

PSSA Vocabulary: Words to Know!



Literary Terms

1. **Affix** – A prefix *or* suffix
2. **Alliteration** – The repetition of initial consonant sounds in neighboring words
3. **Characterization** – The method an author uses to reveal characters and their various personalities
4. **Climax** – The turning point in a narrative, the moment when the conflict is at its most intense; the climax follows the rising action
5. **Conflict/Problem** – A struggle or clash between opposing characters, forces or emotions
6. **Dialogue** – Conversation between people in a literary work
7. **Figurative Language** – Language that cannot be taken literally since it was written to create a special effect or feeling
8. **First Person** – The “first person” or “personal” point of view relates events as they are perceived by a single character; the main character “tells” the story and may offer opinions about the action and characters that differ from those of the author
9. **Flashback** – A device used in literature to present action that occurred before the beginning of the story; flashbacks are often introduced as the dreams or recollections of one or more characters
10. **Foreshadowing** – A device used in literature to create expectation or to set up an explanation of later developments
11. **Hyperbole** – An exaggeration or overstatement such as, “*I was so embarrassed I could have died!*”
12. **Idiomatic Language** – An expression peculiar to itself grammatically or that cannot be understood if taken literally, such as, “*Let’s get on the ball*”
13. **Imagery** – A word or group of words in a literary work which appeal to one or more of the senses: sight, taste, touch, hearing and smell

14. **Irony** – The use of a word or phrase to mean the exact opposite of its literal or usual meaning; incongruity between the actual result of a sequence of events and the expected result
15. **Limited View** – The story is told in first person (character’s own perspective) or third person (an onlooker’s perspective), but the speaker is unable to know what is in any character’s mind but his or her own
16. **Metaphor** – A figure of speech that expresses an idea through the image of another object, such as when Shakespeare describes the arrival of the character Juliet by saying, “But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?”; Juliet is described as if she is the sun
17. **Mood** – The prevailing emotions of a work or of the author in his or her creation of the work; the mood of a work is not always what might be expected based on its subject matter
18. **Omniscient** – The narrative perspective from which a literary work is presented to the reader from a “godlike” perspective, able to see actions and look into the minds of characters
19. **Onomatopoeia** – The use of words whose sounds express or suggest their meaning, such as *crunch*, *crackle* and *meow*
20. **Personification** – An object or abstract idea given human qualities or human form, such as saying, “*Flowers danced about the lawn*”
21. **Plot** – The sequence in which the author arranges events in a story; the plot may have a protagonist who is opposed by an antagonist, creating conflict
22. **Resolution** – The portion of a story following the climax in which the conflict is resolved
23. **Rising Action** – The part of a story where the plot becomes increasingly complicated; rising action leads up to the climax or turning point
24. **Satire** – A literary tone used to ridicule or make fun of human vice or weakness
25. **Setting** – The time *and* place in which a story unfolds
26. **Simile** – A comparison of two unlike things in which a word of comparison (*like* or *as*) is used, such as, “*She eats like a bird*”
27. **Symbolism** – A device in literature where an object represents an idea
28. **Theme** – A topic of discussion or writing; a major idea broad enough to cover the entire scope of a literary work

29. Third Person – A perspective in literature, the “third person” point of view presents the events of the story from outside of any single character’s perception

30. Tone – The attitude of the author toward the audience and characters, such as serious or humorous

“Signal” Words



*These words may be used in the directions for multiple choice or open-ended items on the PSSAs. Knowing them will help you know what the test is asking you to do!

- Multiple Choice Items
 1. **Identify**—locate specific information in the text
 2. **Infer**—draw a logical conclusion using information or evidence (when the information is not directly stated!)
- Open-ended Items
 1. **Paraphrase**—restate the text or passage in other words to simplify or make clearer
 2. **Summarize**—restate important ideas and details from a paragraph or multiple paragraphs in your own words in a much shorter space
 3. **Compare**—state the similarities between two or more ideas or passages
 4. **Contrast**—state the differences between two or more ideas or passages
 5. **Explain**—express understanding of an idea or concept, often using examples from the text to support your explanation