

**Rhetorical Devices
and
Literary Terms**

Denotation

- **The denotation of a word is its dictionary meaning, independent of other associations that the word may have.**

Connotation

- **The connotation of a word is the set of ideas associated with it in addition to its explicit meaning. The connotation of a word can be personal, based on individual experiences. More often, cultural connotations – those recognizable by most people in a group – determine a writer’s word choices.**

Imagery

Imagery is words or phrases that appeal to one or more of the five senses. Writers use imagery to describe how their subjects look, sound, feel, taste, and smell.

Conflict

- **Conflict is the struggle between opposing forces in a story or play.**
- **External conflict exists when a character struggles against some outside force, such as another character, nature, society, or fate.**
 - **Man vs. Man Man vs. Supernatural Man vs. Machine**
Man vs. Nature Man vs. Society Man vs. Time
- **Internal conflict exists within the mind of a character who is torn between different courses of action.**
 - **Man vs. Himself**

Hyperbole

An exaggeration used for emphasis

- **ex. She was so mad that I thought her head was going to explode!**

Rhetorical Question

A question asked solely to produce an effect or to make an assertion

- ex. How many times do I need to tell you to stop doing that?

Alliteration

The repetition of initial sounds in neighboring words

- ex. Sweet smell of success
- ex. “Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.” – MLK
- ex. “Somewhere at this very moment a child is being born in America. Let it be our cause to give that child a happy home, a healthy family, and a hopeful future.” – Bill Clinton

Assonance

The repetition of vowel sounds to create internal rhyming within phrases or sentences

- ex. “Hear the mellow wedding bells”
– Edgar Allen Poe, “The Bells”
- ex. “on a proud round cloud in a white high night” – E.E. Cummings
- ex. “I feel the need, the need for speed.” – *Top Gun*

Consonance

The repetition of similar
consonant sounds within
phrases or sentences

- ex. Lost and past
- ex. She will *confess* about the
trespass

Anaphora

The repetition of the initial word(s) over the following phrases/sentences

- ex. “What we need in the United States is not division. What we need in the United States is not hatred. What we need in the United States is not violence and lawlessness; but is love and wisdom and compassion toward one another, and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country whether they be white or whether they be black.” – Robert F. Kennedy
- ex. “Yesterday, the Japanese government also launched an attack against Malaya. Last night, Japanese forces attacked Hong Kong. Last night, Japanese forces attacked Guam. Last night, Japanese forces attacked the Philippine Islands. Last night, the Japanese attacked Wake Island. And this morning, the Japanese attacked Midway Island.” – FDR, Pearl Harbor Address

Epistrophe

The repetition of the last word(s) in a phrase/sentence at the end of following phrases/sentences

- ex. “The time for the healing of the wounds has come. The moment to bridge the chasms that divides us has come.” – Nelson Mandela
- ex. “We are born to sorrow, pass our time in sorrow, end our days in sorrow.”
- ex. “What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny compared to what lies within us.” –Ralph Waldo Emerson

Anadiplosis

The repetition of the last word(s) or in phrase/sentence at or very near the beginning of the next phrase/sentence.

- ex. “Don't you surrender! Suffering breeds character; character breeds faith; in the end faith will not disappoint. You must not surrender....” – Jesse Jackson
- ex. “Somehow, with the benefit of little formal education, my grandparents recognized the inexorable downward spiral of conduct outside the guardrails: If you lie, you will cheat; if you cheat, you will steal; if you steal, you will kill.” – Justice Clarence Thomas

Conduplication

The repetition of key word(s) in a sentence or phrase at or very near the beginning of successive sentences or phrases

- ex. “I could list the problems which cause people to feel cynical, problems which include lack of integrity in government, the feeling that the individual no longer counts....” – Barbara Jordan
- ex. “And now, I stand before you, Mr. President -- Commander-in-Chief of the army that freed me, and tens of thousands of others -- and I am filled with a profound and abiding gratitude to the American people. Gratitude is a word that I cherish. Gratitude is what defines the humanity of the human being.” – Elie Wiesel

Anecdote

Short tale narrating an interesting or amusing biographical incident.

- ex. “You know, I've heard from an Army captain who was the head of a rifle platoon -- supposed to have 39 men in a rifle platoon. Ended up being sent to Afghanistan with 24 because 15 of those soldiers had been sent to Iraq. And as a consequence, they didn't have enough ammunition, they didn't have enough humvees. They were actually capturing Taliban weapons, because it was easier to get Taliban weapons than it was for them to get properly equipped by our current commander in chief.” – Barack Obama

Parallelism

Several phrases or sentences expressed similarly to show that ideas are equal in importance; adds balance, clarity, and rhythm to sentence(s)

- ex. He liked to eat watermelon and to avoid grapefruit. (parallel verbs and direct objects)
- ex. I have always sought but seldom obtained a parking space by the door. (parallel verbs and adverbs)
- ex. To think accurately and to write precisely are interrelated goals. (parallel infinitive phrases)
- ex. “Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.” – JFK, Inaugural Address

Appositive

A word or group of words that tells us more about the noun that comes before/after it; adds context to that noun

- ex. My brother's car, a flashy red convertible with leather seats, is the envy of my friends.
- ex. "Here, in the great, liberal state of Massachusetts, the cradle of liberty and abolitionism, a woman was arrested on a minor criminal charge." – Pauli Murray
- ex. "John Fitzgerald Kennedy, a great and good President, a friend of all people of goodwill, a believer in the dignity and equality of all human beings, a fighter for justice, an apostle of peace, has been snatched from our midst by the bullet of an assassin." – Justice Earl Warren

Epithet

A phrase that uses an appropriate adjective (usually habitually) to characterize a person or thing (many are clichés)

- ex. blood-red sky, heartfelt thanks, stone-cold heart, fleet-footed Achilles, star-crossed lovers, Alexander the Great
- ex. “Western European nations show their determination to resist aggression. All could acquire an unbreakable strength if bundled together.” – Bernard Baruch, *On the Cold War*
- ex. “Now, in this anxious autumn from those heroic men, there comes back an answering appeal.” – Dwight D. Eisenhower

Understatement

A figure of speech in which a writer/speaker deliberately makes a situation seem less serious or important than it actually is (often used for comic effect)

- ex. “I have to have this operation ... It isn't very serious. I have this tiny little tumor on the brain.”
– *Catcher in the Rye*
- ex. “It’s just a flesh wound.” – *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (after the Black Knight’s arms are cut off)
- ex. Tiger Woods is an ‘all right’ golfer.