



Handout 2 - A Selection of Literary Techniques

Alliteration– The repetition of the same initial consonants of words or of stressed syllables in any sequence of neighboring words. (“She sells seashells by the sea-shore.”)

Allusion– An indirect or passing reference to an event, person, place, or artistic work. (“He’s got the golden touch”; “She’s a regular Van Gogh.”)

Analogy– Comparing two things to explain a complex idea in simpler terms. (“Brilliant as the sun.”)

Anastrophe– A switch in order between the noun and adjective in a sentence for dramatic impact. (“Times past and present.”)

Antithesis– A device used to create contrast by placing two parallel but opposite ideas in a sentence. (“That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.”)

Hyperbole– An intentionally exaggerated statement or claim not meant to be taken literally but creating a desired humorous effect. (“That joke killed me!”)

Irony–The expression of one’s meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite of what the writer intends to achieve a humorous effect or to add emphasis. (“As much fun as a root canal!”)

Metaphor– Placing emphasis on a particular aspect of a word by associating it with another, normally unrelated word. (“He was a lion on the battlefield.”)

Metonymy– Substituting one word for another, usually to make something abstract more concrete. (“Wall Street” standing in for the U.S. stock exchange; “The Crown” standing in for the British Royal Family.)

Onomatopoeia– Words whose pronunciation is close to the actual sound they represent. (“Bang,” “Whizz,” “Zip,” “Snap.”)

Oxymoron– A figure of speech in which apparently contradictory terms appear in conjunction. (“An original copy.”)

Personification– The attribution of a personal nature or human characteristic to a nonhuman or the representation of an abstract quality in human form. (“The wind whispers”; “The bed is calling out to me.”)

Simile– The process of establishing similarities between two otherwise dissimilar words or concepts, usually by using connecting words such “like” or “as.” (“He’s as quiet as a mouse.”)

Symbol/Symbolism– A thing that represents or stands for another thing, such as an object that represents an abstract idea. (“The dawn of a new era.”)