

Literary Elements

Every work of literature is made up of a combination of elements. What makes each work unique is the creative way in which the author handles and blends these elements. Careful readers of literary texts are able to identify these elements and to discuss how they influence the meaning of the literary work.

What Is It Called?	What Does It Mean?	What Does it Look Like?
Characterization	Refers to the creation and development of characters, the people who carry on the action in a literary work	Description by the narrator, dialogue & thoughts, and character actions are all methods of characterization.
Setting	The time and place in which events occur	Can include descriptions of locations, dates, times of year, etc.
Plot	The sequence of events that take place	Major and minor events or conflicts that involve the characters.
Diction	The word choice of the author	Words that help to convey different attitudes or tones. Adjectives & adverbs (describing words) and verbs (action words) are helpful in considering the author's diction.
Tone	The attitude or viewpoint that an author shows toward his or her subject	The tone may be serious, sympathetic, angry, etc. You can usually determine the narrator's tone by studying the author's diction (or word choice).
Mood	The atmosphere or feeling of a literary work	The mood may be joyful, gloomy, suspenseful, etc.
Point of view	The perspective from which a story is told	In the first-person point of view, the narrator tells the story using "I" and "me" and may participate in events. In the omniscient point of view, the narrator is an all-knowing impersonal observer who does not take part in events but can describe the thoughts and actions of all the characters.
Structure	How the parts of a literary work are organized and arranged	The structure of a novel may be based on chronological order with occasional flashbacks. The structure of poetry includes the number, form, pattern of lines, and stanzas.
Theme	The central idea of a literary work	Themes often have to do with widely held human concerns such as love, death, justice, dignity, happiness, etc.

Great Sentence Starters

"The author uses dialogue as a method of characterization to show..."

"The narrator's use of diction helps to express a tone of..."

"The first person point of view of the narrator helps the reader to understand..."