

Literary Devices

Literary devices are tools writers use that help with storytelling and that enhance their writing. They help convey feelings and describe events in a way that captures the reader's imagination. The following are a few literary devices:

Simile

A figure of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind, using the words "as" or "like."

Examples:

"O My Luve is like a red, red rose" ~ Robert Burns

"I wandered lonely as a cloud" ~ William Wordsworth

"Kate inched over her own thoughts like a measuring worm." ~ John Steinbeck

Metaphor

A figure of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind.

Examples:

"All the world is a stage" ~ Shakespeare

"This flea is you and I" ~ John Donne

"Books are the mirrors of the soul." ~ Virginia Woolf

Symbolism

When an object or symbol represents a deeper meaning and a more abstract idea.

Examples:

Yorik's skull in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* can symbolize the inherent meaninglessness of life.

The quilts in Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" can represent cultural and racial heritage.

In Dickinson's "Because I Could Not Stop for Death," the fields of gazing grain may symbolize adulthood, and the setting sun may symbolize old age.

Allegory

A narrative which can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one.

Examples:

“Young Goodman Brown” by Hawthorne

Lord of the Flies by Golding

Animal Farm by Orwell

Paradox

Elements or statements that contradict themselves to elicit humor or promote thought.

Examples:

No one goes there anymore; it is always crowded.

Less is more.

You must spend money to make money.

Verbal Irony

Making statements and using words to express the opposite of the words you’re using.

Examples:

Someone sick shouting, “I feel so great today!”

Juliet says, “I will not marry yet; and, when I do, I swear it shall be Romeo, whom you know I hate, rather than Paris.”

Dramatic Irony

When the audience knows more about the situations, causes of conflict and their resolutions than the character(s).

Example:

Oedipus leaves his family because it has been foretold that he will kill his father and marry his mother. He doesn’t know, however, that he was adopted. The audience knows this and watches in horror as he ends up killing his biological father and marrying his biological mother.

Situational Irony

Incongruity between expectations of something to happen and what actually happens instead.

Examples:

A fire station burns down.

A marriage counselor files for divorce.

A robber gets robbed.

Foreshadowing

A narrative device in which suggestions or warnings about events to come are given.

Examples:

The witches appearing at the beginning of *Macbeth*.

Oxymoron

Two words with opposite meanings in conjunction.

Examples:

Awfully good.

Old news.

Alone together.

Passive aggressive.

Personification

Giving human characteristics to nonhuman things, inanimate objects, or even concepts.

Examples:

“Sorrow abides and happiness takes his leave” ~ Shakespeare *Much Ado About Nothing*

“Let not light see my black and deep desires” ~ Shakespeare, *Macbeth*