

Literary Devices & Figurative Language- *Romeo & Juliet* Examples

Exposition

Setting: a story's time, place, and background

Example: Although no specific date is given, most scholars say the action of the play probably takes place around 1200 or 1300 A.D., when Italian families were feuding, in Verona, Italy.

Characters: the people (sometimes animals or other beings) who take part in the action of a piece of literature

Example: Romeo, Juliet, Friar Lawrence, Tybalt, Mercutio, and all of the other people in this play would be the characters.

Round Characters: have many personality traits, and are well developed like a real person.

Example: Romeo is a round character because he well developed and we know a lot about him, his family and his feelings.

Flat Characters: are one dimensional and underdeveloped. They are there to propel the plot or sometimes to provide comic relief.

The servants from Act 1 are flat characters. They are only there to give us background information about the feud between these two families.

Character Foil: a character who has qualities that are in sharp contrast to another character, thus emphasizing the traits of each.

Example: Tybalt is a foil to Benvolio. Benvolio is peaceful and wants to stop the fighting while Benvolio is rash and apt to fight.

Protagonist: the main character in a piece of literature

Example: In this play, Romeo is one protagonist. Juliet is the second protagonist of the play.

Antagonist: the person or force opposing the main character

Example: Tybalt is one antagonist in the play, because he opposes Romeo, who is a protagonist. Other antagonists of the play are the Capulet and the Montague families. Both of the families are the antagonistic forces because they are not allowing Romeo and Juliet to be together.

Aside: words spoken by an actor that is mean to be heard only by the audience

Example: Romeo uses asides as he is listening to Juliet's soliloquy in Act 2, Scene 2. In line 27, he says, "She speaks." He is not talking to Juliet, the only other person on stage. Only the audience is intended to hear this line.

Conflict: the struggle between opposing forces or characters

Example: An obvious example of conflict is Tybalt's hatred of Montagues, and especially Romeo, which ends with a fight. Another example of conflict in the play is the Capulet and the Montague families not allowing Romeo and Juliet to be together.

Foreshadowing: events which hint of things to come

Example: In the Prologue to Act 1, the Chorus foreshadows what will happen in the play. One thing that will happen is that a feud will be renewed violently, "as civil blood makes civil hands unclean"

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Idiom: An expression that can not be understood based on its literal meaning, but is clear to those who are familiar with the language of its origin.

Example: In Act 2 Scene 4 Mercutio says to Romeo, “Nay, if our wits run the wild goose chase, I am done. There is not going to really be a wild-goose chase, it is a saying that refers to something that is impossible to find.

Irony: What results when the actual outcome differs from what is expected.

Verbal Irony is the contrast or difference between what is said and what is meant.

Situational Irony is the contrast between what the characters believe is going to happen and what really does happen.

Dramatic irony is created when the audience knows something that one or more of the characters in the story do not. This usually creates anticipation in the audience, as they do not know if or when the character is going to discover when they already know.

Example: In Act 3 Scene 4, Lord Capulet happily plans for Paris and Juliet to marry. This is an example of dramatic irony because we know Juliet is already married and yet her parents are planning her wedding. The Capulets think that this will cheer Juliet up and yet it only causes more problems.

Monologue: a lengthy speech that one actor gives, that is addressed to other characters on stage and not just the audience.

Example: When Juliet first hears of Tybalt’s death, she is understandably upset and doesn’t know what to do, she goes into a lengthy speech saying, “Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband?” (3.2.97)

Rhyme: similar sounds between the ends of two words

Example: In the Prologue to Act 2, the Chorus speaks in a sonnet, a form of a poem. The first four lines contain alternating rhymes: Now old desire doth in his deathbed lie./ And young affection gapes to be his heir./ That fair for which love groaned for and would die./ With tender Juliet matched, is now not fair.

Soliloquy: a speech an actor gives when they are alone, as though talking to himself or herself, that often reveal their innermost thoughts or feelings.

Example: Romeo starts his famous soliloquy about Juliet with the words, “But soft, what light through yonder window breaks”(II.ii.2). He is speaking to himself about Juliet. Juliet starts her famous soliloquy about Romeo, “O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?”

