Literature Terms

antagonist—Any force in a story that is in conflict with a protagonist. An antagonist may be another person, an aspect of the physical or social environment, or a destructive element in the protagonist's own nature.

climax—The point at which the complication reaches its maximum tension and the forces in opposition confront each other.

complication—The section of a story in which a conflict begins and grows in clarity, intensity, and importance. This refers to the main complication.

denouement—A brief period of calm following the climax, in which a state of relative equilibrium returns.

developing character—Character who is deeply affected by the action of the plot and undergoes some important change of personality, attitude, or outlook on life as a result of the action of the story.

exposition—The part of the story that introduces the characters, shows some of their interrelationships, and places them within a believable time and place.

external conflict—A personal and individual struggle between the central character and another character or between the central character and some non-human force such as fate, society, or nature.

flat character—Two-dimensional, predictable character who lacks the complexity and unique qualities associated with psychological depth.

foreshadowing—Thoughts, objects, events, actions, or dialog in a story that hints at a future situation to be faced by the main protagonist.

in medias res—A Latin phrase meaning "in the middle of things" that refers to a method of beginning a story with an exciting incident that, chronologically, occurs after the complication has developed.

internal conflict—A psychological conflict within the central character. The primary struggle is between different aspects of a single personality.

motif—Images, patterns, or ideas that are repeated throughout the story and are variations or aspects of the story's theme.

plot—The events of a story and how they develop.

protagonists—The central characters in a conflict, whether sympathetic or unsympathetic as persons. However, this term is commonly used to refer to the main protagonist.

round character—Unique, individualistic character who has some degree of complexity and ambiguity and who cannot easily be categorized. Also called *three dimensional character*.

setting—The time and place in which the story takes place, including all of the complex factors that come packaged with a given time and place: climate, terrain, population density, social structures and economic factors, customs, moral attitudes, and codes of behavior.

static character—A character who remains essentially the same throughout the story, either because the action does not have an important effect on her life or because she is insensitive to the meaning of the action.

stock character—Minor character whose actions are completely predictable or typical of her job or profession.

theme—The central concern around which a story is structured, its unifying focus.

universal theme—one of lasting interest, one that is meaningful not just to people here and now but to all human beings of all eras.