Major Literary Elements (mostly from Kennedy & Gioia)

1. **Character** = persons, places, things, or ideas around which the action of a work is centered; effective characters have epiphanies and/or undergo a change by the end of the story; some commit gratuitous acts; (ex. stock/type, round, flat, believable, allusions, hero, antihero, etc.)

2. **Setting** = time & place of a story; may be dynamic or unobtrusive

3. **Plot** = “unique arrangements of events that the author has made” (K & G 1122-23)

4. **Sub-plot** = “secondary arrangement of incidents, involving not the protagonist but someone less important” (1123)

5. **Conflict** = “the central struggle between two or more forces” (1122)

6. **Dramatic Question** = the main “problem to be solved…uncertainty to be cleared up” in a play (1124)

7. **Exposition** = “the part of a play in which we first meet the characters, learn what happened before the curtain rose, and find out what is happening now” (1123)

8. **Style** = devices used by an author to create deliberate effects (ex. language, structure, imagery, action, setting, tone, length, subject, etc.)

9. **Tone** = "whatever leads us to infer the author's or character's attitudes" (149)

10. **Unities** = three basic principles for a good play, as defined by Aristotle and 16th c. literary critics: unity of action, unity of time, and unity of place. “In practical terms, this theory maintained that a play must represent a single series of interrelated actions that take place within twenty-four hours in a single location” (1125)

11. **Soliloquy** = “a speech by a character alone onstage in which he or she utters his or her thoughts aloud” (1132)

12. **Aside** = “a speech that a character addresses directly to the audience, unheard by the other characters on stage” (1132)

13. **Foreshadowing** = a “hint of what is to come” (1123)

14. **Climax** = “a moment, usually coming late in a play [story, or poem] when tension reaches its greatest height”; works may have several crises, but “only one climax” (1124)

15. **Point of View** = perspective in which a work is written; effects the reader's perceptions (ex. participant, observer, omniscient, naive, unreliable, stream of consciousness, etc.)
16. **Theme** = the universal message or statement of truth; themes are more general than plot and allow for broad application of a work's meaning to a wide readership

17. **Irony** = "profound disparity that communicates a part of the human condition" (Alling); (ex. cosmic: "incongruity between a character's aspirations & the treatment he or she receives by the hands of fate" (660); verbal: when an author's "words say one thing but mean something else" (659); dramatic: when the reader knows more than the character/persona (660)

18. **Symbol** = something that "evokes a range of additional meaning beyond and usually more abstract that its literal significance"

19. **Persona** = the speaker; poet's creation; not always author; may not be human (652)

20. **Literal Meaning** = syntax & word choice that make logical sense

21. **Implications of Words** = syntax & word choice that suggest images, emotions, or relationships

22. **Imagery** = appeals to the reader's senses (may be visual, auditory, tactile, etc.) (710)

23. **Euphony** = “When, in a poem, the sound of words working together with meaning pleases mind and ear” (771)

24. **Cacophony** = opposite of euphony; “harsh, discordant effect”; also intended to give meaning (771)

25. **Alliteration & Assonance** = to repeat the sound of consonants or vowels, respectively (775-6)

26. **Rime/Rhyme** = words that sound/look the same or nearly the same (779-80)

27. **Rhythm** = “the recurrence of stresses or pauses” (789)

28. **Meter** = “when stresses occur at fixed intervals” (790)

29. **Cesura/caesura** = “a light but definite pause within a line” (792)

30. **Closed Form** = form of poetry that “follows (or finds) some sort of pattern…[that] strives for a kind of perfection” (809); common forms: couplet, tercet, quatrain, epic, sonnet, epigram, etc.)

31. **Open Form** = form of poetry that “usually seeks no final click…[that] views the writing of a poem as a process, rather than a quest for an absolute” (809)