

# Literary Devices

Definition and Examples of Literary Terms

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POPULAR LITERARY DEVICES

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## Connotation

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### Connotation Definition

Connotation refers to a meaning that is implied by a word apart from the thing which it describes explicitly. Words carry cultural and emotional associations or meanings in addition to their literal meanings or denotations. For instance, "Wall Street" literally means a street situated in Lower Manhattan but connotatively it refers to "wealth" and "power".

### Positive and Negative Connotations

Words may have positive or negative connotations that depend upon the social, cultural and personal experiences of individuals. For example, the words childish, childlike and youthful have the same denotative but different connotative meanings. Childish and childlike have a negative connotation as they refer to immature behavior of a person. Whereas, youthful implies that a person is lively and energetic.

### Common Connotation Examples

Below are a few connotation examples. Their suggested meanings are shaped by cultural and emotional associations:

- A dog connotes shamelessness or an ugly face.
- A dove implies peace or gentility.
- Home suggests family, comfort and security.
- Politician has a negative connotation of wickedness and insincerity while statesperson connotes sincerity.
- Pushy refers to someone loud-mouthed and irritating.
- Mom and Dad when used in place of mother and father connote loving parents.

### Examples of Connotation in Literature

In literature, it is a common practice among writers to deviate from the literal meanings of words in order to create novel ideas. Figures of speech frequently employed by writers are examples of such deviations.

#### Example #1

Metaphors are words that connote meanings that go beyond their literal meanings. Shakespeare in his [Sonnet 18](#) says:

“Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer’s Day”

Here, the phrase “a Summer’s Day” implies the fairness of his beloved. Similarly, John Donne says in his poem “The Sun Rising”:

“She is all states, and all princes, I.”

This line suggests the speaker’s belief that he and his beloved are wealthier than all the states, kingdoms, and rulers in the whole world because of their love.

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|                      |                  |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Ad Hominem           | Adage            |
| Allegory             | Alliteration     |
| Allusion             | Ambiguity        |
| Anachronism          | Anagram          |
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| Anaphora             | Anecdote         |
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| Limerick             | Line Break       |
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| Memoir               | Metaphor         |
| Meter                | Mood             |
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| Ode                  | Onomatopoeia     |
| Oxymoron             | Palindrome       |
| Parable              | Paradox          |
| Parallelism          | Parataxis        |
| Parody               | Pathetic Fallacy |
| Pathos               | Pentameter       |
| Persona              | Personification  |
| Plot                 | Poem             |
| Poetic Justice       | Point of View    |
| Portmanteau          | Propaganda       |
| Prose                | Protagonist      |
| Pun                  | Red Herring      |
| Reductio Ad Absurdum | Repetition       |
| Rhetorical Question  | Rhetoric         |
| Rhythm               | Rhyme            |
| Sarcasm              | Rhetoric         |
| Satire               | Rhyme            |
| Simile               | Rhyme            |
| Soliloquy            | Sarcasm          |
| Sonnet               | Simile           |
| Style                | Sonnet           |
| Superlative          | Style            |
| Syllogism            | Superlative      |
| Symbolism            | Syllogism        |
| Synecdoche           | Symbolism        |
| Synesthesia          | Synecdoche       |

Example #2

[Irony](#) and [satire](#) exhibit connotative meanings, as the intended meanings of words are opposite to their literal meanings. For example, we see a sarcastic remark passed by Antonio on Shylock, the Jew, in William Shakespeare's play "The Merchant of Venice":

"Hie thee, gentle Jew.  
The Hebrew will turn Christian: he grows kind."

The word "Jew" has a negative connotation of wickedness, while "Christian" demonstrates positive connotations of kindness.

Example #3

George Orwell's allegorical novel "Animal Farm" is packed with examples of connotation. The actions of the animals on the farm illustrate the greed and corruption that arose after the Communist Revolution of Russia. The pigs in the novel connote wicked and powerful people who can change the ideology of a society. In addition, Mr. Jones (the owner of the farm), represents the overthrown Tsar Nicholas II; and Boxer, the horse, represents the laborer class etc.

Example #4

[Metonymy](#) is another figure of speech that makes use of connotative or suggested meanings, as it describes a thing by mentioning something else with which it is closely connected. For example, Mark Anthony in Act III of Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" says, "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears." Here the word "ear" connotes the idea of people listening to him attentively.

Read the following lines from Robert Frost's poem "Out, Out":

"As he swung toward them holding up the hand  
Half in appeal, but half as if to keep  
The life from spilling"

In the line "The life from spilling" the word "life" connotes "blood". It does make sense as well because loss of blood may cause loss of life.

Example #5

Connotation provides the basis for symbolic meanings of words because symbolic meanings of objects are different from their literal sense. Look at the following lines from Shakespeare's play "As you Like It":

"All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts,"

"A stage" connotes the world; "players" suggests human beings; and "parts" implies different stages of their lives.

Function of Connotation

In literature, connotation paves way for creativity by using figures of speech like [metaphor](#), [simile](#), [symbolism](#), [personification](#) etc. Had writers contented themselves with only the literal meanings, there would have been no way to compare abstract ideas to concrete concepts in order to give readers a better understanding. Therefore, connotative meanings of words allow writers to add to their works, dimensions which are broader, more vivid and fresher.



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