

Terms Associated with Close Reading

Terms related to the eighth grade Skill Progression Chart are in bold face print. Additional terms and definitions are included for the sake of vertical team continuity and so that students who wish to go beyond their grade level standards may advance their knowledge of literary terminology at their own pace. Most definitions contain an example from *A Wrinkle in Time* and an explanation of how the use of the device links to meaning.

Literary Elements

Archetype is a character, action, or situation that is a prototype, or pattern, of human life generally; a situation that occurs over and over again in literature, such as a quest, an initiation, or an attempt to overcome evil. Many *myths* contain archetypes. Two common types of archetypes involve **setting** and **character**. A common **archetypal setting** is the desert, which is associated with spiritual sterility and barrenness because it is devoid of many amenities and personal comforts.

Archetypal characters are those who embody a certain kind of universal human experience. For example, a *femme fatale*, *siren*, or *temptress* figure is a character who purposefully lures men to disaster through her beauty. Other examples of archetypal figures include the “damsel in distress,” the “mentor,” the “old crone,” the “hag” or witch, and the “naïve young man from the country.” These characters are recognizable human “types” and their stories recreate “typical” or recurrent human experiences. For example, Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which in *A Wrinkle in Time* function as archetypal mentors or guides to Charles Wallace, Meg,

and Calvin, guiding and directing their quest to find Meg’s father and save the world from the “Dark thing” or shadow that threatens the planet Earth. Their *journey* itself is an archetypal one: it requires a call to adventure, painful ordeals, tests of courage, a confrontation of “the shadow” (a manifestation of evil), magic talismans (Mrs. Who’s spectacles), and a successful completion of the task. Calvin, Meg, and Charles Wallace act out the classic plot elements of an archetypal quest as do the characters in *Star Wars*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and many other books, short stories, poems, and films.

Characters are people or animals who take part in the action of a literary work. Readers learn about characters from

- what they say (**dialogue**),
- what they do (actions),
- what they think (interior monologue),
- what others say about them, and
- through the author’s direct statement.

The **protagonist** is the central character of a drama, novel, short story, or narrative poem. The adversary of this character is then the **antagonist**. To be believable, a character must reflect universal human characteristics that are the same despite geographical differences and time periods. The emotions and concerns of real people of all times are expressed in concrete terms through the traits of literary characters. An author may choose to emphasize a single important trait, creating what is called a **flat character**; or the author may present a complex, fully-rounded personality (a three-dimensional or **round character**). A character that changes little over the course of a narrative is called a **static character**. Things happen to these characters, but little happens



in them. A character that changes in response to the actions through which he or she passes is called a **dynamic character**. One of the objectives of the work is to reveal the consequences of the action upon her or him. Meg Murry, the protagonist of *A Wrinkle in Time*, is an example of a dynamic, round character. The reader gets to know many aspects of Meg's character: she is angry, a loner, is grieving over the loss of her "perfect" father, adores but envies her mother and brothers, and has a low opinion of her own intelligence and physical attractiveness. During the course of the novel, she finds out that her father is human, gains friends and allies in her quest, and comes to an understanding of her own gifts through the events in the plot and because of Calvin's interest in her. She changes dramatically, losing her angry resentment and focusing on her ability to love others. Her brothers Sandy and Dennys are good examples of flat, static characters. They are somewhat one-dimensional (the reader gets to know only that they are popular and good at sports), and they do not change at all from the first pages of the book to the last.

Epiphany – an event in which the essential nature of something – a person, a situation, an object – is suddenly perceived; it is an intuitive grasp of reality in a quick flash of recognition in which something usually simple and commonplace is seen in a new light. Meg's epiphany occurs when she suddenly realizes that anger and resentment will not help her free Charles Wallace from the grip of evil, but love will.

Foil – a character, usually minor, designed to highlight qualities of a major character; e.g., The Man with Red Eyes contrasts vividly with Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which. His evil makes their goodness all the more striking.

Motivation – a reason that explains a character's thoughts, feelings, actions, or behavior. Meg and Charles Wallace seek their father who has been absent from their family for two years. They miss him terribly. Later, Meg must rescue Charles Wallace from the grip of the evil force because she loves her brother deeply.

Stock – a flat character in a standard role with standard traits; e.g., Mr. Jenkins, the school principal, stereotypically does not tolerate nonconformity well and delivers standard "if you'd just apply yourself" lectures to Meg.

