

Diction, Imagery, and Symbolism in *MACBETH*

Great writers write intentionally: they include literary tools and devices in their stories in order to make broader points about life in general. These literary tools—such as diction, imagery, and symbolism—often provide a unique or fresh way of looking at a situation or theme.

DICTION: word choice; the specific vocabulary a writer uses to elicit tone or mood, to reveal a character’s intentions, or to draw attention to a certain idea/theme

Ex: “During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country” (Poe, “Fall of the House of Usher”)

IMAGERY: sensory or figurative language that paints a picture in the reader’s mind; includes concrete details

Ex. from William Wordsworth

“I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o’er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.”

SYMBOLISM: a concrete object that represents a larger idea; a physical thing with an abstract meaning

Ex: the letter “A” in Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* represents not just adultery, but sin in general, especially public and humiliating sin.

Ex: the color of Luke Skywalker’s clothes in the original *Star Wars* trilogy

White→ black jacket→ white shirt underneath

In great literature, these tools often work together and interact to create meaning or theme, examining an idea from multiple artistic angles.

Other Literary Devices You Should Know...

1. Alliteration— words with the same initial consonant-sound in the same phrase
 - a. Creates a musical, songlike effect that emphasizes those particular words; goes hand-in-hand with diction
 - b. “Full fathom five thy father lies” *The Tempest*

2. Allusion— references another work of literature, art, or history, borrowing its meaning and concepts; very often references the Bible or Greek mythology
 - a. “Memorize a new Golgotha” (physically sacrifice oneself) *Macbeth*

3. Simile— compares two things using “like” or “as”
 - a. “Her beauty hangs upon the cheek of night, / Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear” *Romeo and Juliet*

4. Metaphor— compares two things (without “like” or “as”), often uses a form of “is”
 - a. “The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” (compares fortune to an archer) *Hamlet*

5. Personification— attaches human qualities to an inanimate object or concept
 - a. “Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care” *Macbeth*
 - b. Sleep cannot *literally* knit anything, but figuratively it heals and repairs the mind and body

6. Paradox— something that seems contradictory but is still true
 - a. “When the battle's lost and won” *Macbeth*