The Great Gatsby
Literary Terms

Simile - an indirect relationship where one thing or idea is described as being similar to another. Similes usually contain the words “like” or “as,” but not always.
- “Jay Gatsby had broken up like glass against Tom’s hard malice...” (148)

Oxymoron - A contradiction in terms.
- “two old friends whom I scarcely knew at all.” (6)
- “definitely unfamiliar” (120)
- “ferocious indifference” (100)

Personification - where inanimate objects or abstract concepts are seemingly endowed with human self-awareness; where human thoughts, actions, perceptions and emotions are directly attributed to inanimate objects or abstract ideas.
- “The lawn started at the beach and ran toward the front door for a quarter of a mile, jumping over sun-dials and brick walks and burning gardens...” (6)

Anaphora - the repetition of the same word or words at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, or sentences, commonly in conjunction with climax and with parallelism:
- “Her face was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth.” (9)

Asyndeton - the omission of conjunctions between words, phrases, or clauses. In a list of items, asyndeton gives the effect of inadvertent multiplicity, of an extemporaneous rather than a labored account.

Alliteration - The repetition of consonant sounds within close proximity, usually in consecutive words within the same sentence or line.
- “fantastic farm” “grotesque gardens” “obscure operations” (23)

Polysyndeton - the use of a conjunction between each word, phrase, or clause, and is thus structurally the opposite of asyndeton. Gives the effect of a labored account, however can also create a feeling of multiplicity or building up.
- “There were the same people, the same profusion of champagne, the same many-colored, many-keyed commotion” (105)
**Symbol** - The use of specific objects or images to represent abstract ideas.
- The eyes of Dr. T.J. Echleburg can be symbolic of God’s all-seeing eyes.
- Wolfshiem’s cufflinks made of human teeth are a symbol of his connection to the underworld.

**Metaphor** - an direct relationship where one thing or idea substitutes for another.
- “*Her voice is full of money.*” (120)

**Hyperbole** - the counterpart of understatement deliberately exaggerates conditions for emphasis or effect.
- “*I’m paralyzed with happiness.*” (9)
- “*The whole town is desolate. All the cars have the left wheel painted black as a mourning wreath, and there’s a persistent wail all night along the north shore.*” (10)
  - Nick on the subject of people in Chicago missing Daisy.

**Protagonist** - The main character in a story, the one with whom the reader is meant to identify. The person is not necessarily “good” by any conventional moral standard, but he/she is the person in whose plight the reader is most invested.
- The protagonist in The Great Gatsby can be argued to either be Gatsby or Nick depending on whose plight the reader identifies with and invests in.

**Allusion** - a reference to a well-known person, place, event, literary work, or work of art.
- “*He was a son of God...and he must be about His Father’s business*” (98)
- Wolfshheim’s characterization as “*the man who fixed the World Series*” (74) serves as an allusion to the Black Sox scandal of 1919.

**Motif** - a recurring important idea or image. A motif differs from a theme in that it can be expressed as a single word or fragmentary phrase, while a theme usually must be expressed as a complete sentence.
- Geography serves as an important motif in The Great Gatsby as location helps to shape the novel’s themes and characters. (East Egg as odd upper-class traditions, West Egg as new money, celebrities, and wild lifestyles, and The valley of ashes as desperate and desolate)

**Foreshadow** - where future events in a story, or perhaps the outcome, are suggested by the author before they happen.
- “*So we drove on toward death through the cooling twilight*” (136) - This statement foreshadows Myrtle’s death and the death of Gatsby’s dream.

**Irony** - where an event occurs which is unexpected, in the sense that it is somehow in absurd or mocking opposition to what would be expected or appropriate.
- Wolfshern’s characterization as Jewish, yet the title of his office being “*The Swastika Holding Company*” (171).