Details are the facts, revealed by the author or speaker, that support the attitude or tone in a piece of poetry or prose. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Meg discovers her father trapped in a transparent column. The details of her father's appearance reinforce her increasing despair over their situation and her disappointment in her father: "He had grown a beard, and the silky brown was shot with gray. His hair, too, had not been cut. It wasn't just the overlong hair of the man in the snapshot at Cape Canaveral; it was pushed back from his high forehead and fell softly almost to his shoulders, so that he looked like someone in another century, or a shipwrecked sailor" (145).

Diction is word choice intended to convey a certain effect. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, no one on the planet of Camazotz "suffers." When Meg's little brother, Charles Wallace, falls under the spell of the evil force on the planet, he tells Meg and Calvin, "We let no one suffer. It is much kinder simply to annihilate anyone who is ill. Nobody has weeks and weeks of runny noses and sore throats. Rather than endure such discomfort, they are simply put to sleep" (139).

Arguing with Charles' use of these words – *kinder; simply; annihilate, simply, put to sleep* – Calvin points out that this practice is *murder*.

The *denotative* and *connotative* meanings of words must also be considered. *Denotation* refers to the dictionary definition of a word, whereas *connotation* refers to the feelings and attitudes associated with a word. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, the author writes that, in the Murry's house, "the furnace purred like a great, sleepy animal; the lights glowed with steady radiance; outside, alone in the dark, the wind still battered against the house..." (11). The word "purred" refers denotatively to a guttural, wordless noise, but its connotation is one of comfort, contentment, satisfaction – it is a warm word that the reader associates with cats and with pleasure. The emotional impact of the word highlights the contrast between the people in the house – surrounded by warmth, safety, light, and companionship – and the wind, which is "battering" the house but which is "alone in the dark," lonely and ineffectual against the safe walls of the house.

Dialect is the speech of a particular region or group as it differs from those of a real or imaginary standard speech. To emphasize the authority of Mrs. Which and to distinguish her from the other "witches," L'Engle creates a strange dialect for her: "'Yyouu hhave ssaidd itt!' Mrs. Which's voice rang out, 'Itt iss Eevill. Itt iss thee Ppowers of Ddarrkknesss!'" (88). The repeated letters cause her speech to be read slowly and emphatically.

Euphemism is the use of a word or phrase that is less expressive or direct but considered less distasteful or offensive than another; e.g., Charles Wallace, under the spell of evil, says, "'Nobody has weeks and weeks of runny noses and sore throats.

Rather than endure such discomfort, they are simply put to sleep'" (139). Of course, "put to sleep" is a euphemism for murder, but makes the evil force seem reasonable in its explanation.

Idiom is an accepted phrase or expression having a meaning different from the literal; e.g., Calvin says about himself, "'I'm blessed with more brains and opportunities than many people, but there's nothing about me that breaks out of the ordinary mold'" (47). He means that he is an ordinary person, not that he literally would break a mold that shaped him. He also says about Meg that "'...you're supposed to be dumb in school, always being called up on the carpet'" (42). Meg gets in trouble at school; she isn't literally forced to stand on a rug when she is reprimanded.

Imagery consists of the words or phrases a writer uses to represent persons, objects, actions, feelings, and ideas descriptively by appealing to the senses. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, the author incorporates appeals to all five senses. Through these appeals we experience what the main character, Meg, experiences both physically and emotionally.

- **Sight and smell** – "They were standing in a sunlit field, and the air about them was moving with the delicious fragrance that comes only on the rarest of spring days when the sun's touch is gentle and the apple blossoms are just beginning to unfold" (59).
- **Sound** – "'Oh, my dears,' came the new voice, a rich voice with the warmth of a woodwind, the clarity of a trumpet, the mystery of an English horn" (65).
- **Sight** – "And though it was warmer than it had been when they so precipitously left the apple orchard, there was a faintly



autumnal touch to the air; near them were several small trees with reddened leaves very like sumac, and a big patch of goldenrod-like flowers” (99).

- **Taste** – “The table was set up in front of them, and the dark smocked men heaped their plates with turkey and dressing and mashed potatoes and gravy and little green peas with big yellow blobs of butter melting in them and cranberries and sweet potatoes topped with gooey browned marshmallows and olives and celery and rosebud radishes and –” (129).
- **Touch and smell** – “But with the tentacle came the same delicate fragrance that moved across her with the breeze, and she felt a soft tingling warmth go all through her that momentarily assuaged her pain” (174-175).

Mood is the atmosphere or predominant emotion in a literary work. In other words, mood is the emotional response of the reader to the text. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, the description of the house where the three “witches” live establishes an *ominous* mood: “The elms were almost bare, now, and the ground around the house was yellow with damp leaves. The late afternoon light had a greenish cast which the blank windows reflected in a sinister way. An unhinged shutter thumped. Something else creaked” (34).

