

Figurative Language

Go Figure!



Figurative Language

Defining Figurative Language

Figurative language is language that uses words or expressions with a meaning that is different from the literal interpretation. When a writer uses literal language, he or she is simply stating the facts as they are. Figurative language, in comparison, uses exaggerations or alterations to make a particular linguistic point. Figurative language is very common in poetry, but is also used in prose and nonfiction writing as well.

There are many different types of figurative language. For example, it often includes the use of a specific type of word or word meaning:

- **Simile:** A simile is a comparison that often uses the words like or as. One example of a simile would be to say, "Jamie runs as fast as the wind."
- **Metaphor:** A metaphor is a comparison made between things which are essentially not alike. It is similar to a simile, but does not use like or as. One example of a metaphor would be to say, "Nobody invites Edward to parties because he is a wet blanket."
- **Personification:** When something that is not human is given human-like qualities, this is known as personification. An example of personification would be to say, "The leaves danced in the wind on the cold October afternoon."
- **Hyperbole:** Exaggerating, often in a humorous way, to make a particular point is known as hyperbole. One of example of hyperbole would be to say, "My eyes widened at the sight of the mile-high ice cream cones we were having for dessert."
- **Symbolism:** Symbolism occurs when a noun which has meaning in itself is used to represent something entirely different. One example of symbolism would be to use an image of the American flag to represent patriotism and a love for one's country.

In addition to various types of words relating to the word's meaning, figurative language also includes unusual constructions or combinations of words that provide a new perspective on the word. For example:

- **Onomatopoeia:** When you name an action by imitating the sound associated with it, this is known as onomatopoeia. One example of onomatopoeia would be to say, "The bees buzz angrily when their hive is disturbed."

- **Idiom:** An idiom is an expression used by a particular group of people with a meaning that is only known through common use. One example of an idiom would be to say, "I'm just waiting for him to kick the bucket." Many idioms that are frequently used are also considered clichés.

Examples of Figurative Language

Figurative language can be found in literature and poetry where the writing appeals to the senses. It can do this by giving a word with a specific meaning, by comparing two things in such a way that you find the comparison interesting or by using words that have unusual constructions or sounds.

Figurative Language: Understanding the Concept

You are using figurative language when writing goes beyond the actual meanings of words so that the reader gains new insights into the objects or subjects in the work.

One of the best ways to really understand the concept of figurative language is to see it in action such as with these examples:

- Alright, the sky misses the sun at night.
- The poorest man is the richest, and the rich are poor.
- Hear the mellow wedding bells. - Edgar Allen Poe
- Out of reach, I pull out with a screech.
- I move fast like a cheetah on the Serengeti.
- Her head was spinning from all the new information.
- The toast jumped out of the toaster.
- I'm so hungry I could eat a horse.
- The Sea lashed out in anger at the ships, unwilling to tolerate another battle.
- The Redcoats are coming!
- I've told you a million times to clean your room!

Types of Figurative Language

There are many types of figurative language. Some include the use of a specific type of word or word meaning such as:

Following is an explanation of each type of figurative language, each with an example of figurative language:

Simile

A simile compares two things using the words "like" and "as." Examples include:



like a



- busy as a bee
- clean as a whistle
- brave as a lion
- stand out like a sore thumb
- as easy as shooting fish in a barrel
- as dry as a bone
- as funny as a barrel of monkeys

- they fought like cats and dogs
- like watching grass grow

Metaphor

When you use a metaphor, you make a statement that doesn't make sense literally, like "time is a thief." It only makes sense when the similarities between the two things become apparent or someone understands the connection.

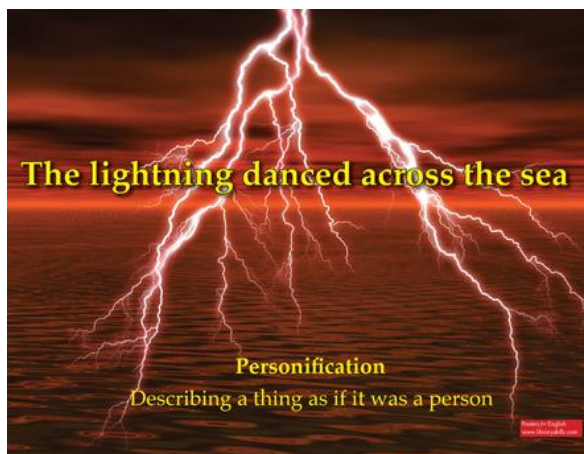


Examples include:

