



Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck • Definitions of Figurative Language

Directions: Imagery is the general term for the collection of sense images in a poem or story. Most imagery tends to be visual in nature, but imagery may also suggest the way things sound, smell, taste, or feel. To create imagery in a work of literature, an author or poet uses figurative language. Use this handout as a reference sheet to identify the technical terms that describe the figurative language an author or poet may use in a work of literature.

Alliteration: repetition of consonant sounds, most often at the beginning of words, or any vowel sound in succession or closely associated words or syllables

Examples: bread and butter; thick and thin, green as grass; sweet as sugar

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

She sells sea shells by the sea shore.

Allusion: a reference in a work of literature to a character, place, or situation from another work of literature, music, or art; often from mythology or the Bible

Examples: He wandered around with Cupid's arrow in his heart.

His love of chocolate was his Achilles' heel.

Assonance: repetition of vowel sounds in accented syllables, but without repeated following consonants

Examples: earth/girl; them/men; stream/beach

Now granite in a granite hill.

Metaphor: an implied comparison of two unlike things, stated directly

Examples: Her eyes are twinkling stars. He was a lion in battle.

The fog comes on little cat feet.

Simile: an expressed comparison of two unlike things, using the words *like*, *as* or *than*

Examples:

Her eyes are like two twinkling stars. She is as pretty as a picture.

Life is like a box of chocolates.

Onomatopoeia: words which imitate or produce natural sounds

Examples: bang, roar, hiss, clatter, thud, shriek, sizzle, murmur, buzz, whirr, clang, tinkle, squeal

Personification: the giving of human qualities to inanimate objects or abstractions

Examples: The sun smiles on us today.

Night covered the world with a lid of darkness.

- Foreshadowing: the use of clues by an author that hint at important plot developments that are to follow in a story of drama
- Aside: a dramatic convention in which a character turns "aside" to speak a few words directly to the audience or to another character, but is not supposed to be heard by others on the stage.
Example: Shakespeare used this device in most of his plays
- Anachronism: an event or a detail that is chronologically out of proper time in history
Example: In the play *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare has a clock chime in ancient Rome.
- Irony: a contrast between what is said and what is meant, or between reality and what seems to be real. Situational irony exists when what actually happens in a situation is the opposite of what we expect to happen. Verbal irony exists when a person says one thing and means another. Dramatic irony occurs when the audience has important information that the characters in the play do not have
- Pun: a humorous play on words, using either 1) two or more different meanings of the same word; or 2) two or more words that are spelled and pronounced somewhat the same but have different meanings
Example: Shakespeare used this device in most of his plays
- Soliloquy: a dramatic conversation in which a character makes an extended speech while alone on the stage
Example: This device is used throughout *Hamlet* to reveal to us Hamlet's uncertainties, plans, and motives.
- Symbol: any object, person, place, or action which maintains its meaning while at the same time standing for something larger than itself (a concept, a theme, a point, etc.)
- Style: a writer's characteristic way of writing—his or her choice of words, sentence structure, and use of imagery and figurative language
- Tone: the attitude a writer takes toward the subject or the reader of a work of literature
- Protagonist: the central character in a story or drama, the one with whom we, as readers or audience, are supposed to identify (good)
- Antagonist: a person or force that opposes the protagonist in a story or drama; an enemy of the hero or heroine (evil)