

Figures of Speech

A figure of speech expresses an idea, thought, or image with words which carry meanings beyond their literal ones. Figures of speech give extra dimension to language by stimulating the imagination and evoking visual, sensual imagery; such language paints a mental picture in words. Some types of figurative language are the following:

Simile:

a direct comparison of two things, usually employing the words like or as.

"He watches from his mountain walls, And like a thunderbolt he falls."

(Tennyson) "My heart is like an apple tree whose boughs are bent with thickest fruit." (Christina Rosseti)

Other Examples:-

clouds like fluffy balls of cotton; snowflakes like soft white feathers; a motor purring like a kitten; a lawn like a green carpet; thin as a bookmark; as contented as a cow.

Metaphor:-

an implied comparison in which one thing is spoken of in terms of something else; the figurative term is substituted for or identified with the literal term. Metaphors are extremely valuable in making an abstract idea clearer by associating the idea with something concrete that relates to one or more of the senses.

"And merry larks are ploughman's clocks." (Shakespeare)

"Entangled in the cobweb of the schools." (Cowper)

Other Examples:-

she is a jewel; the sun is a wizard, and the moon is a witch; the sun was a golden dollar; the Lord is my shepherd; the web of our life is mingled yarn, good and ill together.

Hyperbole:

the use of exaggeration or overstatement to make a point. It may be used for emphasis, for humor, or for poetic intensity.

"Here once the embattled farmers stood,

And fired the shot heard around the world." (Emerson)

big as a house; starved to death; everyone in town came;

on top of the world

Personification:

another type of comparison that treats objects or things as if they were capable of the actions and feelings of people. As in a metaphor, there is an implied comparison which gives the attributes of a human being to an animal, object, or idea.

"... Sea that bears her bosom to the moon" (Wordsworth)

"The dirty nurse, Experience." (Tennyson)

Other Examples:-

the path moving up the mountain, skipping over puddles; trees clinging to the steep sides; winter was fast asleep; the wind was howling; the thunder growled.

Irony:

an expression in which the author's meaning is quite different (often the opposite) from what is literally said. Irony, as a matter of tone, occurs most frequently in prose as a technique for humor, satire, or contrast.

"When I reflect upon the number of disagreeable people who I know have gone to a better world, I am moved to live a different life." (Mark Twain)

"The English are mentioned in the Bible : Blessed are the

mEEK, for they inherit the earth.” (Mark Twain)

“It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.”

(Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice)

Allusion:

a reference to some historical or literary event or person that has striking resemblance to the subject under discussion. Allusion is used often in prose.

“We live under the nuclear sword of Damocles.”

“He is a Romeo to every girl he meets.”

“When he met her, he met his Waterloo.”

Imagery:

the use of vivid detailed descriptions that evoke sensory images. Imagery is employed to give the reader the sense that he or she can see, hear, feel, smell, or otherwise experience what is being described.

“I heard a Fly buzz – when I died

The Stillness in the Room

Was like the Stillness in the Air –

Between the Heaves of Storm.”

(Emily Dickinson, I heard a Fly buzz)

- * The sound imagery of the solitary buzzing in otherwise complete stillness contributes to the poem's theme of death.