Literary Terms

1. Setting – time and place of the action.
2. Characters – the people, animals, or imaginary creatures who take part in the action of a work of literature.
3. Main characters – the most important characters in literary works.
4. Minor characters – the less important character in a literary work.
5. Conflict – struggle between opposing forces.
6. Plot – series of events in a story.
7. Exposition – introduces the setting and the characters. Sets up or hints at the conflict.
8. Inciting Incident – event that sparks the plot and introduces the conflict.
9. Rising Action – shows how the conflict becomes more difficult. Builds suspense.
10. Climax – the most exciting part and a turning point in the story. Makes the outcome of the conflict clear.
11. Falling Action – eases the tension. Shows how the main characters resolve the conflict.
12. Resolution – reveals how everything turns out. Sometimes called the denouement.
13. Fiction – prose in writing that tells an imaginary story. The basic elements of fiction are plot, character, setting, and theme. Different types of fiction include realistic fiction, historical fiction, science fiction, and fantasy.
14. Novel – long work of fiction. Like a short story, a novel is the product of a writer’s imagination. Because a novel is considerably longer than a short story, a novelist can develop the characters and story line more thoroughly.
15. Short Story – a work of fiction that centers on a single idea and can be in one sitting. Generally, a short story has one main conflict that involves the characters and keeps the story moving.
16. Theme – a message about life or human nature that the writer shares with the reader. In many cases, readers must infer what the writer’s message is. One way of figuring out a theme is to apply the lesson learned by the main characters to people in real life.
17. Dynamic Character – one who undergoes important change s as a plot unfolds. The changes occur because of the character’s actions and experiences in the story. The changes are usually internal and may be good or bad. Main characters are usually, though not always dynamic.
18. Static Character – one who remains the same throughout a story. The character may experience events and interact with other characters, but he or she is not changed because of them.
19. Internal Conflict – one that occurs within a character. For example, a character with an internal conflict might struggle with fear.
20. External Conflict – involves a character who struggles against a force outside him or herself, such as nature, a physical obstacle, or another character.
21. Character vs. Character – a character has a problem with one or more of the other characters.
22. Character vs. Society – a character has a problem with society – the school, the law tradition.
23. Character vs. Self – a character struggles with self, trying to make a decision.
24. Character vs. Nature – a character is in conflict with some element of nature – bitter cold, extreme heat, a tornado.
25. Character vs. Fate – a character struggles against the unknown and that which is beyond human comprehension: fate, magic, death, the supernatural.
26. Character vs. Machine/Technology – a character struggles for control and survival against a real or fictional machine or invention.