?
- ▶ List the parts of the narrator’s first morning that are painterly and compare them to those on page 58.
- ▶ The narrator sought solitude and quiet. What surprising discoveries did he make?

**pages 79-81**

- ▶ What elements of Nels’s story about Mother Burke echo his story about the cat?
- ▶ In what way has the narrator begun to react to noises and unfamiliar people in the same way that the locals initially reacted to him?
- ▶ Which of the narrator’s ascribed motivations for leaving Nels alone do you think is most likely: considerateness, shyness, or hostility? Why?

**pages 82-84**

- ▶ Page 82 is a description of the negative aspects of life as a fisherman. Write a short piece of similar structure and length from the point of view of someone who loves that life.
- ▶ Identify the musical elements of the narrator’s tracing of the caribou trails on page 83.
- ▶ How can you tell that the narrator is slowly regaining some of his childhood innocence?

**pages 85-87**

- ▶ Do you think that the locals hear the same sounds at night that the narrator does? Why?
- ▶ How do the sandpiper’s actions show it to be perfectly adapted to its environment?
- ▶ Read page 87 aloud. How does its sound echo its sense?

**Nels, pages 88-90**

- ▶ Nels’s story of his Great-Uncle Aaron and his Uncle Clement speaks of a culture of hypermasculinity. In your opinion, out of what instinct was that culture borne?
- ▶ How is the narrator’s world re-centred by the effect of the tides?
- ▶ Even landscape has a chameleon-like quality to it. How does the narrator make that connection?

**pages 91-95**

- ▶ How does the narrator's inexperience put him in danger on pages 91-92?
- ▶ Does Nels's third tale of Great-Uncle Aaron change your perception of him as a man? How?
- ▶ How has the narrator underestimated his dietary needs?
- ▶ In what way does the night experience of the island increase the narrator's respect for the land?

**pages 96-99**

- ▶ What source of fresh food does the narrator seek on pages 96-97?
- ▶ How does the narrator infuse the land with spirit?
- ▶ In comparison to the census on page 27, what does this passage reveal about the narrator's state of mind?

**pages 100-104**

- ▶ Why would the culture of Newfoundland "set so little store / in staying high and dry"?
- ▶ Compare the narrator's account of the weather with the broadcaster on the radio. What discrepancy does it highlight?
- ▶ Why does the memory of an encounter with a random woman during a job on a construction site coincide with the narrator's intense homesickness for Ontario?
- ▶ Typically, the quest archetype involves a hero journeying over a wasteland through trials and tribulations to garner knowledge and come back to society with the means to improve it. Why does the narrator describe this quest as "some brainless myth"?

**pages 105-110**

- ▶ Crow as symbol has a myriad of interpretations. Which ones lend themselves well to the piece on page 105?
- ▶ What does the narrator's attempt as town planner to plant trees in Milliken Harbour reveal about his point of view? Why, like his excerpts using local voices, has he now switched to conversational prose?
- ▶ What does the fragmented last line on page 107 mean?
- ▶ On page 108, what evidence suggests that the environment is not entirely hostile as the narrator had previously thought?
- ▶ Do you find it odd that the narrator mentions his wife's scent on page 109 without any elaboration on his thoughts about her? Why or why not?
- ▶ In what way does the narrator understand "questions, vanished things" to be "solid facts / as large as the hills"?

**THREE****pages 113-120**

- ▶ Examine the imagery used on page 113. What words delineate the realities of life for those who used to inhabit the islands?
- ▶ What does Nels's account of Aaron Shale's iceberg incident tell the reader about the culture of Newfoundland?
- ▶ On page 113, the word *paths* is used twice. How is the first use different from the second?
- ▶ On page 116, the narrator makes an attempt to speak for the islanders who no longer live in the islands. How well do you think he speaks for them?
- ▶ What is the source of the narrator's sadness on page 118 and what metaphor does he use to describe it?
- ▶ On page 119, how does the account of Cyril and Ambrose Wellon's visit underline a hypermasculine quality to island culture?
- ▶ On page 120, how does the author use paradox to delineate his attempt to record his experience?

**pages 121-125**

- ▶ The narrator suggests that "these people don't measure by what you see. They carry the world around in their heads." Is the vanishing of the world of childhood unique to Newfoundlanders? How does it differ from the vanishing world of childhood in, say, metropolitan cities like Toronto?
- ▶ What do we learn about what became of Carm Denny? Why does the narrator use the expression "our superior tidiness" on page 123?
- ▶ Answer the question that the narrator poses on page 125: "what else could such cold crags / such heaving water intend" other than "some monster"? His romantic notion that the simplicity and stillness of nature will redeem him has altered. How does he see nature now?

**pages 126-134**

- ▶ Nels's voice in Steffler's collection relocates us in the voices of the locals. How does Nels's perspective help us to understand Carm Denny better?
- ▶ Carm's own account of how his house and everything in it burnt down does sound like madness. Is there any science to back up the veracity of his story?
- ▶ How has the wind on page 129 made the narrator feel like even more of an outsider than he was in St. John's?
- ▶ The storm on page 130 is quickly followed by a memory of a night in the boarding house. Compare the two experiences.



- ▶ On page 134, the narrator experiences his first successful catch. Do some research. What has he caught?

### **Reading Matter, pages 135-139**

- ▶ Identify the thesis and supporting arguments in the two sections provided from Stuart Patterson's book, *Soul in Salt: Reflections on Newfoundland*: "Purgatory and Penal Servitude" and "Aristocracy." What reasons might Steffler have had for creating this fictitious treatise?
- ▶ The narrator's dismissal of the book excerpt is quick and sarcastic. What does this reaction reveal about the narrator?

