

Literary Devices & Figurative Language

Literary devices and figurative language are tools that an author uses to draw in the reader. They help the reader to get a better understanding of what's happening in a story or a poem. Below are some definitions and examples of these types of literary devices and figurative language.

Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of initial consonant sounds in neighboring words.

Example: My big brother bought a baseball.

Euphemism

A euphemism is a milder, less direct term that means the same thing as one that is considered harsh, blunt, or offensive. **Example:** senior citizen

Flashback

A flashback interrupts the plot of a story and goes back to a past event. When a story is told in flashbacks, it's usually done to show how something or someone was before the story took place.

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is where future events in a story, or sometimes the outcome, are suggested or hinted to by the author before they happen.

Hyperbole

Hyperbole is a figure of speech in which exaggeration is used for emphasis or effect.

Examples:

- This book weighs a ton.
- I could sleep for a year.

Idiom

An idiom is a speech form or an expression of a given language that is peculiar to itself grammatically or cannot be understood from the individual meanings of its elements.

Example: Don't put your eggs in one basket!

Imagery

Imagery is an author's use of descriptive and figurative language to create a picture in the reader's mind.

Irony

Dramatic irony – This occurs when the reader or audience understands more about the events of a story than a character.

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Situational irony – This occurs when what actually happens is the opposite of what is expected or appropriate.

Verbal irony (Sarcasm) – A person or character says one thing but really means the opposite.

Metaphor

A metaphor states that one thing is something else. It is a comparison, but it DOES NOT use "like" or "as" to make the comparison.

examples:

The river was a winding snake in the forest. This compares the river to a snake by stating that it is a snake.

The pillow was a cloud when I put my head upon it after a long day. This compares the pillow to a cloud by stating that the pillow is a cloud.

Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia is the formation or the use of words that imitate the sounds associated with the objects or actions they refer to.

Examples: moo, buzz, splat

Personification

Personification is a figure of speech in which things are endowed with human qualities or are represented as possessing human form.

Examples:

- a reference to thunder booming "angrily" personifies thunder by giving it emotion
- a smiling moon

Repetition

Sometimes, writers want to make sure that you get the point of a certain sentence or idea, so he or she repeats certain words or groups of words. Pay attention to words that are repeated. Sometimes, repeated words can help you figure out what's coming next in a piece of writing. A repeated phrase or stanza is called a **refrain**.

Rhyme

Rhyme scheme is the repetition of the same or similar sounds in words. Many times writers and poets repeat vowel sounds and ending sounds that appear close together.

Example: The words run and done rhyme with each other.

Simile

A simile is a comparison using "like" or "as." It usually compares two dissimilar objects.

examples:

The man was **as** tall **as** a tree. This compares the man to a tree.

The necklace around her neck swung **like** a pendulum on a clock. This compares a necklace to a pendulum.

Symbolism

Symbolism is the practice of representing things by means of symbols or of attributing symbolic meanings or significance to objects, events, or relationships. Symbols can also have different, but equally valid, meanings to different people.

Example: A movie about the history of the United States might show a bald eagle flying overhead. *The eagle serves as a symbol for freedom.*

Literary Devices

Question 1 .

Tree Shaking by c.safos

The man who cuts our school's lawn
moves on his mower like a hermit crab
dragging a shell.

He also tends to the fruit trees
like a watchmaker keeping time.

He circles the apple tree twice.
The plums surround their trunk like dreams.

When he picks them from the ground, he looks
to see if anyone sees him stash one in his jacket.

His coat is big enough to hide away a whole orchard.
I want to tell him, "I really love your peaches,"
but he's as deaf as the moon during an eclipse.

Which is an example of hyperbole expressed in this poem?

- A. "moves on his mower like a hermit crab"
- B. "but he's as deaf as the moon during an eclipse"
- C. "His coat is big enough to hide away a whole orchard."
- D. "He circles the apple tree twice."

Question 2 .

Animal Behavior by Bryan Ellett

His eyes large and brown,
Human eyes almost,
His fur soft and warm,
Like Mother's hair in summer.

When down, I look to him for comfort,
He nuzzles me, licks me,
Snaps at the flies of my worries,
Scattering them like dandelion fluff.

But he misbehaves,
Cruel like a teenager or worse.
Chews my shoes and drops them,
Looking me in the eye.

It appears to be spite,
Him mocking like a mime,
Able to pierce me
Without word knives.

He doesn't know, I remind me,
He is no human.
Spite and hate are humans,
Dogs are love and play.

What is the poet trying to express about his worries when the dog scatters "them like dandelion fluff"?

