

Literary Devices and Figures of Speech: A Short List

Literary Device	Description	Example
Allusion	<i>Allusion</i> is brief reference to or use of some well-known writer or work.	As Tennyson wrote, I have many "miles to go before I sleep"
Anaphora	<i>The repetition</i> of the same word or group of words at the beginning of successive clauses	"I have a dream" in MLK's speech by that name.
Alliteration	<i>Alliteration is the repetition of sounds</i> throughout a sentence or passage of writing, in order to create a certain feel or effect.	Quote: "Torino's Olympics, a topsy-turvy mix of marvels and misadventures..." <i>USA Today</i>
Hyperbole	<i>Hyperbole is exaggeration, or overstatement.</i>	"The lights of the village burned brighter than a thousand stars."
Imagery	<i>Imagery</i> is a general figure of speech, or way of describing something using a "mental picture" created by a word or words; it almost always involves some sort of comparison. <i>Imagery</i> can be simple, or involve a complete literary unit (poem, novel, drama, etc.). <i>Imagery</i> encompasses all the senses, and not only <u>visual</u> word pictures. Hence, <i>imagery</i> includes sound, touch, smell, taste, or sensations of movement, as well as visual qualities.	Usually used to identify general patterns of similes and metaphors, such as the use of images of burning (smoke, reddish light, smells, sounds of crackling).
Simile	A <i>simile</i> is imagery using <u>indirect</u> comparison, that is, using explicit words of comparison such as "like" or "as" as verbal cues.	For example, Robert Burns famous poem "My love is like a red, red rose" compares love as being beautiful, like a "red, red rose."
Metaphor	A <i>metaphor</i> is imagery using <u>direct</u> comparison; that is, not using explicit words of comparison as verbal cues.	For example, Paul Simon's famous song lyrics "I am a rock; I am an island" compares the alienated self as being a rock (hard, insensitive) or an island (isolated, remote).

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Parable	A <i>parable</i> is a story that illustrates a particular truth or life-lesson. A parable usually has an unexpected ending that, like the punchline of a joke, must be understood for the hearer or reader to properly understand the truth that the parable is illustrating. Some parables come close to be allegories, wherein each detail of the story represents a particular aspect of the truth being illustrated.	The parables of Jesus described in the New Testament gospels. For example, the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)
Personification	<i>Definition:</i> when you make a thing, idea, or an animal do something only humans can do.	<i>Example 1:</i> "Wind yells while blowing" "Wind yells while blowing" is an example of personification because wind cannot yell. Only a living thing can yell. <i>Example 2:</i> "Necklace is a friend" "Necklace is a friend" is an example of personification because Necklace is a thing, and necklaces cannot be friends. Only <i>living</i> things can have friends.
Theme	<i>Theme</i> is the central "message or doctrine that a literary work is designed to convey to the reader". Secondly, a theme is "the pattern created within a literary work by the repetitive use of a particular image-subject".	The theme of Shakespeare's play <i>Othello</i> , the theme is jealousy.
Verbal Irony	Verbal irony is the use of words to express a meaning that is the opposite of what is literally expressed in the words.	"Hey, you look great!" (said to someone who doesn't) "There's nothing like a sunny day for a picnic" (said during a rainstorm).