

Imagery



What images come to mind?

Imagery is the use of language to describe or represent things, actions, feelings, ideas, and sensory experience. Imagery may be literal or figurative. Imagery evokes sense perceptions: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch. That is, the words make readers imagine the look, the sound, the smell, the taste, and the touch of something.

Literal Imagery

Literal imagery is language that is meant to be taken at one level --literally. The following description from Alistair MacLeod's "In the Fall" paints a clear visual image. Note that everything should be taken literally.

My father is standing with his back toward us and is looking out the window to where the ocean pounds against the cliffs. His hands are clasped behind his back. He must be squeezing them together very tightly because they are almost white --especially the left. My father's left hand is larger than his right and his left arm is about three inches longer than normal. That is because he holds his stevedore's hook in his left hand when he works upon the waterfront in Halifax. His complexion is lighter than my mother's and his eyes are



grey, which is also the predominant colour of his thinning hair. (99-100)

Figurative Imagery

Figurative imagery is language that goes beyond literal meaning by use of figurative language. The devices of figurative language are called figures of speech. You cannot take these literally.

Examine this next paragraph from the same Alistair MacLeod story, "In the Fall." Notice how the ocean takes on the emotions and behaviours of a human.



It is hard to believe that this same ocean that is the crystal blue of summer when only the thin oil-slicks left by the fishing boats or the startling whiteness of the riding seagulls mar its azure sameness. Now it is roiled and angry, and almost anguished; hurling up the brown dirty balls of scudding foam, the sticks of pulpwood from some lonely freighter, the caps of unknown men, buoys from mangled fishing nets and the inevitable bottles that contain no messages. And always also the shreds of blackened and stringy seaweed that it has ripped and torn from its own lower regions, as if this is the season for self-mutilation -- the pulling out of the secret, private, unseen hair. (99)

By using figurative language, MacLeod gives the ocean the qualities of an angry, self-abusive person.

Figurative Language

Language is figurative when it makes use of figures of speech. These use "language that depart[s] from

customary construction, order, or significance in order to achieve special effects or meanings" (Holman 203). In some cases, one thing is being compared to another thing that is quite different; the two things do, however, share some common quality and that is the point of the comparison. In other cases repeated sounds (specific consonants or vowels) are used for effect.

The most common figures of speech are listed in the following chart.

Figures of Speech		
Strategy/Device Definition	Example	Why/How it is an effective device
<p><i>Antithesis</i> uses contrasting words, clauses, sentences, or ideas, balancing one term against another for emphasis. The opposition should be written in similar grammatical structure, nouns opposing nouns, verbs opposing verbs. Closely related to <i>Oxymoron</i> and <i>Paradox</i>.</p>	<p>"The hungry judges soon the sentence sign, And wretches hang that jury-men may dine." (Pope)</p>	<p>-provides emphasis -arouses a sense of irony</p>

<p><i>Apostrophe</i> involves addressing a thing (real or abstract) or person as if present, when it is absent or even dead.</p>	<p>A young girl evokes her father who has passed away, saying, "Daddy, please help me now."</p>	<p>-conveys deep emotional expression</p>
<p><i>Hyperbole</i> (pronounced hi-Pur-bo-lee), is an overstatement or extreme exaggeration.</p>	<p>I thought I would die.</p>	<p>-emphasis -humour</p>
<p><i>Metaphor</i> is an imaginative comparison which does not use "like" or "as." The comparison is between two things that are essentially different but alike in one way. The comparison is implied, rather than stated explicitly.</p>	<p>"He was a surgeon in his approach to the consumption of his meals." "Her eyes were coal."</p>	<p>-to convey information about a known person/object by comparing him/her/it to something with which the reader is familiar -to evoke a strong sensory image</p>
<p><i>Metonymy</i> (pronounced me-TON-i-me) replaces the name of one thing with the name of something else that is closely related to it.</p>	<p>"Don't rob the bench of its dignity." The bench is substituted for the judiciary. "The stage is not for me." The stage is substituted for theatrical performances.</p>	<p>-evokes a simple image (often a symbol) in place of the real thing</p>
<p><i>Personification</i> is the technique of attributing human qualities to non-human objects or settings.</p>	<p>"The willow tree hunched over the shallow brook as if in search of its own reflection." "The moaning wind would not surcease."</p>	<p>-brings inanimate things to life -provides emphasis -gives character to nature or objects</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Repetition</p> <p>Alliteration occurs when words that are close to each other share the same initial consonant sound.</p> <p>Assonance is the repetition of stressed vowel sounds.</p> <p>Consonance is the repetition of consonants before and after a vowel.</p>	<p>Alliteration: "the soft and silent snow"</p> <p>Assonance: "It's mail day today, eh?"</p> <p>"He was fit, not fat, and in ship shape."</p>	<p>-provides emphasis</p> <p>-gives a hard, soft, or ringing sound, adding to tone and atmosphere</p>
<p>Simile is an imaginative comparison which relies upon the use of "like" or "as". The comparison is explicit.</p>	<p>"He snored like a drowning bear."</p> <p>"She looked as comfortable as a sleeping baby in a cradle."</p>	<p>-to convey information about an known person/object by comparing him/her/it to something with which the reader is familiar</p> <p>-to evoke a strong sensory image</p>
<p>Synecdoche (pronounced si-NEC-du-key) replaces the name of one thing with the name of one of its parts.</p>	<p>"All hands on deck."</p> <p>"She needed to feed many hungry mouths."</p>	<p>-evokes a simple, smaller image (often a symbol) in place of an image of the whole thing</p>