- A. The worries are neat to watch as they fly away.
- B. The worries are capable of traveling far in the wind.
- C. The worries are very small and insignificant.
- D. The worries are strong enough to make him sneeze.

Question 3 .

**excerpt from The Time Machine
by H.G. Wells**

I don't know if you have ever thought what a rare thing flame must be in the absence of man and in a temperate climate. The sun's heat is rarely strong enough to burn, even when it is focused by dewdrops, as is sometimes the case in more tropical districts. Lightning may blast and blacken, but it rarely gives rise to widespread fire. Decaying vegetation may occasionally smoulder with the heat of its fermentation, but this rarely results in flame. In this decadence, too, the art of fire-making had been forgotten on the earth. The red tongues that went licking up my heap of wood were an altogether new and strange thing to Weena.

The flame is a symbol of

- A. an adventurous journey.

- B. a brilliant personality.
- C. a complicated problem.
- D. an object of innovation.

Question 4 .

As a team captain, Selma believed in giving each of her teammates a fair chance. So, even after repeated oppositions from them, she chose Eve as the speaker for the next quiz bowl. As Ralph, Tom, and Bianca rolled their eyes, Eve smiled the biggest smile and rolled up her sleeves. Being the smart aleck that she was, Eve hastily answered the questions without consulting the team. Before they knew it, Team Star Far was at the bottom in the first round.

Although Ralph and Bianca tried to keep their cool, Tom could not control himself. "Congratulations, you did it," Tom said to Eve and angrily waited for the second round.

What is sarcastic about the Tom's congratulating Eve?

- A. He thinks Eve can do a better job in the next round.
- B. He is encouraging Eve to help the team win.
- C. He is confused about Selma being the team captain.
- D. He is actually angry about losing the first round.

Question 5 .

Gale Sayers was an amazing football player. He was small and astonishingly fast. He befuddled opposition defenses with his crazy moves and left everyone in his wake. His nickname was the Kansas Comet because he attended college at the University of Kansas, where he was an All-American running back. In a game in his junior year, he set an NCAA record with a 99-yard run against Nebraska. The next year, he scored the winning touchdown against Oklahoma when he ran a kickoff back 96 yards. Many think he was the best open-field runner who ever played the game. He was like a ballerina among sumo wrestlers.

What is meant by the simile "like a ballerina among sumo wrestlers"?

- A. He was small and fast among large, slow-moving men.
- B. Gale Sayers ran on his toes to get around the defense.
- C. The Kansas Comet could dance as well as run fast.
- D. Gale Sayers wore special shoes on kickoff returns.

Question 6 .

People moved slowly then. There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County.

from To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee

What does the underlined phrase mean in the passage above?

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- A. There were no towns outside of Maycomb County.
- B. Nobody had ever been outside of Maycomb County.
- C. People's lives revolved around Maycomb County.
- D. Maycomb county was very large.

Question 7 .

Soiree had been looking forward to the summer all year long. She had just turned sixteen. Finally, she would be able to get a job and earn independence. Soiree had dreams of working in the mall as a sales representative for the make-up department. Better yet, she wanted to work at her favorite clothing store so that she could get a discount. Then, she filled out the applications and applied to all the departmental stores. Her father also helped her out by taking her applications to the other stores in the mall.

As summer approached, Soiree panicked when she did not hear back from a single store. "Dad, what do I do now? Looks like all the stores are booked," she voiced her fears.

"Just wait a few more days, kiddo," the father assured Soiree.

Before she knew it, Soiree was riding to the mall with her father. She had managed to put on the seat belt despite the thickness of the penguin costume.

"You okay there?" the father asked.

"Yes, just a little toasty," Soiree replied, taking her hat off. "It's only June in Arizona."

"Well, at least you got your first job, darling," the father tried to cheer her up.

"Yes, I am honored to be a penguin in a pet store," Soiree said without a laugh.

What is sarcastic about this sentence from the story?

"Yes, just a little toasty," Soiree replied, taking her hat off.

- A. She thinks her father is feeling warm in the car as well.
- B. Soiree can greatly adapt to changes in temperature.
- C. She is sharing her excitement about her very first job.
- D. Soiree means to say that she feels very hot in the outfit.

Question 8 .

Samuel had always been a patient young man. He was raised with four sisters by a single mother, just him and these five females. Often, he felt like an alien among them, as so many things about these women just didn't make sense. One or another of his sisters would erupt in a volcano of emotion, for what seemed like Samuel to be the smallest of issues. That didn't happen to Samuel. To him, his emotions always felt room temperature, neither cold nor hot. Samuel regularly found himself sitting on the couch like an unmovable mountain while the fury of his mom and sisters exploded in flames all around him. Samuel was always at peace while his sisters seemed always to be declaring war.

