

AP English – *Hamlet* – Literary Terms

setting – the imagined time and place of a story, novel, poem, or play

protagonist – the main character in a play or novel

antagonist – the character opposing the main character or hero

dramatic conflict – every play can be thought of as a struggle between two forces; at a specific point early in the play the two forces come into definite conflict and a question is raised as to which of the two forces will triumph; this question creates suspense which holds the interest of the view of the play

crisis – the crisis of a plot is that point at which the protagonist makes the crucial decision which determines his or her fate

resolution – the resolution of the play occurs when the question of the play as a whole is finally answered

dilemma – a situation in which a character must choose between two equally undesirable courses of action

tragedy – a type of drama in which a protagonist or hero destroys him or herself by making a crucial error of judgment, often an error based on an excess of virtue, thus exhibiting nobility of soul even in the process of self destruction

soliloquy – a speech by a character alone on stage in which his innermost thoughts are expressed

denotation – the literal meaning of a word; the object, action, or idea the word points to

connotation – the associations and feelings clustering around a word as opposed to its denotation

simile – a comparison of dissimilar entities, stated explicitly, usually using the words “like” or “as” for the purpose of transferring attributes of one element (the figurative element) to the other (the literal element)

metaphor – a comparison of dissimilar entities, expressed implicitly as an identity, for the purpose of transferring attributes of one element (the figurative element) to the other (the literal element)

symbol – a concrete image which is the course of a work typically comes to draw together and represent a large body of experience and idea