Theme: the main idea of a piece of literature

Example: One theme of Romeo and Juliet might be that “haste makes waste.” In other words, hurrying too much often leads to problems.

Figurative Language:

Allusion: A direct or indirect reference to a significant person, event, time or work of literature.

Example: In Act 1 Scene 1 when Romeo is speaking of Rosaline, he describes her saying, “she hath Dian's wit;” This is an allusion where Romeo makes reference to the goddess of chastity and therefor implies that Rosaline has the mind of Diana, or is chaste.

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Because the audience of the time would have known who Diana is, they would have gotten the reference immediately, without Romeo having to say it out-right.

Hyperbole: a figure of speech which uses exaggeration to provide strong emotion, create humor or make a point.

Example: In Act 2, scene 2, when Juliet and Romeo discuss when to meet again, Juliet says, “’tis twenty years till then.” She is saying it will seem like it is 20 years until 9 o’clock the next day (the time when she will see Romeo again). This extreme exaggeration illustrates her desire to see him again and how any time apart seems too long.

Imagery: the use of figurative language to paint a sensory picture for the reader so that they may picture it as if they were watching a movie.

Example: In Act 1, Scene 5, lines 55 and 56, Romeo uses imagery to describe Juliet’s beauty when he says, “So shows a dove trooping with crows / As yonder lady o’er her fellows shows.” Romeo is comparing Juliet to a dove among the crows, meaning she stands out greatly. Doves are white while crows are black.

Metaphor : compares seemingly dissimilar things or ideas to point out the similarities without using like or as.

Example: In Act 2, Scene 2, line 3, Romeo uses a metaphor, saying, “Juliet is the sun,” meaning that Juliet is bright and beautiful. Another metaphor that Romeo uses for Juliet is also in this scene (see line 29), “O, speak again, bright angel! for thou art as glorious to this night, being o’er my head”

Metaphors may also be **implied**. The Prince uses implied metaphors when he angrily accuses the citizens: “... You men, you beasts, / That quench the fire of your pernicious rage / With purple fountains issuing from your veins!” The Prince compares the anger of the citizens to a fire, and the blood gushing from the wounds to purple water spewing out of fountains.

Oxymoron: combines two words of contrasting meanings to convey a single thought or idea.

Example: In Act I Scene 1, Benvolio tries to find out why Romeo is sleeping all day and wandering around all night. Romeo declares/uses oxymorons – “loving hate”, “heavy lightness”, “cold fire”— as a way to describe his love-sickness and confusion about his feelings for Rosaline.

Paradox : a statement that might seem to contradict itself but is nevertheless true; for example, “less is more.”

Example: In Act 1, Scene 5, line 152, Juliet expresses a paradox when she speaks of Romeo, saying, “My only love sprung from my only hate.” This seems to be a contradictory statement, because love and hate are opposites. Romeo is Juliet’s love and her hated enemy because she loves him, but he is a Montague and she is a Capulet.

Personification: Personification is a special kind of figurative language, in which something that is not person is spoken of as if it were human.

Example: When Benevolio says that the sun “peered forth the golden window of the East,” he is personifying the sun by saying that it peered, as if it has two eyes. Or later in the story Juliet says the sun “exhales” as if it is breathing out the light that brings the morning.

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Pun: plays on the multiple meanings of words in order to make a joke.

Example: Many of the puns in *Romeo and Juliet* go over our heads today because jokes go out of fashion very quickly and some of Shakespeare's wordplay involves words we don't use today. Mercutio is the best *punster* in the play, though Romeo does pretty well in Act II, when he matches wits with his friend. When Mercutio spies Romeo coming down the street, he says Romeo comes "without his roe." Roe can refer to a female deer, so if Romeo is without his roe, he's without his girl. Roe also refers to fish eggs, so "without his roe" can mean that Romeo's been gutted (we'd say he's "gutless"), as a fish is when its eggs are removed.

Simile: a direct comparison of unlike things using like or as.

Example: In Act 2, Scene 2, line 140, Juliet says that her "bounty is as boundless as the sea." In other words, she says what she has to offer Romeo is wider than the ocean.