

Literary Devices

Metaphor

Definition:

Metaphors are one of the most extensively used literary devices. A metaphor refers to a meaning or identity ascribed to one subject by way of another. In a metaphor, one subject is implied to be another so as to draw a comparison between their similarities and shared traits. The first subject, which is the focus of the sentences is usually compared to the second subject, which is used to convey a degree of meaning that is used to characterize the first. The purpose of using a metaphor is to take an identity or concept that we understand clearly (second subject) and use it to better understand the lesser known element (the first subject).

Example:

“Henry was a lion on the battlefield”. *This sentence suggests that Henry fought so valiantly and bravely that he embodied all the personality traits we attribute to the ferocious animal. This sentence implies immediately that Henry was courageous and fearless, much like the King of the Jungle.*

Simile

Definition:

Similes are one of the most commonly used literary devices; referring to the practice of drawing parallels or comparisons between two unrelated and dissimilar things, people, beings, places and concepts. By using similes a greater degree of meaning and understanding is attached to an otherwise simple sentence. The reader is able to better understand the sentiment the author wishes to convey. Similes are marked by the use of the words ‘as’ or ‘such as’ or ‘like’.

Example:

“He is like a mouse in front of the teacher.”

Personification

Definition:

Personification is one of the most commonly used and recognized literary devices. It refers to the practice of attaching human traits and characteristics with inanimate objects, phenomena and animals.

Example:

“The raging winds”

“The wise owl”

“The warm and comforting fire”

Alliteration

Definition:

Alliteration is a literary device where words are used in quick succession and begin with letters belonging to the same sound group. Whether it is the consonant sound or a specific vowel group, the alliteration involves creating a repetition of similar sounds in the sentence. Alliterations are also created when the words all begin with the same letter. Alliterations are used to add character to the writing and often add an element of ‘fun’ to the piece.

Example:

The Wicked Witch of the West went her own way. (The ‘W’ sound is highlighted and repeated throughout the sentence.)

Imagery

Definition:

In literature, one of the strongest devices is imagery wherein the author uses words and phrases to create “mental images” for the reader. Imagery helps the reader to visualize more realistically the author’s writings. The usage of metaphors, allusions, descriptive words and similes amongst other literary forms in order to “tickle” and awaken the readers’ sensory perceptions is referred to as imagery. Imagery is not limited to only visual sensations, but also refers to igniting kinesthetic, olfactory, tactile, gustatory, thermal and auditory sensations as well.

Example:

The gushing brook stole its way down the lush green mountains, dotted with tiny flowers in a riot of colors and trees coming alive with gaily chirping birds.

Euphemism

Definition:

The term 'euphemism' is used to refer to the literary practice of using a comparatively milder or less abrasive form of a negative description instead of its original, unsympathetic form. This device is used when writing about matters such as sex, violence, death, crimes and things "embarrassing". The purpose of euphemisms is to substitute unpleasant and severe words with more genteel ones in order to mask the harshness.. The use of euphemisms is sometimes manipulated to lend a touch of exaggeration or irony in satirical writing.

Example:

Using "to put out to pasture" when one implies retiring a person because they are too old to be effective.

Below are some more examples of euphemisms

- Downsizing - This is used when a company fires or lays off a larger number of employees
- Friendly fire - This is used by the military when soldiers are accidentally killed by other soldiers on the same side.
- Tipsy - This is a soft way to say that someone has had too much to drink.
- Golden years - This is used to describe the later period of life when someone is of old age.
- Gone to heaven - This is a polite way to say that someone is dead.
- Enhanced interrogation - This is modern euphemism to minimize what by many people would be viewed as torture.

Exercises: What literary device is being used in the following sentences?

1. *Purple puppies like playing on the playground.*

2. *They fought like cats and dogs.*

3. *She's a very curvy woman.*

4. *Laughter is the music of the soul.*

5. *We have to let you go, Tyler.*
6. *The grass grew green in the graveyard.*
7. *The chirping crickets filled the empty night air.*
8. *They are as different as night and day.*
9. *I was awoken by the pleasing scent of the bacon as it wafted down the hallway.*
10. *Jakia jumped in the jar of jelly.*
11. *An old lump of snow melted in the corner.*
12. *Your explanation is as clear as mud.*
13. *Jimmy was sent to a correctional facility.*
14. *Watching the show was like watching grass grow.*
15. *Kisses are the flowers of love in bloom.*
16. *Her eyes were fireflies.*
17. *Cameron always had a taste for the fruit of knowledge.*
18. *The detective listened to her tales with a wooden face.*
19. *She cut him down with her words.*
20. *Despite their mother's warnings, the children chose to chew with their mouths open.*