Figurative Language

PROSE VS. POETRY

DEFINITIONS:

- **Poetry**: language that is similar to song; typically emphasizing the following: figurative language, musical sounds and rhythm, fewer and more meaningful words, and incomplete sentences.

- **Prose**: ordinary writing; a non-poetic way of expressing ideas

HINTS:

- You read prose when you read emails, essays, newspaper, and most novels.

- You hear poetry typically when you listen to songs.

SIMPLE PROSE EXAMPLE:

- Around every curve we spotted picture-perfect medieval towns atop small hills, often with shafts of light beaming down on them from between the clouds. Those images you know from paintings and movies? They're real. (from Mangia! Mangia! by Matt Gross in the New York Times, April 11, 2010)

This is clear, normal language we use to talk to each other. It’s prose.

SOPHISTICATED PROSE EXAMPLE:

- And when the top of her dress was around her hips and he saw the sculpture her back had become, like the decorative work of an ironsmith too passionate for display, he could think but not say, “Aw, Lord, girl.” (pg. 21 of Toni Morrison’s Beloved; 1987)

Even though this sentence contains some figurate language (like the simile “like the decorative work of an ironsmith...”), it is still written in prose or every-day language. Sure, it’s a little poetic; but it’s still prose.

SIMPLE POETRY EXAMPLE:

- What happens to a dream deferred?

  Does it dry up
  like a raisin in the sun?
  Or fester like a sore—
  And then run?

  (lines 1-5 of Langston Hughes’s A Dream Deferred)

You can tell that this is poetry because the author uses few words to contain a great deal of meaning. In addition, the lines are short and separate, and it includes rhyme (a key feature of poetry).

SOPHISTICATED POETRY EXAMPLE:

- "Will all of great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine, making the green one red."

  (II.ii.78- of Shakespeare’s Macbeth; c. 1604)

Although this sentence could be understood as prose, it is actually poetry because Shakespeare wrote with a specific rhythm (or meter). This rhythm makes it more like song and therefore it is considered poetry.

Please Note: Prose can be poetic and poetry can be prose-like at times.

DIACET:

Definition: The way a language is spoken; varies from area to area

Hint: It is like an accent; English is spoken differently in California than in Kentucky than in New York.
Example:

musta come from the sewer
swimmin aroun an tryin ta
climb up the sida the bowl
so I goes to flushm down
but sohelpmegod he starts talkin
(lines 6 - 10 of “Hazel vs. Levern” by Katharyn Howd Machan)

The way the character is talking, you are able to tell that she most likely grew up in the south. Dialect helps you know where people come from.

VERBAL IRONY/DOWN MEANING/PLAY ON WORDS/PUN:

Definition: Words that are said that do not mean exactly what they say.

Hint: The words will usually mean the opposite of what they actually are or will mean something similar to what they appear to mean.

Simple Example:

- "I lost my lunch money. That's just great."

In reality, it is not a great thing to lose your lunch money, as it probably means you won't eat. But the irony of saying "That's great" puts emphasis on the fact that it actually sucks a lot that you lost your lunch money.

Class Example:

- In “Stranger than Fiction” Harold presents Ana with a gift and says “I brought you flours.”

The play on words here is that typically a guy gives a girl “flowers”, but since Ana is a baker he gave her different types of baking flour and said “flours”.

COLOQUIALISM

Definition: Those phrases of speech that are familiar to use in informal everyday language.

Hint: Think words you use every day with your friends

Simple example: "What's cracka' lackin'?"

- You would say something along these lines to a good friend in greeting. This informal language is colloquialism.

Sophisticated example: "LOL"

- Text talk is also colloquialism because it too is informal language you use with friends.

DOUBLE ENTENDRE

Definition: Where a spoken phrase is said to have a double meaning, one is the clearly visible one, while the other can be a bit more hidden; usually involving sexual innuendo

Hint:

- they would rely more on multiple meanings of words, or different interpretations of the same primary meaning
- the second meaning could be probably ironic or inappropriate (usually dirty)

Example:
• One of Shakespeare’s plays is called “Much Ado About Nothing”. This could be understood in two ways, (1) making a big deal about nothing. (2) Making a big deal about sex (“nothing” was a slang term for sexual relations in Shakespeare’s day)

WIT

**Definition:** The kind of intellectual humor that creates laughter.

**Hint:** Monty Python; intellectual joking

**Simple example:** God: “Every time I try to talk to someone it's "sorry this" and "forgive me that" and "I'm not worthy"...” (Monty Python, 1975)

• This quote from Monty Python is wit because it is making fun of how people talk to God.