Plot is the sequence of events or actions in a short story, novel, play, or narrative poem.

Freytag’s Pyramid is a convenient diagram that describes the typical pattern of a dramatic or fictional work. The structure of the work begins with *exposition*, in which the author lays the groundwork for the reader by revealing the setting, the relationships between the characters, and the situation as it exists before conflict begins. The *inciting incident* interrupts the harmony and balance of the situation and

one or more of the characters comes into conflict with an outside force, with his or her own nature, or with another character. During the plot events that constitute the *rising action*, the things that happen in the work build toward an irreversible *climax*, or pivotal point, after which the *falling action* leads inevitably toward a revelation of meaning that occurs at the *denouement*, or unraveling, of the problem set up by the inciting incident. A plot may be sequenced chronologically, or interrupted by *flashback* or *flash forward*. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, the plot outline might read this way:

- **Exposition:** The reader is introduced to Meg Murry and her family and gets to know their situation and personalities.
- **Inciting Incident:** A “tramp,” who turns out to be Mrs. Whatsit, comes to the Murry house for a late-night snack. In the process she mentions a mysterious word, “tesseract,” what is somehow connected to Meg’s missing father and his highly secret government work.
- **Rising Action:** During the rising action of the story, Meg and Charles Wallace investigate the three “witches,” meet Calvin, and set off on their journey, finally arriving at Camazotz, the “shadowed” planet where Meg’s father is being held captive.
- **Climax:** In a dramatic confrontation with the hideous disembodied brain “IT,” Meg battles for her freedom and that of her family and friends, using emotion (anger and impatience) as a weapon to counter her antagonist’s monstrous insistence on isolated reason and restrictive order. She is able to resist, but Charles Wallace falls into the antagonist’s trap because of his overconfidence in his own intelligence.
- **Falling Action:** The falling action takes place as Meg, Calvin, and Meg’s father escape from Camazotz, leaving Charles

Wallace held captive by “IT.” They again encounter the three witches, and Meg is sent back to the shadowed planet to try to release Charles Wallace from the spell that holds him.

- **Denouement:** In the denouement, or resolution of the plot, Meg counters the antagonist’s logical order with the power of her love, forgives her father for not being all-powerful, accepts her own strengths and weaknesses, and triumphs over “IT.” The children and Mr. Murry are returned to their home and reunited with their loved ones.

Conflict is a term that describes the tension between opposing forces in a work of literature. Some of the more common conflicts involve the following forces:

- a person in opposition to another person
- a person opposing fate
- an internal battle involving contradictory forces within a character
- a person fighting against the forces of nature
- a person in opposition to some aspect of his or her society

In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Meg, Charles Wallace, and Calvin oppose the forces of darkness in order to save both Meg and Charles’s father and the world as we know it. The children fight particularly against that aspect of society that seeks conformity and uniformity of all its members; they fight for individuality and free will. In addition to this conflict, Meg herself is internally conflicted, fighting against her own insecurity and fear.

Flashback is a scene that interrupts the action of a work to show a previous event. Near the beginning of *A Wrinkle in Time*, the author shows the reader Meg Murry remembering an incident in which her

absent father had reassured her about her own intelligence and that of her little brother. The scene is presented as though taking place *now*, with **dialogue** and description, even though it is really a memory that Meg is recalling.

Foreshadowing is the use of hints or clues in a narrative to suggest future action. The author of *A Wrinkle in Time* uses foreshadowing in the beginning paragraph of the novel. Even though the main character Meg Murry is safe in her bed in her family home, the author foreshadows the fearsome nature of the task that is about to confront her by describing the storm that is battering the house, personifying its natural phenomena when she shows the clouds “scudding frantically” across the sky and the moon “ripping” through the clouds, making “wraithlike shadows” that “race” across the ground. The use of these frightening images and scary diction portends the ominous events that lie in store for Meg.

Suspense is the quality of a short story, novel, play, or narrative poem that makes the reader or audience uncertain or tense about the outcome of events. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Madeleine L’Engle creates suspense by withholding certain information about the three witches and about Meg’s father, thus making the reader question the witches’ motives and wonder about Mr. Murry’s actions and whereabouts.

