**LITERARY DEVICES:**
With Latin and English Examples

These terms are essential, if someone wishes to discuss literature intelligently. Think about it. Imagine trying to discuss concepts of mathematics without using terms such as “equation,” “tangent,” and “function.”

To say that a passage is beautiful and not be able to explain why is fine for 8th grade. However, there comes a time when the mind years to flex its dendrites, enter the minds of great writers and thinkers. The best handle for this is a grounding in literary devices.

**ALLEGORY**—a narrative in which abstract ideas (such as Love, Rumor, Knowledge) figure as circumstances or persons usually to enforce a moral truth.

English—Bunyan’s Pilgrims Progress and Spenser’s Faerie Queen use this technique.

The most famous example is Plato’s Allegory of the Cave. Occurs in Virgil’s Aeneid 4.173–197 where Fama (Rumor) is used in an allegory.

**ALLITERATION**—repetition of the same sounds in two or more words. This usually applies to consonants and accented initial vowels.

munere mortis /et mutam(Catullus).

Wild and wooly is a common English expression.

**ANAPHORA**—repetition of a word, usually at the beginning of a clause or phrase. This can be a source of power to emphasize.
nostis insolentiam Antonii, nostis amicos, nostis totam domum (Cicero).

English– Victory–victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be...(W.Churchill).

**ANASTROPHE**– placing the object of a preposition before the preposition.

oraculum Jovis inter aestuosi. Catullus.

English– “When he himself might his quietus make.” Shakespeare’s *Hamlet.*

**APOSIOPE**SIS– an abrupt failure to complete a sentence.

Quos ego...! Aeneid 1.135.

English–his behavior was...but I blush to mention that...

**APO**STROPHE– to talk to someone or something which is not there. O ter quaterque beati–Aeneid 1.94. English example–while reading some novel so pathetically written the reader puts down the book and cries “Oh Shakespeare where have you gone, where is your light?”

**ASSONANCE**–repetition of sounds, usually vowel sounds.

amissos longo socios sermone... Virgil Aeneid 1.217.

English– George Saintsbury’s “ring and hild”.

**ASYNDETON**– omission of conjunctions in a series.

petulantibus, impuris, impudicis, aleatoribus.... *Philippics,* Cicero.
English– We have petitioned, we have remonstrated, we have supplicated... Patrick Henry.

**CAESURA**– a pause or break in a line of poetry.

Me miserum aspicite et, si vitam puriter egi Catullus( the pause is after the elision of aspicite et. The foot is not completed until si. Catullus is sobbing.)

English–of man’s first disobedience// and the fruit.

**CHIASMUS**– arrangement of words ABBA.

innumeris tumidum Pythona sagittis (Ovid).

English–a superman in physique but in intellect a fool.

**ECPHRASIS**–a formal description. Often used in epic to make a transition to a new scene.

est locus....Aeneid 1.159–170

**ELLIPSIS**– omission of one or more words necessary to the sense.

Haec secum (dixit) Aeneid 1.37.

English–all had turned out as expected (all had turned out as had been expected).

**ENJAMBMENT/ENJAMBEMENT**–happens in poetry. Closely related words are split between one line and the next. The word Catullus is the subject of agit in the next line.

Latin
gratias tibi maximas
agit pessimus omnium poeta (Catullus)

Enjambment is often used by a poet as one means to bind a poem together. It also has the benefit of making a pause before completion of a thought.

English

all in the valley of death
road the six hundred. (Tennyson)

HENDIADYS–the expression of an idea using two nouns joined with “and” instead of a noun and an adjective.

molemque et montes–Aeneid 1.61.

English– a cup and gold (a cup of gold).

HOMOEOTELEUTON– series of words end in the same sound.

Horum duorum criminum....Cicero Pro Caelio 30.

English– loves, doves

HYPERBOLE–exaggeration.

terram inter fluctus aperit. Aeneid 1.107.

English–mile high ice cream cones.