**Sophisticated example:** “I do not approve of anything that tampers with natural ignorance. Ignorance is a delicate exotic fruit, touch it and the bloom is gone” (The Importance of Being Earnest, Oscar Wilde, 1895)

• This quote from The Importance of Being Earnest is wit because it is mocking ignorance.

SPoonerism:

**Definition:** switching the beginning letters of two words to create two new words; often this produces humorous results

**Simple Examples:**

• Crushing blow / Blushing crow

  The first two letters of the words are switched to create a whole different meaning.

• It is customary to kiss the bride. / It is kisstownary to cuss the bride.

  The first two letters of the words 'customary' and 'kiss' are switched.

**Sophisticated Example:**

• Prucky lince! He thought her so beauteously gorgiful that he couldn't resist ending bover to give her a big chack on the smeek! She stoke with a wart and looked up into his fandsome hace. It was suv at first light.

  (Excerpt from Stoopnagle's Beeping Sleauty; c. 1946)
**IDIOM:**

**Definition:** Sayings or expressions that are unique to the culture and dialect of a certain demographic.

**Hint:** Idioms have the tendency to have a double meaning; one can be taken literally, and the other can only be understood depending on the individual’s understanding of that culture.

**Simple Examples:**

- **Cat got your tongue?**  
  Literally, it can be taken as someone asking why do you have a cat holding onto your tongue. It can also describe the act of keeping quiet.

- **Let the cat out of the bag**  
  Literally, it can be taken as someone asking to let the cat out of the bag. But it can also mean to make a secret known to someone else.

**Sophisticated Examples:**

- **Live off the fatta the lan’**  
  (Chapter 1, pg. 14.8 of Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*; c. 1937)  
  In this quote, it literally means to ‘live off the fat of the land’ which means to live comfortably off of the resources found naturally.

**Bonus Example:**

- "Nangisisda sa dalawang ilog" (Tagalog Idiom)  
  This short saying’s literal translation is "Fishing in two rivers". However, this saying has another meaning that usually refers to an unfaithful man in a promiscuous relationship with another woman despite the fact that the man is already in a relationship.

**MAXIM/APHORISM/CLICHÉ**

**Definition:** A saying of overall truth or observation, sometimes lost from overuse

**Hint:** You may hear the same phrase over and over again, when you’re feeling down or learning something.

**Simple example:** "One person’s trash is another person’s treasure"

- This is a saying that is used often by everyone.

**Sophisticated example:** "There are other fish in the sea"

- This saying is one that is said, typically when someone breaks up with someone. This too has been said way too often to carry any significant meaning.
OXYMORON:

Definition: a figure of speech that combines terms that usually contradicts each other in order to make a point.

Origin:
The word oxymoron is a combination of two Ancient Greek words:
1. "oxy" (Meaning pointed/sharp)
2. "moros" (Meaning dull/foolish)

Simple Examples:

- He was happy in his pessimism.
- It was a successful disaster.
- The officer admitted that it was a deliberate mistake.

In the first sentence, happy and pessimistic are two completely opposite emotions but it is still making a point.

- Jumbo Shrimp

Shrimp are small, but some shrimp are much larger than others. So, the phrase “jumbo shrimp” makes sense and doesn’t at the same time.

Sophisticated Example:

- O brawling love! O loving hate!
  O anything of nothing first create!
  O heavy lightness, serious vanity!
  Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms!
  Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health!
  Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!
  This love feel I, that feel no love in this.