Point of view is the **perspective** from which a narrative is told. Some technical terms for different points of view include *omniscient* and *limited*; however, point of view can also refer to the bias of the **person** or thing through whose eyes the reader experiences the action. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, L’Engle uses the *third-person limited* point of view. The



story focuses on Meg Murry and her perspective. We know how she thinks and feels, but we do not know how the other characters think and feel. For example: “Meg had almost forgotten the flowers, and was grateful to realize that she was still clasping them, that she hadn’t let them fall from her fingers.” Calvin and Charles also hold their flowers, but we do not know their thoughts or feelings about the experience (70).

Point of view shift – when an author shifts the focus of attention to another character; there are, however, no real shifts in point of view in *A Wrinkle in Time*. Meg’s father gives a summary of what has happened to him, but the focus is still on Meg’s reactions to what he has to say.

Rhetorical Shift or *turn* refers to a change or movement in a piece resulting from an epiphany, realization, or insight gained by the speaker, a character, or the reader. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Meg realizes she must take on the responsibility of rescuing her brother: “She felt tired and unexpectedly peaceful. Now the coldness that, under Aunt Beast’s ministrations, had left her body had also left her mind. She looked toward her father and her confused anger was gone and she felt only love and pride....’ It has to be me. It can’t be anyone else. I don’t understand Charles, but he understands me’ ” (195).

Setting is the time and place in which events in a short story, novel, play, or narrative poem take place. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, the initial setting is a small New England town, with Meg Murry’s safe, loving home and boring rural high school. The action takes place during the latter half of the twentieth century. Later, the setting changes to wild interplanetary landscapes, most notably the rigid totalitarian planet of Camazotz.

Style is the writer’s characteristic manner of employing language.

Theme is the central message of a literary work. It is not the same as a subject, which can be expressed in a word or two: courage, survival, war, pride, etc. The theme is the idea the author wishes to convey about that subject. It is expressed as a sentence or general statement about life or human nature. A literary work can have more than one theme, and most themes are not directly stated but are implied. The reader must think about all the elements of the work and use them to make inferences, or reasonable guesses, as to which themes seem to be implied. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Meg rescues her brother through the power of love. Therefore, a major theme in the novel is “Love can conquer the greatest evil.” Or “Expressing anger and hate only make situations worse.”

Tone is the writer’s or speaker’s attitude toward a subject, character, or audience, and it is conveyed primarily through the author’s choice of diction, imagery, figurative language, details, and syntax. *Tone* can be serious, humorous, sarcastic, indignant, objective, etc. L’Engle in *A Wrinkle in Time* clearly establishes a tone of *horror* when Meg confronts IT on the planet Camazotz: “A disembodied brain. An oversized brain, just enough larger than normal to be completely revolting and terrifying. A living brain. A brain that pulsed and quivered, that seized and commanded. No wonder the brain was called IT. IT was the most horrible, the most repellent thing she had ever seen, far more nauseating than anything she had ever imagined with her conscious mind, or that had ever tormented her in her most terrible nightmares” (158).

Tone shifts, multiple tones reveal changes in attitude or create new attitudes;

e.g., Meg's tone changes from anger to exhilaration when she realizes what she has to do to save Charles Wallace, reflecting her change in attitude from frustrated to controlled.

Figures of Speech

Figures of speech are words or phrases that describe one thing in terms of something else. They always involve some sort of imaginative comparison between seemingly unlike things. Not meant to be taken literally, figurative language is used to produce images in a reader's mind and to express ideas in fresh, vivid, and imaginative ways. The most common examples of figurative language, or figures of speech, used in both prose and poetry are *simile*, *metaphor*, and *personification*.

Apostrophe is a form of personification in which the absent, or dead, are spoken to as if present, and the inanimate, as if animate. These are all addressed directly: e.g., "Milton! Thou should'st be living at this hour." In *A Wrinkle in Time*, when Meg and Calvin try to rescue Charles Wallace from the man with the red eyes, Meg wishes desperately for the help of the absent Mrs. Whatsit: "'Mrs. Whatsit!' Meg called despairingly. 'Oh, Mrs. Whatsit!'" (135).

Metaphor is a comparison of two unlike things *not* using *like* or *as*: e.g., "Time is money." In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Meg sees what Mrs. Whatsit really is, a beautiful creature with wings: "From the shoulders slowly a pair of wings unfolded, wings made of rainbows, of light upon water, of poetry" (64). L'Engle implies that the wings are special, rare, ephemeral things, blessings.

extended/controlling metaphor – differs from a regular metaphor in that it is sustained for several lines or sentences or throughout a work; e.g. in *A Wrinkle in*

Time, the "Black Thing" stands for the evil force trying to conquer the universe and is referred to throughout the novel.