### **Cyril, pages 140-142**

- ▶ In what way does Cyril's account of hunting ducks in the winter support Carm's story about the number of ducks he had put by in his freezer?
- ▶ What other unceremonious description of death comes to mind when you hear Cyril's account of the death of his best friend and cousin, Eustace?

### **pages 143-149**

- ▶ Draw the scene (or find an image of the same) for either the bedroom or the kitchen as depicted on page 143.
- ▶ Identify the irony of the piece on page 144.
- ▶ What does the narrator mean when he says, "I'm trying to stop wasting our time" on page 146? How are his family ties "stronger than it looks"?
- ▶ On page 147, the narrator says he is "digging life out of this place." What does he mean? What is he mining in the Grey Islands?
- ▶ Read page 148 and imagine what kind of thoughts might no longer be "stuffed down in you like socks in a bag" but "parts of the landscape now."
- ▶ What role does the narrator think he has in the lives of Newfoundlanders?

## **FOUR**

### **pages 153-157**

- ▶ Why does the narrator visit Carm Denny's shack?
- ▶ What imagery does Steffler use to describe the bond between the narrator and Carm?
- ▶ Read about the mythology surrounding Tiresias and draw parallels between him and Cyril's account of Carm.
- ▶ Cyril describes Carm's eyes as having "no centre to them at all." Comment on the recurrent theme of centring, de-centring, and re-centring throughout *The Grey Islands*.

- ▶ On pages 156-157, Carm gives an account of two “more” women whom he sees from a distance crossing the eastern head of the island. Why does he fear them? What steps does he take to protect himself from them?
- ▶ What parallels are there between the Greek myths of Prometheus and of the Sirens and Carm’s experience of these women?

### pages 158-166

- ▶ What technique does Steffler use to describe the wind and the mountains on page 158?
- ▶ By giving a few examples, show how much of the narrator’s description of French Cove (page 159) is made in terms of what is absent rather than what is present.
- ▶ Why did the narrator choose to move in to Carm Denny’s cabin?
- ▶ How does the narrator describe time on page 162?
- ▶ On page 163, the narrator explains that he is “enjoying the most elaborate advantage any lover ever contrived.” What is the narrator’s real motive for having left his wife?
- ▶ On page 164, the narrator wrestles with someone in his dreams. Our attention is drawn in the next page to Genesis 32, the account of Jacob wrestling with the angel. Page 164 is written in the second person. Make some arguments for the identity of the “you” whom the narrator addresses.
- ▶ What does the narrator find in the root cellar of Carm’s cabin? Make some guesses as to the significance of his findings.
- ▶ What does the narrator mean on page 166 when he says, “I am this island now”?

### Carm, pages 167-172

- ▶ What do we learn of the woman in the photograph that the narrator found in Carm’s cabin on page 167?
- ▶ What happened to Carm’s wife?
- ▶ The narrator interrupts the voice of Carm on page 170. According to him, what are some of the paradoxes of attempting to fish for a living in Newfoundland?
- ▶ The evening that Carm describes is obviously a special one. What evening was it? How does he describe himself in comparison to his wife?

### pages 173-183

- ▶ The narrator tells us “things here flower / in death.” What does he mean?
- ▶ How is the same idea conveyed differently on page 174?
- ▶ Draw the scene as described by the narrator on page 175.
- ▶ On page 176, how is the death of the birds not much different than the death of people?

- ▶ What does the narrator describe as being “like taking the bus” on page 177?
- ▶ Judging by Cyril’s reaction to the broken capstan, how often does this kind of event occur?
- ▶ When a good catch of fish does come in for Cyril, the narrator describes him “like a man in a fairy tale / who is shown a mountain of gold / and told he can keep whatever he digs in a day.” Name any fairy tales that are reminiscent of this scenario. What are we to infer?
- ▶ Pages 180-181 describe the state of the fish when they are caught. What might they symbolize?
- ▶ On pages 182 and 183, the narrator describes gutting and cleaning the fish. Why does he remark that “some of the running blood is mine”?

### pages 184-193

- ▶ The narrator’s tone has shifted after the fish run. How?
- ▶ On pages 185 and 186, the narrator dreams of a wedding. The communion experienced is more than just man with woman. What else is joined?
- ▶ From pages 187 to 191, how does the narrator see himself now amongst the locals? Is his perception accurate in your opinion?
- ▶ On page 192, the narrator explains how returning to his wife will turn him “back into flesh and blood.” What transformation does he think he has experienced?
- ▶ Draw your own conclusions from the last page, 193. How has this experience in the Grey Islands affected the narrator? Is he planning on making his stay in Newfoundland permanent or not? Justify your response.

**Activities Group A: These essays require that your thesis be arguable, provable, worth proving, and within the scope of a 1 500-word paper. Choose one. Use MLA format.**

- ▶ Develop a thesis which identifies Martin Hoffman’s true motive for going to live in the Grey Islands.
- ▶ Examine the role of dreams in *The Grey Islands*.
- ▶ Choose the best examples of well-wrought imagery in *The Grey Islands* and explain why they speak to the reader so well.
- ▶ Create your own topic and have it approved by your instructor.

**Activities Group B: Choose one.**

- ▶ Choose five memorable scenes from *The Grey Islands* and illustrate them with drawings. Choose an excerpt from each scene as a caption to each drawing.
- ▶ Write a letter in the voice of Karen Hoffman in which you explain to your husband Martin how you feel about his time being spent in the Grey Islands.

- ▶ Write a four-verse ballad about any character you have encountered in *The Grey Islands*.
- ▶ Create your own extension of *The Grey Islands* in any creative format you wish (interpretive dance, photography, music).

**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.*