A quick reference for figurative language, literary elements, and literary techniques.

Figurative Language

Alliteration - The repetition of the same initial letter, sound, or group of sounds in a series of words. Alliteration includes tongue twisters.
Example: She sells seashells by the seashore.

Cliché - A cliché is an expression that has been used so often that it has become common and sometimes boring.
Examples: Opposites attract. You are what you eat.

Hyperbole - An exaggeration that is so dramatic that no one would believe the statement is true. Tall tales are hyperboles.
Example: I'm so hungry I could eat a horse.

Idiom - An idiom is an expression that has a meaning apart from the meanings of its individual words. It's not meant to be taken literally.
Example: It's raining cats and dogs.

Irony – Irony is a literary device involving a discrepancy between what is said and what is meant, or between what's expected to happen and what actually occurs. There are three main types:

- **Dramatic irony** - A situation in which the audience knows something about present or future circumstances that the character does not know.
  Example: In Romeo & Juliet, Romeo thinks Juliet is dead, so he goes to her tomb to kill himself. This is ironic because he doesn't know, as the audience does, that she is has been given a potion to make her look dead.
- **Verbal irony** - A contradiction of expectation between what is said and what is meant.
  Example: In Romeo & Juliet, Juliet is upset after being told that her father has promised her hand in marriage to Paris. She states to her mother "…I will not marry yet; and, when I do, I swear it shall be Romeo, whom you know I hate, rather than Paris …" This is ironic because she is already married to Romeo.
- **Situational irony** - A contradiction between what might be expected and what actually occurs. It's often connected to a really negative view of life.
  Example: Dying of thirst while adrift on a boat in the ocean. There's water everywhere, but none of it is drinkable.

Metaphor - The metaphor makes a direct comparison between two unlike things. A simile would say you are like something; a metaphor is more positive - it says you *are* something.
Example: Her eyes are stars shining in the sky.

Extended Metaphor – In an extended metaphor, the metaphor is carried over many sentences or lines.

Onomatopoeia – The use of a word to describe or imitate a natural sound or the sound made by an object or an action.
Example: snap, crackle, pop.

Oxymoron – When something is described using contradictory terms.
Example: jumbo shrimp; definite maybe; deafening silence.

Personification - A figure of speech in which human characteristics are given to an animal or an object.
Example: My teddy bear gave me a hug.

Pun – A play on words. A pun involves using a word or words that have more than one meaning.
Example: My dog not only has a fur coat, but also pants.

Simile - A simile uses the words "like" or "as" to compare one object or idea with another to suggest they are alike.
Example: She is busy as a bee.

Literary Elements (Every story has these)

Protagonist - The main character in a story, the one with whom the reader is meant to identify. The person is not necessarily "good", but is the person whom the reader is most invested in.
Example: Peter Parker in the Spiderman movies / comic books.

Antagonist - Counterpart to the main character/protagonist and source of a story's main conflict. It may not even be a person (see Conflict below).
Examples: The Green Goblin in Spiderman. The storm in A Perfect Storm.

Plot - Sequence of events in the story.

Setting - Time and place in which the story occurs.
Example: Spiderman takes place in modern-day New York City.

Conflict - A struggle between opposing forces which drive the action in a story. This is what keeps the reader reading! The outcome of the story is usually a resolution of the conflict. The opposing force does not have to be a person. The basic types of conflict are: Man vs. Self, Man vs. Man, Man vs. Nature, Man vs. Society or Man vs. Machine.

Climax - The most dramatic part of a story. Right before the climax is the turning point, usually where something goes wrong. The climax then ensues and comes to a resolution. A resolution does not necessarily mean the problem has been solved; only that the high point has ended.

Diction – The choice of words used in writing. Authors pay attention to diction, because using one word instead of another can dramatically change the meaning of a sentence.

Theme - A theme is a main universal idea or message conveyed by story. A theme is expressed as a complete sentence.
Example: Little Red Riding Hood's theme may be "Don't talk to strangers".

Motif - A motif is an important, recurring idea, structure or image; it differs from a theme in that it can be expressed as a single word.
Example: A motif in The Outsiders is family.

Mood - Mood refers to the general sense or feeling the reader is supposed to get from the story. Mood doesn't refer to a characters' state of mind. It's how we feel when we read a story.

Tone – Tone is the attitude a writer has towards what they're writing about. Authors show tone through their word choice, style, and opinion if they express one. It's how the author feels when writing a story.

Point of View – Point of View is the perspective from which the reader sees the story. It may be first person (there is no narrator and the story is told by one of the characters as events unfold) or third person (the story is told by an observer of the story. This could be someone who may or may not be involved).

Common Literary Techniques

Allegory - Where an entire story is symbolic of something else, usually a larger abstract concept, idea, or important event.
Example: Animal Farm is an allegory of Soviet Union.

Allusion A reference in a work of literature to something outside the work, especially to a well-known historical or literary event, person, or work.
Example: The title of John Steinbeck's book, Of Mice and Men is an allusion to a line from a poem by Robert Burns.

Anthropomorphism - Where animals or inanimate objects are portrayed as people.
Example: Cars the cars can talk and interact like humans.

Exposition – Exposition is when an author interrupts a story in order to explain something - usually to provide important background information. An exposition can also be essential information which is given at the beginning of a play or short story, about the plot and the events that are to follow.

Foil - A foil is character who is meant to represent characteristics, values or ideas which are opposite to another character (usually the protagonist).
Example: Mercutio is Romeo's foil in Romeo & Juliet.

Foreshadowing - Where future events in a story, or perhaps the outcome, are suggested by the author before they happen. This suggestion can be made in various ways such as a flashback, an object, or a previous situation which reflects a more significant situation later on.

Imagery – Imagery is the sensory details and images evoked by the words of a story. When you are asked to discuss the images or imagery of a work, you should look especially carefully at the sensory details and the metaphors and similes of a passage.

Parallelism - The use of similar or identical language, structures, events or ideas in different parts of a text.

Repetition - When a specific word, phrase, or structure is repeated several times, usually in close proximity, to emphasize a particular idea.
Example: from Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech –

Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.
Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania!
Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado!
Let freedom ring from the curvaceous peaks of California!
But not only that, let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!
Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!
Let freedom ring from every hill and every molehill of Mississippi.

Symbolism - A symbol is an object, color, person, character or figure used to represent abstract ideas. A symbol, unlike a motif, must be visible. Symbols exist all around us in "real" life, like a heart (❤) used to represent "love".
Examples: Cars are symbolic in The Outsiders. They represent the social mobility the Soc's have that the Greasers don't (they also are an example of situational irony because Darry and Soda work on cars and know more about them than the Greasers who drive them).