(Act 1, Scene 1 of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet; c. 1597)

There are numerous oxymorons found in this passage such as: "brawling love", "loving hate", "anything out of nothing", "heavy lightness", "serious vanity", "Misshapen chaos", "feather of lead", "bright smoke", "cold fire", "sick health", "Still-waking sleep," and "This love feel I, that feel no love in this." All these examples contain words that are almost exact opposites of each other and yet, it still gets the point across.
**SIMILE VS. METAPHOR:**

Definitions:
- A *simile* is a comparison of two things, using the words like or as.
- A *metaphor* is a comparison of two things without using the words like or as.

Hints:
- A *simile* makes parts of things similar, but not equal, to each other. It more than likely will use
  the word like or as to compare the two things.
- A *metaphor* makes parts of things equal to each other. It will never use the words like or as to
  compare, but will often times use the words are or is.

Simple Example of Simile:
- His arms snapped like a twig when he fell out of the tree.

The way his bone snapped (broke) ≠ the way a twig snaps (breaks). But they are similar to each other.

Sophisticated Example of Simile:
- *Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?*
  Thou art more lovely and more temperate.

  *(Shakespeare’s “Sonnet XVIII”, Lines 1 - 2)*

While this does not use the words like or as, it is still a simile. The speaker is not saying to his
audience "you are a summer day" but instead is comparing them to a summer day and explaining how
they are similar. This is not a metaphor because it is making two things similar, not equal to, each
other.

Simple Example of Metaphor:
- "My heart is a butterfly when you’re around."

Here, the author's heart is being compared as equal to a butterfly whenever the other person is
around.

Sophisticated Example of Metaphor
  "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?
   It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
   Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
   Who is already sick and pale with grief
   That thou, her maid, art far more fair than she."

  *(Romeo and Juliet by Shakespeare; II, ii, 2-6)*

Here, Juliet (or more accurately her beauty) is being compared to that of the sun. The two thins are
being made equal here, not just similar.
EXTENDED METAPHOR:

Definition: A metaphor that extends beyond a few lines; usually, it will take up many lines or an entire poem

Hint: It will usually extend over a couple of lines.

Simple Example:

"But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief
That thou, her maid, art far more fair than she."
(Romeo and Juliet by Shakespeare; II, ii, 2-6)

Usually, a metaphor is just a quick, simple sentence. But in an extended metaphor, the sentence goes into great length and detail to explain the metaphor.

Sophisticated Example:

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,
His acts being seven ages. At first, the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.
Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like a snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like a furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
...
(from Act ii, Scene VII of As You Like It by William Shakespeare)

In this speech, a character is comparing the world to a theatre stage, claiming that life is like a great big play and we are all actors. Notice the ellipses (...) indicating that the metaphor continues. This monologue actually goes on for 28 lines.
**Mixed Metaphor:**

**Definition:** The act of putting two or more metaphors together that do not match with each other.

**Hint:** comparisons that don’t go with one another

**Simple example:**

"But sadly, that train has sailed."

*(Austin Powers, 1997)*

This quote has two metaphors that have nothing to do with each other. You could say “that train has departed” or “that ship has sailed”, but you don’t want to mix the two. Therefore it is a mixed metaphor.

**Sophisticated example:**

"Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them?"

*(William Shakespeare, Hamlet, 1603)*

If you read through this quote you will find that it has multiple metaphors that do not go together. The first metaphor: “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” creates a comparison to war. The second: “take arms against a sea of troubles” creates a comparison to the ocean. Both metaphors compare and express things that do not normally blend together.

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**Euphemism:**

**Definition:** using nicer or vague language instead of harsher words

**Hint:** Sugarcoating; to ease the blow of bad news.

**Simple Examples:**

- "Grandpa has gone on to a better place."

Instead of saying "Grandpa is dead", you use a euphemism to ease the blow, so as to, hopefully, not to upset people quite as much.

"The CIA used enhanced interrogation techniques on the terrorist suspect."

Instead of saying “torture”, the phrase “enhanced interrogation techniques” is used to confuse the meaning.

**Sophisticated Example:**

"But Syme was not only dead, he was abolished, an unperson. Any identifiable reference to him would have been mortally dangerous..."

*(from page 235 of 1984 by George Orwell)*

Unperson, and the explanation that follows, does not give you a 100% clear idea of what exactly happened to Syme. But we can infer, from the surrounding text, that he was probably killed in a most horrible way. The term unperson is a euphemism for the fact that, and way in which, Syme will be killed.