Metonymy is a form of metaphor. In *metonymy*, the name of one thing is applied to another thing with which it is closely associated: e.g., "I love Shakespeare." In *A Wrinkle in Time*, the "shadow" stands for an evil power (the "Black Thing") trying to conquer the universe.

Oxymoron is a form of paradox that combines a pair of opposite terms into a single unusual expression: e.g., "sweet sorrow" or "cold fire." There are no examples of oxymoron in *A Wrinkle in Time*.

Paradox occurs when the elements of a statement contradict each other. Although the statement may appear illogical, impossible, or absurd, it turns out to have a coherent meaning that reveals a hidden truth: e.g., "Much madness is divinest sense" (Emily Dickinson). In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Meg expresses her vast relief after experiencing being "flattened" on a two-dimensional planet: "She was whizzed into nothingness again, and nothingness was wonderful" (80).

Personification is a kind of metaphor that gives inanimate objects or abstract ideas human characteristics. For example, in *A Wrinkle in Time*: "Directly ahead of her was the circular building, its walls glowing with violet flame, its silvery roof pulsing with a light that seemed to Meg to be insane" (205). Meg enters the CENTRAL Central Intelligence building, fearful and doubting whether she can rescue her brother Charles. The "insane" light reflects her state of mind and the insanity going on inside the building.



Pun is a play on words that are either identical or similar in sound but have sharply diverse meanings. Puns can have serious as well as humorous uses. Early in *A Wrinkle in Time*, Mrs. Murry and Meg's brothers tell her she needs to find a "happy medium" in her life – meaning to practice moderation in her behavior and reactions to trouble. Later, she meets an actual "Happy Medium," a cheerful "seer," who shows the children their home planet and significant celestial events in her crystal ball to help them understand the importance of their mission.

Simile is a comparison of two different things or ideas through the use of the words *like* or *as*. It is a definitely stated comparison in which the author says one thing is like another. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, L'Engle captures Meg's experience of being two-dimensional when the three "witches" accidentally stop on the wrong planet: "Without warning, coming as a complete and unexpected shock, she felt a pressure she had never imagined, as though she were being completely flattened out by an enormous steam roller" (79). Another simile shows Meg's true emotional state when she tries to pose as brave and confident: "She was completely unaware that her voice was trembling like an aspen leaf" (102). These comparisons of strange, unknown situations to known objects help us to picture what is happening to the characters in the story.

An *epic/Homeric simile* is more involved, more ornate than the typical simile. When trying to make something new and strange understandable to their audience, authors compare it to something familiar. For example, at the beginning of the *Pequod's* voyage in *Moby-Dick*, Captain Ahab is in a foul mood, but as they journey south to a warmer climate, his mood vastly improves.

Melville compares Ahab's moods to the weather and, also, the weather to dancing girls:

"...[T]here was little or nothing...to employ or excite Ahab, now; and thus chase away, for that one interval, the clouds that layer upon layer were piled upon his brow, as ever all clouds choose the loftiest peaks to pile themselves upon.

Nevertheless, ere long, the warm, warbling persuasiveness of the pleasant holiday weather we came to, seemed gradually to charm him from his mood. For, as when the red-cheeked dancing girls, April and May, trip home to the wintry, misanthropic woods, even the barest, ruggedest, most thunder-cloven old oak will at least send forth some few green sprouts, to welcome such glad-hearted visitants; so Ahab did, in the end, a little respond to the playful allurings of that girlish air. More than once did he put forth the faint blossom of a look which, in any other man, would have soon flowered out in a smile" (123-124).

Synecdoche is a form of *metaphor*. In *synecdoche*, a part of something is used to signify the whole: e.g., "All hands on deck." Also, the reverse, whereby the whole can represent a part, is *synecdoche*: e.g., "Canada played the United States in the Olympic hockey finals." Another form of *synecdoche* involves the container representing the thing being contained: e.g., "The pot is boiling." In one last form of *synecdoche*, the material from which an object is made stands for the object itself: e.g., "The quarterback tossed the pigskin." In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Mrs. Whatsit suggests to the children after a long journey: "'We don't have far to go, and we might as well walk. It will do you good to stretch your legs a little'" (83). Of course, it

is the whole body that needs to move and stretch, not just the legs, after they have traveled such a great distance.

Sound Devices

Sound devices are stylistic techniques that convey meaning through sound. Some examples of sound devices are **rhyme** (two words having the same sound), **assonance** (repetition of similar vowel sounds), **consonance** (repetition of consonant sounds in the middle or at the end of words), **alliteration** (words beginning with the same consonant sound), and **onomatopoeia** (words that sound like their meaning).

