Navigational Novel Guide Books

presents

Figurative Language Terms

Review and Practice

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About Literary Terms

Writers, in their craft, depend on an arsenal of tools to best fashion their work. These tools include literary devices, ways that language can be used so that the writer can best set a mood, chisel a character, evoke emotion, establish an attitude, and stage a setting for a story. Literary devices enhance, advance, and define the message of the story. They allow the writer to carefully manipulate language for the best storytelling effect.

While literary devices are tools to be used by the writer, the literary elements of a story are already there. These elements, common to every story, include plot, conflict, theme, setting, and point of view. How well they function will depend on the extent to which the writer has honed this craft.

In any discussion about literary devices, ***figurative language*** holds a pivotal position because it is the language that contains the images that strengthen and define meaning. Using figurative language gives writers and speakers a way to say precisely what they mean and to make use of unusual comparisons for effect, for interest, for humor, and for the purpose of creating the best images. Figurative language is a literary device that creates vivid images, fine-tunes meaning with subtleties and nuances, and broadens the literal definitions of language and words. Figurative language appeals to the reader's sense of imagination and affects the way that the reader understands an idea. This type of language goes beyond the literal meaning of words and adds new dimension, a richness, to a thought or idea. From poetry to prose, in song and in speech, figurative language gives words a different energy. Writers know that using figurative language is their best way of saying exactly what they want to say so that the reader responds with the most precise understanding. This understanding will go beyond what is basic meaning and literal definition; it will involve the senses, emotions, history, and implicit knowledge.

This book deals with figurative language of various types, some commonly used and others more often utilized by the writer and the reader with the deepest knowledge of and strongest appreciation for the language and its power.

Sterling Russell

Before you start …

Figurative language is a part of all literature, is identified by a plethora of literary terms, and is intended to enhance the reading experience. The following pages introduce 20 literary terms through definition, example, and practice.

Exercises for each term offer a total possible value of 20 points. The completed book is equal to 400 points total.

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What Is Figurative Language?

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE refers to words that affect a meaning other than the usual or literal meaning of the words. Figurative language is different from literal language. Literal language refers to words that do not deviate from or exaggerate their usual (dictionary) meanings.

These are some of the most common figurative language terms:

alliteration	cliché	euphemism	irony	paradox
allusion	connotation	hyperbole	metaphor	personification
analogy	consonance	idiom	onomatopoeia	pun
assonance	denotation	imagery	oxymoron	simile

Authors and speakers use figurative language to modify meaning, evoke emotion, clarify facts, mystify history, promote empathy, create barriers, and to influence a reader's or listener's thinking. When you say, "I'm hungry as a bear," you are using figurative language. Consider the figurative language examples below from noted authors.

Example 1 (The Red Badge of Courage by Stephen Crane)
"The cold passed reluctantly from the earth, and the retiring fog revealed an army stretched out on the hills, resting."

In Example 1, a thing or object is given human traits, qualities or abilities. The cold passes *reluctantly* and the fog *retires*; human traits given to elements of weather (personification).

Example 2 (Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston)
"She was a rut in the road. Plenty of life beneath the surface but it was kept beaten down by the wheels."

In Example 2, there is an implied comparison between two generally unlike or unrelated things. *She* is being compared to a rut in the road. This comparison is made without using connecting words such as *as* or *like* (metaphor).

Example 3 (Inherit the Wind by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee)
"You see, I haven't really thought very much. I was always afraid of what I might think—so it seemed safer not to think at all. But now I know. A thought is like a child inside our body. It has to be born. If it dies inside you, part of you dies, too!"

In Example 3, the authors compare two unlike things using the word *like*: a thought is compared to a child (simile).

Exercise: Identifying Figurative Language

Instructions: In the following excerpt from President Obama's inauguration speech, underline all instances of figurative language. Then, answer the questions that follow. (20 points)

1. … Forty-four Americans have now taken the presidential oath. The words have been spoken during rising tides of prosperity and the still waters of peace. Yet, every so often the oath is taken amidst gathering clouds and raging storms. At these moments, America has carried on not simply because of the skill or vision of those in high office, but because we the people have remained faithful to the ideals of our forebears, and true to our founding documents … We are the keepers of this legacy. Guided by these principles once more, we can meet those new threats that demand even greater effort—even greater cooperation and understanding between nations. We will begin to responsibly leave Iraq to its people and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan. With old friends and former foes, we will work tirelessly to lessen the nuclear threat and roll back the specter of a warming planet. We will not apologize for our way of life, nor will we waver in its defense, and for those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken; you cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you. … For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus—and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.

2. Is there more literal or more figurative language in his speech? Highlight or circle at least one example of figurative language and rewrite it in literal language.

3. What effect does the use of figurative language have on the president's message?

What Are Denotation and Connotation?

DENOTATION is the explicit, literal meaning of a word or phrase. Denotation is the meaning of a word as it is found in a dictionary.

The denotative meaning of the word *rose* is any of the many shrubs of the genus *Rosa* that bear flowers.
She grows roses in her garden.