- the world is my oyster
- you are a couch potato
- time is money
- he has a heart of stone
- America is a melting pot
- you are my sunshine

Personification

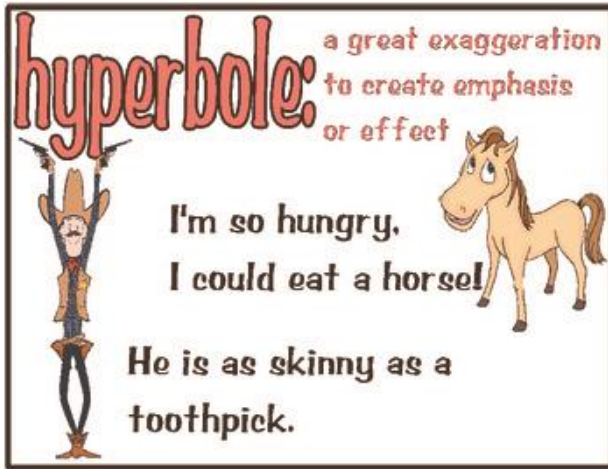
Personification gives human characteristics to inanimate objects, animals, or ideas. This can really affect the way the reader imagines things. This is used in children's books, poetry, and fictional literature. Examples include:



- opportunity knocked on the door
- the sun greeted me this morning
- the sky was full of dancing stars
- the vines wove their fingers together to form a braid
- the radio stopped singing and stared at me
- the sun played hide and seek with the clouds

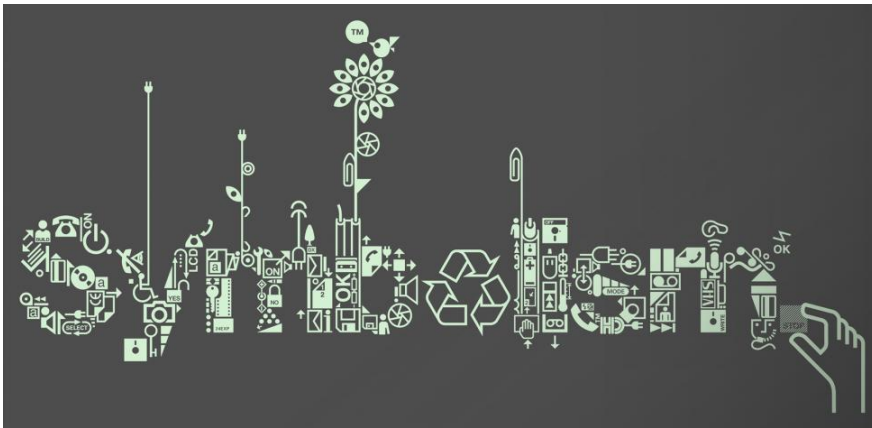
Hyperbole

Hyperbole is an outrageous exaggeration that emphasizes a point, and can be ridiculous or funny. Hyperboles can be added to fiction to add color and depth to a character. Examples are:



- You snore louder than a freight train.
- It's a slow burg. I spent a couple of weeks there one day.
- She is so dumb, she thinks Taco Bell is a Mexican phone company.
- I had to walk 15 miles to school in the snow, uphill.
- You could have knocked me over with a feather.

Symbolism



Symbolism occurs when a word which has meaning in itself but is used to represent something entirely different. Examples are:

- Using an image of the American flag to represent patriotism and a love for one's country.
- Using an apple pie to represent an American lifestyle.
- Using an apple to represent education.

Alliteration

Alliteration is the easiest of the examples of figurative language to spot. It is a repetition of the first consonant sounds in several words. Some good examples are:

- wide-eyed and wondering while we wait for others to waken
and tongue twisters like:
- Betty bought butter but the butter was bitter, so Betty bought better butter to make the bitter butter better.

Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia is the use of words that sound like their meaning, or mimic sounds. They add a level of fun and reality to writing. Here are some examples:

- the burning wood hissed and crackled
- the words: beep, whirr, click, whoosh, swish, zap, zing, ping, clang, bong, hum, boom, munch, gobble, crunch, pow, smash, wham, quack, meow, oink, and tweet.

Idiom

An idiom is an expression that has a meaning that is only known to a particular group of people. For example:

- Kick the bucket
- Raining cats and dogs
- Whistling Dixie
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Regardless of the type of word used, figurative language can make you look at the world differently; it can heighten your senses and help you feel like you are having the same experience as the author.