Alliteration is the practice of beginning several consecutive or neighboring words with the same sound. For example, in *A Wrinkle in Time*: “Over a Bunsen burner bubbled a big earthenware dish of stew” (39). The repetition of the “b” sound reproduces the motion of the stew simmering in its pot. It is a humorous moment, too, because Mrs. Murry cooks in the lab where she does her scientific experiments, worrying her children that a chemical might get mixed up with the food.

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in a series of words: e.g., the words “cry” and “side” have the same vowel sound and so are said to be in assonance. In the following sentence from *A Wrinkle in Time*, the long “a” captures the unpleasant effects the storm has upon the clouds; it is almost a cry or moan of pain: “Every few moments the moon ripped through them, creating wraithlike shadows that raced along the ground” (3).

Consonance is the *repetition* of a consonant sound within a series of words to produce a harmonious effect. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, the author describes the storm: “Behind the trees clouds scudded frantically across the sky”

(3). The repeated hard “c” sound recreates the chaotic harsh movement in the stormy sky.

Meter is the measured, patterned arrangement of syllables according to stress and length in a poem. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Charles Wallace shouts out lines of nursery rhymes to try to keep the Man with Red Eyes from taking over his mind: “‘And everywhere that Mary went the lamb was sure to go!’... ‘Peter, Peter, pumpkin eater, had a wife and couldn’t keep her –’ (122). The first sentence “and everywhere...go” is written in iambic meter. The second sentence “Peter, Peter...her” reverses this sentence pattern. The meter of each individual line of these verses is tetrameter – four accented syllables per line. The rhythm of each line is trochaic.

Onomatopoeia (imitative harmony) is the use of words that mimic the sounds they describe: e.g., “hiss,” “buzz,” “bang.” When *onomatopoeia* is used on an extended scale in a poem, it is called *imitative harmony*. A good example occurs in *A Wrinkle in Time* when the Happy Medium falls asleep: “‘Good-by, everyb –’ and her word got lost in the general b-b-bz-z of a snore” (98).

Rhyme is the repetition of sounds in two or more words or phrases that appear close to each other in a poem. *End rhyme* occurs at the end of lines; *internal rhyme*, within a line. A *rhyme scheme* is the pattern of end rhymes. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Charles Wallace recites nursery rhymes, trying to save himself from mind control:

Mary had a little lamb.
Its fleece was white as snow.
And everywhere that Mary went
The lamb was sure to go.

The second and fourth lines rhyme and help to connect the lines of the poem. The rhyme scheme is ABCB, showing the rhyme pattern.



Rhythm is the varying speed, intensity, elevation, pitch, loudness, and expressiveness of speech, especially poetry. In *A Wrinkle in Time* when “IT” tries to control Meg’s mind, she resists the force through concentration on ordinary thoughts. She starts reciting the Periodic Table (“hydrogen, helium, lithium, beryllium, boron, carbon, etc.”), but the words become too rhythmical, allowing “IT” to perceive the pattern and try to gain control again. She switches to working out math problems instead (161-162).

Literary Techniques

Allusion is a reference to a **mythological**, **literary**, or **historical** person, place, or thing. L’Engle employs numerous allusions in *A Wrinkle in Time*, especially references to *Alice in Wonderland*. These allusions add to the feeling that the settings in the novel are turned upside down, that natural laws do not apply in this world. When Mrs. Who disappears before her glasses do, “it reminded Meg of the Cheshire Cat.” In Carroll’s *Alice*, the Cheshire disappears before his smile does. Again, on the planet Camazotz, the children see a man running into a main building saying, “Oh, dear, I shall be late,” and Meg responds, “He’s like the white rabbit” (112). Alice encounters a white rabbit nervously consulting his watch and proclaiming, “I’m late! I’m late!” L’Engle also incorporates Biblical and Shakespearean allusions throughout the story. These more serious allusions underscore the importance of the children’s mission.

Antithesis is a contrast of thoughts, situations, or ideas. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, the thoughts of the people of Earth are antithetical to the thoughts of the people on Camazotz, who have willingly surrendered their freedom in order to eliminate conflict in their society

while the people of Earth continue to resist the forces trying to control them.

Argumentation functions by convincing or persuading an audience, or by proving or refuting a point of view or an issue.

