

Author's Use of Language

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Authors use words in ways that go far beyond what the dictionary says they mean.

Word choice is the use of words for what they suggest. Words that have the same meaning can suggest very different things. Using the right word adds to the story:

I reached the top of the mountain. As I stared out, I realized that I'd reached the peak. What was left to do next?

The dictionary definitions of top and peak are the same. Reaching the top sounds like you're the best. But saying that you've reached the peak suggests that your next step is to come down.

Figurative language connects things in an exaggerated way in order to create an image readers will remember. For example—

- **Similes** use *like* or *as*: “Mac charged the goal *like* a lion.”
- **Metaphors** use *is* or *are*: “Mac *was* a lion as he charged the goal.”
- **Personification** treats a thing or animal as a person: “The goal *called invitingly* to Mac.”
- **Hyperbole** is a total exaggeration. It can't be mistaken for the truth: “Mac charged the goal, *running 100 yards in less than a second.*”

Sound elements play with the way words sound together. They are common in poetry and in spoken forms of writing like speeches and plays. For example—

- **Rhyme** repeats ending sounds: “I know it's fate/I can't be late.”
- **Alliteration** repeats beginning sounds, usually consonants: “Ten tiny teacups teetered on the table.”
- **Onomatopoeia** uses a word that sounds like what it is: “The air *swished* through the willow trees and the frogs *croaked* in the night air.”

Sensory imagery connects to the senses, especially those other than sight:

I breathed the *sweet smell of roses* and the deeper, *earthy smell* of the night.

All of these are ways to make the action more realistic or exciting. Use of language separates great writing from bad, or even average, writing.



Connections The author calls Wednesday a “Perfectly Awful Day.” Why would the author capitalize these words? (Hint: Think about why you capitalize words in your own writing.)

Example

Read this excerpt from the first paragraph of *Daddy-Long-Legs*.

“But this particular first Wednesday, like all the ones before, finally dragged itself to a close.”

This excerpt is an example of which use of language?

- (A) hyperbole
- (B) simile
- (C) alliteration
- (D) personification

D I S C U S S	(A) Nothing in this sentence is an extreme exaggeration.	(C) There is no pattern of repeated beginning sounds in this sentence.
	(B) The narrator does use the word <i>like</i> . This is just a regular comparison. It is not exaggerated to create a memorable image.	(D) Wednesday “dragged itself” to a close. This makes the day sound like a living thing that can act on its own. That is personification.

Example

The author writes that “Jerusha dropped down on the window seat and leaned throbbing temples against the cool glass.” Why does the author say it that way, instead of saying that “Jerusha sat at the window seat and leaned her head against the glass”?

Kevin’s Answer

The author says it this way to make you feel how tired Jerusha is. She describes Jerusha as dropping, as if she had no control of it. Also, the author is using sensory imagery, making the sentence connect to your senses. Jerusha’s head is “throbbing,” so she leans it against the “cool glass” to feel better.

D I S C U S S	This is a very strong answer. Kevin gives a convincing explanation of why the author would choose these words. He describes their effect on the reader, and quotes details from the story to support his idea. He also correctly identifies the use of sensory imagery.
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