CONNOTATION is the suggestive meaning of a word or phrase. A connotative definition relies on the associations, emotional and otherwise, that people have with a word. The connotative meaning of a word exists in conjunction with the denotative meaning of a word.

The connotative meaning of the word rose suggests love, beauty, feeling of the heart, and sincerity.
She grows roses in her heart for him.

Example (*"A Dog's Tale"* by Mark Twain) **"My father was a St. Bernard, my mother was a collie, but I am a Presbyterian."**

In the example, the author did not literally mean that his father was a St. Bernard and his mother a collie. The connotative link is to canine traits. If he used the denotative meanings of the words, the author would have to describe himself as a dog, and not a Presbyterian.

Exercise 1: Denotation

Instructions: Give the denotation for each word below. The words all describe ways to move, walk, or otherwise get around on foot. (5 points)

Sample gallop *the fastest gait of a horse; a four-beat gait that is equivalent to running*

1. walk _____
2. march _____
3. slink _____
4. prance _____
5. strut _____

Exercise 2: Connotation

Instructions: Suggest a connotative meaning for the following words. (5 points)

Sample gallop *not a particularly graceful gait; walking really fast without grace*

1. walk _____
2. march _____
3. slink _____
4. prance _____
5. strut _____

Exercise 3: Positive, Neutral, and Negative Meanings

Instructions: In this exercise, define the neutral or denotative meaning of a word and then write *positive* and *negative* connotations as well. You can write more than one meaning for each word in each box. (5 points)

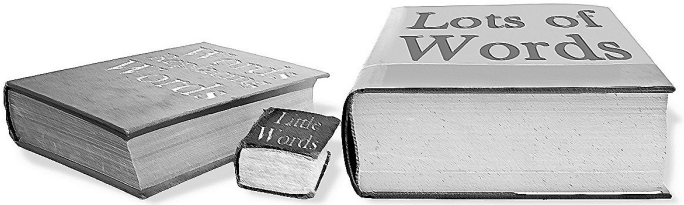
	Term	***Neutral***	***Good***	***Bad***
Sample	rose	flower	love, friendship, beauty	thorny, deceptive
1.	dog			
2.	cake			
3.	hairy			
4.	small			
5.	money			

Exercise 4: Change the Word, Change the Mood

Instructions: You can change the mood and meaning of a written piece by changing the language. On the blank below, write one word that represents a mood. Using that mood as a reference, rewrite the following paragraph, replacing all of the underlined words with new ones. For example, to create a mood of tension, an *empty room* might become a *dank vestibule*. (5 points)

What is the mood you are creating? _____ (Use words that connote that mood or feeling.)

> Emily <u>came into</u> the <u>empty</u> <u>room</u>. She <u>looked</u> at the <u>blinds</u> and their <u>purple</u> <u>color</u> <u>caught her eye</u>. She <u>failed</u> to <u>notice</u> the table under the <u>blinds</u>. On the table was a coin. The coin was <u>bright silver</u> and <u>shone</u> against the <u>dark wood</u>. Before she <u>picked</u> up the coin, Emily <u>looked</u> <u>hesitantly</u> around the room. Was someone <u>watching</u>? She <u>could not tell</u>. She <u>yelped</u> in <u>surprise</u> as she heard a <u>loud thump</u> from behind her.



What Is Imagery?

IMAGERY is the use of figurative language to paint a sensory picture of objects, people, and places. It's not simply additional adjectives or adverbs; it's full thought, vividly expressed.

Example (Rabbit, Run by John Updike)
They sense it, too, and look at him with hard eyes, eyes like little metal studs pinned into the white faces of young men sitting in zippered jackets in booths three to a girl, the girls with orange hair hanging like seaweed or loosely bound with gold barrettes like pirate treasure. At the counter, middle-aged couples in overcoats bunch their faces forward into straws of gray ice-cream sodas.

The **Example** sentence describes with colorful detail the place and the people in the café Rabbit visits. It tells what makes the people foreign to him and it paints a mood across the setting.

Exercise 1: Identifying Imagery

Instructions: Underline all the words and/or phrases that demonstrate imagery in the story "Comma Gets a Cure," on the next page. Then in this space below, describe the types of emotion evoked by the language used in the story. To which senses does the language appeal? (11 points)

Exercise 2: Writing With Imagery

Instructions: Pick a set of five sentences from the story in the previous exercise that DO NOT use imagery. Rewrite those sentences using imagery. (5 points)

Comma Gets a Cure

Well, here's a story for you: Sarah Perry was a veterinary nurse who had been working daily at an old zoo in a deserted district of the territory, so she was very happy to start a new job at a superb private practice in North Square near the Duke Street Tower. That area was much nearer for her and more to her liking. Even so, on her first morning, she felt stressed. She ate a bowl of porridge, checked herself in the mirror and washed her face in a hurry. Then she put on a plain yellow dress and a fleece jacket, picked up her kit and headed for work.

