

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

In Poetry



What is 'figurative language'?

Literal language refers to words that do not depart from their defined meaning. If I say, "My room is a pigsty," then *literally*, I mean that I live with the pigs in a pen. However, it is more likely that I mean it *figuratively*. That I mean my room is comparable to a pigsty in that it is very messy or dirty.

Figurative language refers to words, or groups of words, that exaggerate, make a comparison or alter the usual meanings of the component words. It can make language more descriptive, imaginative or fresh.

Why is it used in poetry?

Poets often use figurative language in their poems because it helps to stir the reader's imagination and bring out the emotion and understanding that can't be expressed by the words' literal meaning alone. Figurative language helps to create visual images in the minds of the readers.

What are common types of figurative language used in poetry?

Metaphor – A figure of speech that implies a comparison between two relatively unlikely things.

E.g. "My nephew is a monkey! He climbs on everything."

Simile – A comparison between two unlike things, usually with the words 'like' or 'as'.

E.g. "She dances like a chicken on hot coals."

Personification – The giving of human qualities to an animal, object or abstract idea.

E.g. "The chocolate cake was calling my name."

Hyperbole – An exaggerated statement used to emphasize an idea or make a point.

E.g. "I've told you to clean your room a million times."

Assonance – The repetition of vowel sounds.

E.g. "Try to light the fire by the ottoman over there."

Euphemism – A 'softer', more inoffensive word or phrase, used as a substitute for one considered too harsh or blunt, when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing.

E.g. "His mother passed away last year."

Alliteration – The repetition of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected words.

E.g. "The tall trees towered over the town."

Synecdoche – A figure of speech in which a part is used to represent the whole, or the whole for a part.

E.g. "I see many new faces here tonight."

Pun – A play on words; sometimes on different meanings of the same word and sometimes on the similar sense or sound of different words.

E.g. "A horse is a very stable animal."

Oxymoron – When incongruous or contradictory terms appear side by side.

E.g. "Parting is such sweet sorrow."

Anaphora – The repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses.

E.g. "Every man, every woman, every child, should be love."

Onomatopoeia – The use of words which actually sound like the objects or actions to which they refer.

E.g. "The guitar twanged as he thumped on it."