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**Overstatement/Hyperbole:**

**Definition:** A deliberate exaggeration, not meant to be taken literally, to create emphasis on something.

**Hint:** Often used in everyday speech, such as "You’re burning up!" when someone has a fever. Also used in poetry, often to get a point across.
Simple Example:
"Put on your jacket or you'll freeze to death!"

While it may be very cold outside, you will not, in reality, freeze to death. This over exaggeration is used, often by parents, to emphasize the need for wearing a jacket when it is cold out.

Sophisticated Example:
"Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No. This my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red."

(Act 2, Scene 2 of Macbeth by William Shakespeare)

Here, Macbeth is saying that he believes his conscience will never be clear of his guilt of his and Lady Macbeths killing of Lord Duncan (the blood on his hands) and that not even the whole ocean could clean his hands of this. This over exaggeration puts emphasis on how guilty he feels.

UNDERSTATEMENT/LITOTES/MEIOSIS

Definition: exaggeration that shrinks importance; not meant to be taken literally, to create emphasis on something.

Hint: Hyperbole exaggerates things to larger proportions; litotes exaggerates things to smaller proportions

Simple Example:
• “How did it feel when they tortured me? Well, it stung a little.”

Torture would obviously be excruciatingly painful. The phrase “it stung a little” completely understates how it felt.

Sophisticated Example:
• "We made a difference. We made the city stronger, we made the city freer, and we left her in good hands. All in all, not bad, not bad at all."

(Ronald Reagan, Farewell Address to the Nation, January 20, 1989)

President Reagan starts out talking about the great achievements made. But, then he understates their importance by describing them as “not bad, not bad at all”.
ARCHAISM/ARCHAIC LANGUAGE:

**Definition:** Words and phrases that were once used regularly in language. They can often be used to describe and refer to earlier times.

**Hint:** words that are old and rarely used anymore

**Simple example:**
- “thou”

‘Thou’ is the archaic way to say ‘you’. In the modern times we live in, saying ‘thou’ would sound out of place.

**Sophisticated example:**
- “anon”

This word was used by Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* (William Shakespeare, 1599) and means 'soon'. You can see this in the context of the play: "I hear some noise within; dear love, adieu!/ Anon, good nurse! Sweet Montague, be true./ Stay but a little, I will come again." [II, ii] Here Juliet is calling to the Nurse, in the hopes that when Juliet comes to her whatever the Nurse wants will be quick and Juliet can go back to Romeo.

MALAPROPISM

**Definition:** When a word gets substituted by a word that may sound the same, but has a different meaning.

**Hint:** using the wrong word that sounds like the correct word

**Examples of Malapropism:**
- "He is the very pine-apple of politeness!"
  (Mrs. Malaprop in Richard Sheridan's play *The Rivals*, 1775)

What is supposed to be said is: *pinnacle*

- "...she might reprehend the true meaning of what she is saying."
  (Mrs. Malaprop in Richard Sheridan's play *The Rivals*, 1775)

What is supposed to be said is: *comprehend*.

**Sophisticated Examples of Malapropism:**
- "Our watch, sir, have indeed comprehended two auspicious persons."
  (Dogberry from Act III, Scene v William Shakespeare's play *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1600)

The word “comprehended” should be “apprehended” and “auspicious” (which means “favorable”) should be “suspicious”.

In all these examples, the malapropisms completely change the meaning of what is being communicated.
**ANECTODE:**

**Definition:** A short story, usually about something that happened to you directly, that is used as evidence to make a point.

**Hint:**
Most commonly found inside of an essay, and used to help prove a point.

**Simple Example of Anecdote:**
- "Many people believe in the dumb blonde stereotype. There are many many jokes about blondes acting stupid. Many of today's T.V. shows and movies portray white, blonde, female actresses. They also portray them as sluts. This kind of mainstream media gives girls who are blonde low self-esteem and tends to make them feel they have to act stupid or dumb in order to get attention from anyone. But in the real world, blondes are actually just as smart as anybody else, as long as they don't buy into the stereotype.
  
