

Figurative Language: Definitions and Examples

Figurative language is used to create a special effect or feeling. It is characterized by figures of speech—language that compares, exaggerates, or means something other than what it first appears to mean.

A **figure of speech** is a literary device used to create a special effect or feeling by making some type of interesting or creative comparison. The four most common are simile, metaphor, personification, and hyperbole.

Simile—a comparison of two unlike things in which a word of comparison (“like” or “as” is used.

- “Grandmother came with fruit and my uncles clumped around and around my bed, snorting like wild horses.” Ch. 13
- “Just my breath, carrying my words out, might poison people and they’d curl up and die like the black fat slugs that only pretended.” Ch. 13
- “I walked into the room where people were laughing, their voices hitting the walls like stones. . .” Ch. 13
- “The giggles hung in the air like melting clouds that were waiting to rain on me.” Preface

Metaphor—a comparison of two unlike things in which no word of comparison (“like” or “as”) is used.

- “If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat.” Preface
- “Instead they used their intelligence to pry open the door of rejection and not only became wealthy but got revenge in the bargain.” Ch. 29

Personification—a special kind of metaphor in which human qualities or attributes are given to an inanimate object.

- “I had trained myself so successfully through the years to display interest, or at least attention, while my mind skipped free on other subjects. . . “ Ch. 29
- “When he finished more triumphant stories rainbowed around the room riding the shoulders of laughter.” Ch. 29

Hyperbole—an overstatement or exaggeration

- “They’ve got watermelons twice the size of a cow’s head and sweeter than syrup.” Ch. 24
- “And if you can count the watermelon’s seeds, before it’s cut open, you can win five zillion dollars and a new car.” Ch 14

Imagery: Definitions and Examples

Imagery—the words or phrases a writer uses to create a certain picture in the reader’s mind. Imagery is usually based on sensory details.

- “I tasted the sour on my tongue and felt it in the back of my mouth. Then before I reached the door, the sting was burning down my legs and into my Sunday socks.” Preface
- “Her skin was a rich black that would have peeled like a plum if snagged.”
• Ch. 15
- “The sweet scent of vanilla had met us as she opened the door.” Ch 15
- “. . . but in a minute she was back in the room with a long, ropy peach-switch, the juice smelling bitter at having been torn loose.” Ch. 15