

# Understanding Literary Devices

A **simile** is a way of describing something by comparing to something else.

Examples:

The **bread** was hard as a **rock**.

The **woman** sang like a **bird**.

Similes always contain the words *like* or *as*.  
These are words used to compare things.



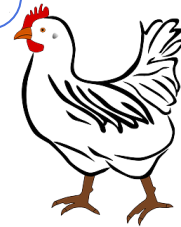
A **metaphor** is a way of describing something or someone by saying it (or he or she) is something else.

Example:

**She is a chicken when it comes to going to the dentist.**

Metaphors do not use the words *like* or *as*.

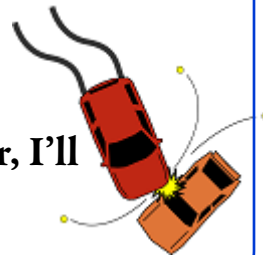
She does not actually turn into a barnyard animal. This means that she gets scared!



**Hyperbole** is an obvious exaggeration.

Example:

**When my parents find out what I did to the car, I'll be grounded for the rest of my life!**



A **pun** is when the meaning of a word is twisted to be funny, or words with similar sounds but meanings are switched to be funny.

Example:

**The fish could not carry a tuna.**



**Sarcasm** is a comment that teases or criticizes someone or something. It is often expressed by the person's tone of voice.

Example:

**When someone says, “Thanks, that was a really useful definition,” but they really mean it was not useful at all.**



**Onomatopoeia** is when words sound like what they are describing.

Examples:

**Splat! Sizzle! Woof! Cuckoo! Buzz!**



**Allusion** is an (often indirect) reference to something well-known, such as a famous text.

Example: **Allusion to Shakespeare:**

**The guy was a real Romeo—always sending flowers and gifts.**



**Situational irony** is when events are tied together in an unexpected way; for example, a strange coincidence.



Example:

**It was ironic that the forest caught fire during Fire Prevention Week.**

**Verbal irony** is when a person says (or writes) the opposite of what they really mean to emphasize a point.

Example:

**A parent talking to a teenager watching TV: “When you’re finished with your serious studies, maybe you could take some time out to relax and do a little yard work.”**



**Imagery** is when objects, actions, or ideas are described in detail so readers can picture them in their minds.

Example:

**The robin swooped and swirled around the tree, her wings beating a warning to the intruder. She screeched and flapped her wings frantically.**

**Symbols** are images or events that represent a larger idea, feeling, or belief.

Example:

**Sometimes writers use signs of winter—leaves falling off trees, geese flying South, flowers dying—to symbolize the death of a character.**