Argumentation uses **induction**, moving from observations about particular things to generalizations, or **deduction**, moving from generalizations to valid inferences about particulars – or some combination of the two – as its pattern of development. Composers of arguments will also use a combination of logical (**logos**), emotional (**pathos**), and ethical (**ethos**) evidence to establish both their credibility as writers or speakers. Though not written as formal persuasive essays, passages in *A Wrinkle in Time* include examples of arguments between characters illustrating the different types of appeals:

Ethical – The man with red eyes tries to convince Charles Wallace that he is trustworthy by promising that Charles can leave if he chooses to and also by feeding Calvin and Meg a decent meal. He flatters Charles Wallace’s intelligence and speaks to him in a calm, soothing manner.

Emotional – When Meg decides near the end of the story to rescue Charles Wallace alone, her father and Calvin express their fears and insist on going with her. First, Meg responds angrily that she can do it alone and then reminds them tearfully that she must go alone to save her brother.

Logical – The three “witches” give Meg, Calvin, and Charles Wallace a clear, detailed explanation of the “tessering” concept to persuade them that they would survive the experience of traveling through space in a different dimension.

Cause/effect is one of the traditional rhetorical strategies; it consists of arguing from the presence (or absence) of the cause to the existence (or nonexistence) of the effect or result. Conversely, it can also involve arguing from an effect to its probable causes.

Classification, one of the traditional ways of thinking about a subject, identifies the subject as a part of a larger group with shared features.

Comparison is a traditional rhetorical strategy based on the assumption that a subject may be shown more clearly by pointing out ways it is similar to something else. The two subjects may each be explained separately and then their similarities are noted. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Mrs. Whatsit compares the lives of the characters to the sonnet: “You mean you’re comparing our lives to a sonnet? A strict form, but freedom within it?” “Yes,” Mrs. Whatsit said. “You’ve given the form, but you have to write the sonnet yourself. What you say is completely up to you” (199).

Contrast is a traditional rhetorical strategy based on the assumption that a subject may be shown more clearly by pointing out ways in which it is unlike another subject.

Characterization is the act of creating or developing a character. In **direct characterization**, the author directly states a character’s traits. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, L’Engle describes Meg’s twin brothers: “The twins didn’t have any problems. They weren’t great students, but they weren’t bad ones either. They were perfectly content with a succession of Bs and an occasional A or C. They were strong and fast runners and good at games, and when cracks were made about anybody in the Murry

family, they weren’t made about Sandy and Dennys” (7). A writer uses **indirect characterization** when showing a character’s personality through his or her actions, thoughts, feelings, words, and appearance, or through another character’s observations and reactions. L’Engle shows that Mrs. Whatsit has a sense of humor when she falls backward in her chair and says, “If you have some liniment, I’ll put it on my dignity...I think it’s sprained” (20).

Hyperbole is a deliberate, extravagant, and often outrageous exaggeration. It may be used for either serious or comic effect: e.g., “The shot heard ‘round the world.” In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Meg lacks self-confidence and self-esteem. She exaggerates things because she feels inept in her life right now: “On top of Meg Murry doing everything wrong” (4); “A delinquent, that’s what I am...” (4); “Why do I always have to show everything [on my face]?” (5).

Irony occurs in three types.

Dramatic irony occurs when a character or speaker says or does something that has a different meaning from what he thinks it means, though the audience and other characters understand the full implications of the speech or action. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, though Meg holds a low opinion of herself through most of the story, L’Engle prepares us well for the ending of the novel when Meg is the only one, among many knowledgeable and seemingly more powerful and capable beings, who can rescue her brother. Her ineptitude in school and her relations with others matter little in comparison to the love and understanding she has for her brother.

Situational irony occurs when a situation turns out differently from what one would normally expect – though often the twist is oddly appropriate: e.g., a deep sea diver



drowning in a bathtub is ironic. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, when Meg, her father, and Calvin land on a strange planet, they find creatures there like none they have ever seen. They have no face, four arms, and tentacles on their hands. At first, they frighten Meg, Calvin, and Mr. Murry, but these creatures turn out to be highly sophisticated, caring, intellectual beings. They save Meg's life and help in the rescue of Charles Wallace from the evil force holding him captive.

Verbal irony occurs when a speaker or narrator says one thing while meaning the opposite. Meg and her mother and brother in *A Wrinkle in Time*, have this exchange about a so-called "tramp" in the area: "They were saying at the post office this afternoon that a tramp stole all Mrs. Buncombe's sheets.' 'We'd better sit on the pillow cases, then,' Mrs. Murry said lightly." Mrs. Murry employs irony to lighten Meg's fears and Charles' concerns.

