

Figurative Language & Imagery

A Guide to Literary
Devices



Figurative Language

- Figurative Language is a writer's tool.
- A “figure of speech” is an intentional deviation from the ordinary usage of language that
 - conveys unique images in the reader's mind.
 - creates a special effect or impression.
 - helps the reader to visualize what the writer is thinking.
 - adds dimension to characters.
 - adds suspension to the plot.

Imagery

- An image conveys a sense perception, i.e. a visual picture, a sound, a feeling of touch, a taste, or an odor.
- Imagery = a noun referring to a string of words that create a picture in your mind.
- Picture this....
 - “Twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty”--MLK

Metaphor

- All figures of speech which use association, comparison, or resemblance can generally be called types of metaphor or metaphorical.
- In a metaphor, an author writes that **X is Y**. Readers understand that we are not to take the comparison literally, but that the metaphor helps us to see **X** in a new way.

Metaphor Examples:

- John's mind is a computer.
- My mom is a workhorse.
- Bob was a snake in the grass.
- Susan's cooking is garbage.
- That catch was golden.
- That football player was a monster.
- We are angels!
- Razorback Stadium was a slaughterhouse!
- How many examples of metaphors can you think of?

Implied Metaphor

- This is a metaphor lacking the actual “to be” verb (is, am, are, was, were and other such forms).
- What is implied here about the speaker’s love?
 - “Oh, my love has petals and sharp thorns.
“Oh, I placed my love into a long-stemmed vase and I bandaged my bleeding thumb.”

Implied Metaphor (continued)

- What is implied about the city and the subway here?
 - “The subway coursed through the arteries of the city”.
- Can you think of an example of an implied metaphor?

Simile

- A simile is a type of metaphor, a figure in which an ***explicit comparison*** is made using the comparative words ***like, as, resembles, than.***

EXAMPLES:

- The team's center looked like a skyscraper.
- My love is like a red, red rose.
- We were as quiet as frightened mice.

Several ways to make a simile:

- My love is like a red, red rose.
- My love resembles a rose.
- My love is redder than a rose.
- She came out smelling like a rose.

Idiom

- Expressions that have taken on an accepted meaning over time, but don't make sense literally.
- Idioms can be similes, too.

Examples:

Time flies when you're having fun!

She was hanging by a thread.

Keep your shirt on, I'm coming.

He needs a taste of his own medicine.

Bob got up on the wrong side of the bed today.

Personification

- A comparison where animals, elements of nature and abstract ideas are given human qualities.

Examples:

“Time is the subtle thief of youth.”—John Milton

“The rosy fingers of dawn...”- Homer

The sun smiled down on us.

An angry wind slashed its way across the island.

Hyperbole

(hy per buh lee)

- Intentional exaggeration or overstating, often for dramatic or humorous effect.

Examples:

I am so sad that I feel a flood of tears coming on.

I have told you a million times to pick up your dirty clothes!

“I would walk 1000 miles if I could just see you tonight.”-

Vanessa Carlton

Hyperbole (continued)

- Both metaphors and similes tend toward hyperbole.

Example:

My worries were 100 pound weights from which I could not escape. (metaphor)

The cool, blue swimming pool was as big as Lake Michigan. (simile)

Cliché

- A phrase or expression that has become overused.
(These can also be similes, metaphors, idioms.)

Examples:

Busy as a bee

Ugly as sin

Cute as a button

Time flies when you're having fun

Nobody's perfect

Irony

- **Verbal Irony**: The use of words to express a meaning that is the opposite of what is said literally.
- **Situational Irony**: events that occur are contrary to what was expected, such as a twist of fate.

Example

Juliet awakens to find that Romeo killed himself because he thought she was dead. (ironic)

Irony (continued)

- “Isn’t It Ironic” song by Alanis Morissette contains many ironies:
 - “An old man turns 98, he won the lottery and died the next day.”
 - “...It’s a death-row pardon two minutes too late.”
 - “...It’s a free ride when you’ve already paid.”
 - “...it’s a ‘no smoking’ sign on your cigarette break.”

Oxymoron (äk-sē-mör-än)

- A combination of contradictory words.

Examples:

Jumbo shrimp

Painfully good

Deafening silence

Anxious patient

Adult children

Act naturally

Death benefits

Allusion

- “Alluding to” means to make an indirect reference.
- Allusion is a reference to a well-known person, place, thing, or event.
- The author’s intent is to call up relevant associations.

Examples:

Scrooge

Watergate

Postal

Flashback

- **Flashbacks interrupt the current action of the story to show a scene from the past.**
- “Yesterday I was pulling weeds from the garden when thoughts flooded my mind of a time when I was eight years old. My mother told me to pull the weeds from the garden, but instead I went on a hiking journey to our back 80 acres, eventually lying down to take a nap. No one could find me for hours. I snapped back to real time when my son accidentally sprayed me with the garden hose...”

Foreshadowing

- When what is going to happen in the future is predicted or hinted about using words, imagery, or dialogue.
- Often used when a chapter or scene is ending.
- ***“Sam wished he could rid himself of the sick feeling in his gut that told him something terrible was going to happen, and happen soon.”***

Rhetorical Question

- A question that is asked merely for effect, with no answer expected.

Examples:

Why me???

Why are you so ridiculous??

How much longer must our people endure this
injustice?

Onomatopoeia (On-o-mat-ah-pee-ah)

- Words or phrases that sound like what they are describing, like *hiss*, *bang*, and *meow*.

Other examples:

Shhhh

Ugh

Cuckoo

Boom

Acronym (AK-ri-nim)

- An acronym is a word formed from the initial letters or groups of letters of words in a set phrase or series of words.

Examples:

FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency)

Navy SEAL (SEa, Air, Land)

BLOG (Web Log)

MAD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving)

Review: Guess what type of literary device for each sentence.

- The leaves danced in the wind.
- The lake was glass.
- The lake was as smooth as glass.
- She was sitting on the fence.
- The shooting stars were fireworks in the sky.
- The ceremony ran as smoothly as a well-tuned engine.
- MAD
- He was busy as a bee!
- The smell was sickeningly sweet.

Review: ANSWERS

- The leaves danced in the wind. (personification)
- The lake was glass. (metaphor)
- The lake was as smooth as glass. (simile)
- She was sitting on the fence. (idiom)
- The shooting stars were fireworks in the sky. (metaphor)
- The ceremony ran as smoothly as a well-tuned engine. (simile)
- MAD (acronym)
- He was busy as a bee! (cliché)
- The smell was sickeningly sweet. (oxymoron)

Review (continued)

- Her heart was sour, prickly and cold.
- Jimmie was a couch potato.
- The hands of time are standing still.
- You're as cold as ice.
- Your hands are ice.
- I've sat through a million hours of classes in the last few years.
- Sam is a scrooge!

Review (continued): ANSWERS

- Her heart was sour, prickly and cold. (implied metaphor)
- Jimmie was a couch potato. (idiom)
- The hands of time are standing still. (personification)
- You're as cold as ice. (simile)
- Your hands are ice. (metaphor)
- I've sat through a million hours of classes in the last few years. (hyperbole)
- Sam is a scrooge! (allusion)