Which of the following statements from the passage contains a simile?

- A. "To him, his emotions always felt room temperature, neither cold nor hot."
- B. "Samuel was always at peace, while his sisters seemed always to be declaring war."

- C. ". . . so many things about these women just didn't make sense."
- D. "Samuel regularly found himself sitting on the couch like an unmovable mountain . . ."

Question 9 .

Aleya had almost made it. Nobody could have believed that she actually baked the red velvet cake and carried it on a glass tray by herself to the Student Center. "Anyone who knows me is familiar with my grace and skills," Aleya told herself. She had not made it to school a single day without falling down one place or another. In fact, she'd had close encounters with all the ditches and potholes on the way to school. Once, her hair caught on fire in the chemistry lab.

The whole crowd watched as Aleya slowly balanced her steps and almost approached the Student Center. "They just might think differently of me," she told herself and smiled. The bake sale table was two steps away, and Aleya's smile was never more radiant. She bent down carefully to place the cake on the table when her friend Josh offered to help her. He attempted to carry the cake without Aleya's permission, and disaster struck. The world stopped spinning for a fraction of a second. The cake fell on the ground, the tray broke into pieces, and Aleya's heart sank. "Well, thanks, Josh," she nearly screamed and stormed out of the Student Center.

What Aleya says to Josh is sarcastic because

- A. she is not grateful for his role in the cake disaster.
- B. she is thankful that her attempt of being graceful is over.
- C. she is confused about Josh trying to help her at all.
- D. she is generally doing things at the Student Center alone.

Question 10 .

**The Pasture
by Robert Frost**

I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):
I shan't be gone long.—You come too.

I'm going out to fetch the little calf
That's standing by the mother. It's so young,
It totters when she licks it with her tongue.
I shan't be gone long.—You come too.

The calf is a symbol of what in the passage?

- A. danger
- B. beauty
- C. hard work

D. innocence

Answers

1. C
2. C
3. D
4. D
5. A
6. C
7. D
8. D
9. A
10. D

Explanations

1. A hyperbole is a figure of speech in which statements are exaggerated or extravagant. It implies strong feelings or is used to create a strong impression and is not meant to be taken literally. In this case, it's used to exaggerate the size of the man's jacket as another way of saying he has a big coat.
2. The phrase "scattering them like dandelion fluff" is comparing the poet's worries to dandelion fluff. Dandelions are weeds in the ground that you can pick up and blow on, and the fluff flies off in bits, like a cloud. The fluff is very delicate and light. Comparing the poet's worries to the fluff tells that the worries are small and insignificant and are not important. Even if you aren't sure what a dandelion is, the word "fluff" lends this same understanding.
3. Symbols are items that represent big ideas and concepts. In this passage, the flame represents "an object of innovation." In the passage, the author describes fire as something that can be used either positively or negatively.
4. Sarcasm is when someone says one thing but means something different. Tom is upset about Eve causing their team a loss. Thus, the congratulatory remarks are sarcastic.
5. Similes compare two unlike things using the words "like" or "as." In this passage, Gale Sayers is "like a ballerina" because he was quick on his feet and small, at least in comparison to football players, who are typically large and slow.
6. The statement above is an example of a hyperbole. A hyperbole is a figure of speech in which statements are exaggerated or extravagant. It implies strong feelings or is used to create a strong impression and is not meant to be taken literally.
7. Sarcasm is when someone says one thing but means something different. In this understatement, Soiree means opposite of what she feels. She is really warm in her thick outfit in the Arizona summer.
8. A simile is a form of figurative language. It is a comparison that uses the words "like" or "as." In this passage, the statement "Samuel regularly found himself sitting on the couch like an unmovable mountain," contains a simile. It compares Samuel sitting on a couch to an unmovable mountain, and it uses the word "like." The comparison tells you that while sitting on

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the couch Samuel was not bothered, pushed around, or shaken by the fury of his sisters, just as a mountain would not be.

9. Sarcasm is when someone says one thing but means something different. The reader knows Aleya tries really hard to appear graceful and skilled. When Josh plays a role in ruining her effort, she is upset. Thanking him is sarcastic.

10. Symbols are items that represent big ideas and concepts. Baby animals are usually used to represent qualities that humans associate with babies. For example, babies are innocent. The calf in the poem is being watched over by its mother because it is too young and innocent to be on its own.