Sarcasm is the use of **verbal irony** in which a person appears to be praising something but is actually insulting it: e.g., "As I fell down the stairs headfirst, I heard her say, 'Look at that coordination'." In *A Wrinkle in Time*, to defuse the tension when Charles and Meg encounter Calvin for the first time, Calvin wryly comments about Charles' supposed lack of intelligence: "'What *is* this? The third degree? Aren't you the one who's supposed to be the moron?' Meg flushed with rage, but Charles Wallace answered placidly, 'That's right. If you want me to call my dog off, you'd better give!' 'Most peculiar moron I've ever met,' Calvin said" (31).

Motif is a term that describes a pattern or strand of imagery or symbolism in a work of literature. *Light* and *dark* throughout *A Wrinkle in Time* indicate the level of safety for the characters.

Satire refers to the use of humorous devices like *irony*, *understatement*, and *exaggeration* to highlight a human folly or a societal problem. The purpose of satire is to bring the flaw to the attention of the reader in order that it may be addressed, remedied, or eradicated. L'Engle's description of the robotic-like inhabitants of Camazotz portrays her disapproval of the tendency people have to want everyone to conform. This particular planet imposes sameness on everyone and on everything they do with dangerous, deadly consequences for deviations. Through this description, L'Engle intends for her readers to share her feelings and to value differences as Meg learns to do by the end of the story.

Symbolism is the use of any object, person, place, or action that has a meaning in itself while standing for something larger than itself, such as a quality, attitude, belief, or value. There are two basic types, *universal* (a symbol that is common to all mankind) and *contextual* (a symbol used in a particular way by an individual author). Symbols are elastic and multifaceted, not static or concrete. It is important to remember that symbols have no one-on-one correspondence, but are like prisms through which the reader may view many colors, many shades of meaning. *A Wrinkle in Time* contains many symbols. For example, *light* and *dark* act as symbols. Light can be positive or negative depending upon its color and its context. Dark usually symbolizes danger and evil, but sometimes Meg finds comfort in the darkness. *Colors*, too, play a symbolic role in the novel. The *red* light coming from the man's eyes suggests

the danger the children (and the universe) face. *Black* is the color of the “thing” seeking to blanket the universe with evil. On the planet where the “beasts” save Meg from death, the trees and plants are *brown* and *gray*. At first, Meg finds these colors depressing, but she learns later that colors do not matter on their planet because the “beasts” cannot see. *Silver* and *gold* add richness to descriptions of the light of day and night. And when Mrs. Whatsit reveals her true form, she turns out to be all *white*, resembling something like a centaur and symbolizing a force of goodness. Also, *dimensions* symbolize the complexities in the story. The *fifth dimension* allows the characters to move through space quickly though they only vaguely understand the concept.

Understatement is the opposite of *hyperbole*. It is a kind of *irony* that deliberately represents something as being much less than it really is: e.g., “I could probably manage to survive on a salary of two million dollars per year.” In *A Wrinkle in Time*, when Calvin, Meg, and Mr. Murry escape from “IT” but land on an unknown planet, Meg lies near death. Mr. Murry matter-of-factly relates to Calvin his harrowing experience being captured and imprisoned for two years on Camazotz: “‘Yes. It’s frightening as well as an exciting thing to discover that matter and energy *are* the same thing, that size is an illusion, and that time is a material substance. We can know this, but it’s far more than we can understand with our puny little brains’ ” (167).

Literary Forms

Aristotle’s Rules for Tragedy

Catharsis is the release of emotion (pity and fear) from the audience’s perspective. e.g. After watching *Antigone*, the audience will feel pity for the tragic deaths and fear for themselves because if even the “best” in society fall, what future awaits the common man?

Dramatic Unities

- *Time*: The play has to take place within a 24-hour period. e.g. *Antigone* takes place in “real” time; the audience experiences the action as it unfolds.
- *Place*: The action of the play is set in one place. *Antigone* is set in front of the royal palace in Thebes.
- *Action*: There is one hero and one plot. The action in *Antigone* focuses on Antigone’s determination to bury her brother Polyneices and the resulting consequences.

Hamartia is the tragic flaw that leads to the tragic hero’s downfall. e.g. Creon’s tragic flaw of holding himself above the prophets and the laws of the gods dooms him.

Hubris is arrogance before the gods. e.g. Creon’s pride and arrogance cause his downfall.

Recognition occurs as the hero meets his catastrophe, at which point he recognizes his flaw and why he must die. e.g. Creon acknowledges his responsibility for the deaths of his family and confesses he was too proud.

Reversal occurs when the opposite of what the hero intends is what happens. e.g. Creon thinks he is doing the right thing by imprisoning Antigone, but this action leads to the suicides of his son and his wife.