  I myself am a blonde female and have always felt offended by such cruel, harsh stereotypes put against me. I was not the dumbest kid in school. One year, when we had to take our 7th science final, there was one question that stumped everybody in the class, except me. I was the only one who could get it right. The teacher even praised me in class and asked me to explain it to my fellow students, since I was the only one who understood."

In this passage, the anecdote appears in the second paragraph and is used as evidence to help provide that, while there is a stereotype of dumb blondes out there, not all of them are stupid. The example is short, personal, and educational.

**Sophisticated Example of Anecdote:**
- To conduct some forms of sleep research, we have to find a way to track sleepiness over the day. Some people might think that tracking sleepiness is a fairly trivial task. Couldn't you, for instance, simply count the number of times a person yawns during any given hour or so?
  
  In most people's minds, yawning—that slow, exaggerated mouth opening with the long, deep inhalation of air, followed by a briefer exhalation—is the most obvious sign of sleepiness....
  
  Unfortunately, yawns don't just indicate sleepiness....
  
  Yawning can be a sign of sleepiness or stress in humans. Once, when observing airborne troops about to take their first parachute jump, I noticed that several of the soldiers were sitting in the plane and yawning. It was 10a.m., just after a coffee break, and I doubted that they were tired; I knew for a fact that they were too nervous to be bored. When I asked about this, the officer in charge laughed and said it was really quite a common behavior, especially on the first jump.
  
  (Collegeboard SAT Study Guide)

In this excerpt, an anecdote is in the last paragraph. It is used to provide evidence for the author's argument that, while yawning is common amongst those who are tired, it is not the only reason for which you would yawn. Again, it is short, personal, and educational.

**ANAPHORA:**

**Definition:**
The deliberate repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of several successive verses, clauses, or paragraphs.

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From Devon. Shared on EC-Ning
Hint:

- It is either a word or phrase that is constantly repeated, usually the first one.

Simple Example:

- "We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills"
  
  (Winston S. Churchill)

The phrase "We shall fight" is being repeated throughout the verse. It is anaphora.

Sophisticated Example:

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe;
I told it not, my wrath did grow.
And I water'd it in fears,
Night & morning with my tears;
And I sunned it with my smiles
And with soft deceitful wiles.

(Lines 1-8 of William Blake's A Poison Tree, 1794)

In anaphora, simple words are repeated in most poems/verses/and paragraphs, just like in Blake's A Poison Tree, within the lines like the words I was, I told, And I, to emphasize on what target the poem is describing.
**ALLEGORY**

**Definition:** A story with two meanings those which are literal meaning and a symbolic meaning.

**Hint:**
- a symbolic story; when the whole story is a metaphor

**Example:**
- *Plato's allegory of the cave*

The cave in which the prisoners sit is our bodies. Plato believes that the soul is trapped in the body, and if we can travel with our soul to the exit of the cave, we can see true reality. He talks about breaking out of the chains and leaving the cave - which although is desirable is also scary so many prisoners do not really want to leave.

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**SYNECDOCHE OR METONYMY**

**Definition:** A part of an object is used to represent the whole thing, or when the object (as a whole) is used to represent a part of it.

**Hint:**
- these two terms aren’t technically the same, but they are SO similar that no AP test will ask you to tell the difference between the two

**Simple Examples:**
- Asking for help as a representation of "Lend me a hand."
- Describing a complete vehicle as “wheels”
- Calling a works “a pair of hands”
- “The White House said today...” (the actual building didn’t say anything; this phrase represents the U.S. President’s official statements)
- “They counted heads” (the word “heads” represents “people”)

**Sophisticated Example:**
- "Friends, Romans, countrymen: lend me your ears"
  (Act III, Scene ii of William Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*)

Here, the speaker is not trying to tell the people to literally give him their ears.
**Syntax vs. Anastrophe**

**Definitions:**
- Syntax: The way words are arranged in order to form sentences or phrases.
- Anastrophe: The way words are arranged for rhythm or meter.

**Hints:**
- Yoda has odd syntax; his words are out of order
- As a poet you might want to use anastrophe to help your poem flow better.

