



First Stage  
Morning & Evening Classes  
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## Literary devices

**L**iterary devices refer to any specific aspect of literature, or a particular work that can be recognized, identified, interpreted and/or analyzed. The most common literary devices that can be found in a literary text are:

**Exposition:** Where an author interrupts a story in order to explain something, usually to provide important background information

**Figurative language:** Any use of language where the intended meaning differs from the actual literal meaning of the words themselves. There are many techniques which can rightly be called figurative language, including metaphor, simile, hyperbole, personification, onomatopoeia, verbal irony, and oxymoron. (Related: figure of speech).

**Foreshadowing:** Where future events in a story, or perhaps the outcome, are suggested by the author before they happen. Foreshadowing can take many forms and be accomplished in many ways, with varying degrees of

subtlety. However, if the outcome is deliberately and explicitly revealed early in a story (such as by the use of a narrator or flashback structure), such information does not constitute foreshadowing.

**Imagery:** Language which describes something in detail, using words to substitute for and create sensory stimulation, including visual imagery and sound imagery. Also refers to specific and recurring types of images, such as food imagery and nature imagery.

**Irony:** Where the audience or reader is aware of something important, of which the characters in the story are not aware or where an event occurs which is unexpected, and which is in absurd or mocking opposition to what is expected or appropriate.

**Metaphor:** A direct relationship where one thing or idea substitutes for another.

**Onomatopoeia:** Where sounds are spelled out as words; or, when words describing sounds actually sound like the sounds they describe.

**Oxymoron:** A contradiction in terms.

**Paradox:** Where a situation is created which cannot possibly exist, because different elements of it cancel each other out.

**Parallelism:** Use of similar or identical language, structures, events, or ideas in different parts of a text.

**Personification:** (I) Where inanimate objects or abstract concepts are seemingly given human self-awareness; where human thoughts, actions and perceptions are directly attributed to inanimate objects or abstract ideas.

**Repetition:** Where a specific word, phrase, or structure is repeated several times, to emphasize a particular idea.

**Simile:** An indirect relationship where one thing or idea is described as being similar to another. Similes usually contain the words “like” or “as,” but not always.

**Symbolism:** The use of specific objects or images to represent abstract ideas. This term is commonly misused, describing any and all

representational relationships, which in fact are more often metaphorical than symbolic. A symbol must be something tangible or visible, while the idea it symbolizes must be something abstract or universal.

**Point-of-view:** The identity of the narrative voice; the person or entity through whom the reader experiences the story. May be third-person (no narrator; omniscient or limited) or first-person (narrated by a character in the story who either merely observes or directly participates). Point of-view is a commonly misused term; it does not refer to the author's (or characters') feelings, opinions, perspectives, biases, etc.

**Protagonist:** The leading (main) character in a story, the one with whom the reader is meant to identify. The person is not necessarily "good" by any conventional moral standard, but he/she is the person in whose plight the reader is most invested. There is also the antagonist, a character in a story who is presented as the chief foe of the protagonist.

**Tragedy:** Where a story ends with a negative or unfortunate outcome that was essentially avoidable, usually caused by a flaw in the central character's personality. Tragedy is really more of a dramatic genre than a literary element; a play can be referred to as a tragedy, but tragic events in a story are essentially part of the plot, rather than a literary device in themselves.