When she got there, there was a woman with a goose waiting for her. The woman gave Sarah an official letter from the vet. The letter implied that the animal could be suffering from a rare form of foot and mouth disease, which was surprising, because normally you would only expect to see it in a dog or a goat. Sarah was sentimental, so this made her feel sorry for the beautiful bird.

Before long, that itchy goose began to strut around the office like a lunatic, which made an unsanitary mess. The goose's owner, Mary Harrison, kept calling, "Comma, Comma," which Sarah thought was an odd choice for a name. Comma was strong and huge, so it would take some force to trap her, but Sarah had a different idea. First she tried gently stroking the goose's lower back with her palm, then singing a tune to her. Finally, she administered ether. Her efforts were not futile. In no time, the goose began to tire, so Sarah was able to hold on to Comma and give her a relaxing bath.

Once Sarah had managed to bathe the goose, she wiped her off with a cloth and laid her on her right side. Then Sarah confirmed the vet's diagnosis. Almost immediately, she remembered an effective treatment that required her to measure out a lot of medicine. Sarah warned that this course of treatment might be expensive—either five or six times the cost of penicillin. I can't imagine paying so much, but Mrs. Harrison—a millionaire lawyer—thought it was a fair price for a cure.

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Exercise 3: Imagery and Sensory Detail

Instructions: For each topic below, write a sentence that includes imagery and sensory detail. (4 points)

1. taking a test

2. eating lunch

3. riding the bus home

4. doing homework

What Is Personification?

PERSONIFICATION is the attribution of human traits, qualities, characteristics, and/or actions to an inanimate object, animal, or abstract idea. Figurative language in which a force of nature is represented as a character or person also qualifies as personification.

Example 1 ("An Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard" by Thomas Gray)
"Fair science frowned not on his humble birth, and Melancholy marked him for her own."

We know that science and melancholy are not animate objects, but in **Example 1** each is personified with typically human actions or behaviors—frowning and choosing another person as her own. Note that Melancholy is also given a gender—"for HER own."

Example 2 ("Macbeth" by William Shakespeare) **"Stones have been known to move, and trees to speak."**

In **Example 2**, stones and trees are characterized as people, capable of speaking and moving.

Exercise 1: Identifying Personification

Instructions: For each sentence, write what object is being personified, and what human action or characteristic is being given to the object. (10 points)

1. The blue dress in the store window called to me and begged me to buy it.

2. Against my wishes, the breeze stopped caressing my face.

3. My computer smirked at me before it shutdown.

4. The forest slept as the nocturnal animals emerged to roam.

5. The keyboard cried letters as the writer pounded its keys.

6. Growling and moaning, the skies darkened with clouds.

7. "Ouch," exclaimed the ball as the bat hit it to deep centerfield.

8. Rushing across the roadway, the discarded wrapper halted as the wind ceased.

9. The blank paper stared up at the nervous student pondering the essay assignment.

10. Feeling ignored, the telephone screamed, "ring, ring, ring, ring."

Exercise 2: Creating Personification

Instructions: Use personification to rewrite each sentence. (10 points)

1. The branch fell from the tree.

2. The parachute opened just in time.

3. The desk was cluttered.

4. The final school bell rang.

5. I've misplaced my car keys.

6. The tent collapsed during the storm.

7. The printer was totally out of ink.

8. He tore the paper.

9. I ripped the old wallpaper down today.

10. The store was closed.

What Is Allusion?

ALLUSION is an implied reference to a famous or noteworthy place, event, time, myth, or work of literature. When using allusion, the author assumes and requires that the reader understands the reference and can make the connection.

Example 1 (Inherit the Wind by Jerome Lawrence and Robert Edwin Lee)
"The individual human mind. In a child's power to master the multiplication table there is more sanctity than in all your shouted 'Amens!,' 'Holy, Holies!' and 'Hosannas!' An idea is a greater monument than a cathedral. And the advance of man's knowledge is more of a miracle than any sticks turned to snakes, or the parting of waters!"

Example 1 alludes to the content of prayers and to stories in the Bible.

Example 2 ("I have a Dream" by Martin Luther King Jr.)
"Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope ...."

Example 2 contains an allusion that connects Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, which begins "Four score and seven years ago today," to King's speech, and draws parallels between the two points in history. It also connects both men's ideas and political viewpoints on freedom.

Example 3 ("The Merchant of Venice" by William Shakespeare)
"Come, come, Nerissa; for I long to see quick Cupid's post that comes so mannerly."

Example 3, which is a reference to Cupid, is an explicit allusion because it is directly stated. In Roman mythology, Cupid is the god of love and beauty.

Many great works of literature hold allusions to other great literary works. Allusions provide important references and images, giving the author a way of connecting the reader with the idea.

Exercise 1: Identifying the Allusions

Instructions: Identify the allusion in each of the following quotes. The allusions are connected to famous speeches or common stories. (10 points)

1. **"I was not born in a manger. I was actually born on Krypton and sent here by my father, Jor-el, to save the Planet Earth."** (~Senator Barack Obama)

2. **"I violated the Noah rule: predicting rain doesn't count; building arks does."** (~Warren Buffett)