IRONY– using words in a context with a meaning contrary to the situation.

Junone secunda. Aeneid 4.45.
Oh what a fine fellow we have here (the situation indicates that the opposite is meant).

**LITOTES**—double negative.

nec minimo puella naso—Catullus.

He’s not a bad ball player.

**METAPHOR**—implied comparison.

remigio alarum Aeneid 1.31.

The Marble Man, a ship plows the seas.

**METONYMY**—use of one noun in place of another.

Cererem corruptam undis—Aeneid 1.177.

Lands belonging to the crown. Demanded action from City Hall.

**ONOMATOPOEIA**—use of words whose sounds suggest the sense.

magno cum murmure montis—Aeneid 1.55.

Hiss, chickadee, thud. This device can be very sophisticated. These are only simple examples.

**OXYMORON**—contradictory words in the same phrase.

Cum tacent, clamant.

Loveless love.
**PERIPETY**– a sudden reversal. Based on logical sequence. Fine examples in *North by Northwest, Rear Window*.

**PERSONIFICATION**– treatment of inanimate objects as human.

Phaselus ille, quem videtis, hospites/ait fuisse navium celerrimus. Catullus 4.1–2.

English–the floods clap their hands.

**PLEONASM**– use of unnecessary words. (Sort of like saying the same thing twice.)

mortales visus reliquit,/et procul in tenuem ex oculis evanuit auram Aeneid 4.277–278.

English– a pleonasm or overflow of that great kindness–Samuel Purchos.

**POLYPTOTON**– repetition of key word with slight change in form.

tam te basia multa basiare– Catullus.

English–my own heart’s heart and ownest own, farewell–Tennyson

**POLYSYNDETON**– use of unnecessary conjunctions.

Eurusque Notusque ruunt creberque.../Africus Aeneid 1.85–86.

English–we have ships and men and money and stores.

**PRAETERITIO**– saying what one says will not be said.

Obliviscor iniurias tuas, Clodia, depono memoriam doloris mei; quae abs te crudeler in meos me absente facta sunt, neglego....Pro Caelio 50.
English– I confine to this page the volumes of his treacheries and debaucheries.

PROLEPSIS– use of a word before it is appropriate. This technique leaves us hanging until we get the stuff we need to finish the thought. Usually a verb comes between the adjective and the nouns it modifies.

submersasque obrue puppes Aeneid 1.69.

PROSOPOPOEIA– assumption of another person’s character.

Cicero does this in the Pro Caelio when he pretends to be Appius Claudius Caecus. Commonly used in English literature.

SIMILE– a comparison using like or as.

velut agmine facto Aeneid 1.82.

English– cheeks like roses, a heart as hard as flint.

SYNCHYSIS– interlocking word order.

saevae memorem Junonis ob iram Aeneid 1.4. (saevae modifies Junonis, memorem modifies iram)

SYNECDOCHE– part for the whole.

Puppis(stern) can be used for navis(ship)

English– fifty sail can be used in place of fifty ships.

TMESIS– separation of the parts of a compound word.

circum dea fundit. (Circum belongs with fundit) Aeneid 1.412.
English—what place soever for whatsoever place.

**TRANSFERRED EPITHET**—attributing some characteristic of a thing to another thing.

velivolum mare= sail—flying sea.


**TRICOLON CRESCENS**—three like phrases in a row (three relative clauses, three prep phrases, etc.).

vivamus mea lesbia atque amemus/rumoresque senum severiorum/omnes unius aestimemus assis Catullus.

English—of the people, by the people, for the people is a simple tricolon in English. Patrick Henry uses more complex examples in his speech “Give Me Liberty.”

**ZEUGMA**—joining of dissimilar words in a unit.

in joco atque vino— Catullus.

English—they wear a garment like that of the Scythians but a language peculiar to themselves.

Check out these sites for more information:

http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric
(Brigham Young University)

http://www.uky.edu/ArtsSciences/Classics/rhetoric.html
(University of Kentucky)