**Simple Syntax Example:**
- The ice cream was so tasty and creamy I ate it quickly
  vs.
  Quickly I ate the creamy and tasty ice cream.

We can change the syntax (word order) of a sentence and still keep the same meaning.

- "We turn not older with years but newer every day."

In Emily Dickinson’s birthday quote, we see how her syntax creates a more poetic effect.

**Sophisticated Syntax Example:**

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The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee!
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight, or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
I see thee yet, in form as palpable
As this which now I draw.
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In Shakespeare’s Macbeth, the syntax that we see in the above passage shows his somewhat deliriousness but also keeps it understandable and arranged with order.

**Simple Anastrophe Example:**
- Glistens the dew upon the morning grass. (Normally: The dew glistens upon the morning grass)  
  (http://rhetoric.byu.edu/figures/A/anastrophe.htm)

By rearranging the words it adds more to the words and the phrases, or emphases.

**Sophisticated Anastrophe Example:**
- It only stands / Our lives upon, to use Our strongest hands
  (Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra* 2.1.50-51)

Shakespeare is known for using Anastrophe in his poems, like in the example above, by switching words around it flows the sentence with rhythm and it highlights the important part of his sentence.
**PERSONIFICATION:**

**Definition:** A figure of speech that gives animals, ideas, and inanimate objects with human-like qualities such as figure of speech, character traits, or mental awareness.

**Hint:** Personifications are commonly used to create vivid descriptions of ordinary events or objects in life.

**Simple Example:**
- The ocean waves lashed out at the boat.

The object being personified here is the ocean waves, it is describing how the storm created powerful waves that 'lash'ed out' at the boat. The ocean can't choose to “lash” like a human.

**Sophisticated Example:**
- The house was the same, droopy and sick, but as we stared down the street we thought we saw an inside shutter move. Flick. A tiny, almost invisible movement and the house was still.
  
  (Chapter 1, pg. 15.5 of Lee's *To Kill A Mockingbird*; c. 1960)

The object being personified here is the house, its decaying appearance is personified as “droopy and sick”.

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**ANTHROPOMORPHISM:**

**Definition:** when a non-human thing is given human characteristics in a literal way

**Hints:**
- personification is figurative; when we read “the chair groaned under his weight” we understand that the chair didn't actually “groan”
- anthropomorphism is literal; when we see Mickey Mouse, we are to understand that he’s a mouse with human characteristics
- personification is used as figurative language while anthropomorphism is used to create characters in a story

**Simple Example:**
- animal cartoon characters
  
  (Mickey Mouse, Garfield, Tony the Tiger)

We know that these characters aren’t real, but we are to understand that they are real characters in their stories. They aren’t figurative like personification.

**Sophisticated Example:**
- A Hare one day ridiculed the short feet and slow pace of the Tortoise. The latter, laughing, said: “Though you be swift as the wind, I will beat you in a race.”
  
  (from George Fyler Townsend’s translation of *Three Hundred Aesop's Fables*, 1867)

In this well-known story, we have to believe that hares and tortoises can speak. They have been anthropomorphized.

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**ALLUSION**

**Definition:** when a story references another well known story

**Hint:** typically, novels or poems will quickly reference a scene or character from the Bible or a myth
Simple Example:
How many times can you
savor
a memory?
Each time replenished
infinitely.
Each time as delicious to my
hungry
brain,
like Tantalus in reverse
tasting her sweet plum tongue and
honey breath.
Until it fades into
blurry,
bland lines that
once
held so much joy.
(“How Many Times Can You Savor a Memory” by David Lee)

This poem quickly mentions “like Tantalus in reverse”. Tantalus was a Greek mythic character whose punishment in Hell was to be surrounded by food and water but always be hungry and thirsty. Each time he would reach for food, it would become inaccessible.

Sophisticated Example:

Nature's first green is gold
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.
(“Nothing Gold Can Stay” by Robert Frost, 1923)

In line 6, Frost quickly mentions “Eden”. This is an allusion to the Garden of Eden from the Bible. Since this poem discusses the theme of falling from a state of perfection, Frost alludes to Eden to remind his audience that Adam and Eve lost perfection when they were exiled from the Garden of Eden.