

Double Entendre

Definition of Double Entendre

A double entendre is a literary device that can be defined as a phrase or a [figure of speech](#) that might have multiple senses, interpretations, or two different meanings, or which might be understood in two different ways. Oxford Dictionary says that it “conveys an indelicate meaning.” The first meaning in double entendre is usually straightforward, while the second meaning is ironic, risqué, or inappropriate.

Examples of Double Entendre in Literature

Double entendre is used in literature, everyday life, films, magazines, and newspapers to criticize and provide entertainment, and sometimes to make people laugh. It is widely used for insinuation and [irony](#). William Shakespeare and Geoffrey Chaucer have made use of double entendre in their works.

Example #1: The 2,548 Best things Anybody Ever Said (By Robert Byrne)

“Marriage is a fine institution, but I’m not ready for an institution.” (Mae West)

The word “institution” in connection with marriage has two meanings in here. One, it refers to marriage as an important custom of a society. Two, marriage is something that will cause an individual to go to a mental institution.

Example #2: *Romeo and Juliet* (By William Shakespeare)

Nurse: "God ye good morrow, gentlemen."

Mercutio: "God ye good den, fair gentlewoman."

Nurse: "Is it good den?"

Mercutio: " 'Tis no less, I tell you; for the bawdy hand of the dial is now upon the prick of noon."

Nurse: "Out upon you! What a man are you!"

The [audience](#) may wonder why the nurse reacted negatively when Mercutio was plainly stating the time. This is because he was saying something quite different ... something that is sexual in meaning: *bawdy*, meaning "lustful," and *prick*, meaning "penis."

Example #3: *Are You Being Served* (By Jeremy Lloyd and David Croft)

Mrs. Slocombe: "Before we go any further, Mr. Rumbold, Miss Brahms and I would like to complain about the state of our drawers. They're a positive disgrace."

Mr. Rumbold: "Your what, Mrs. Slocombe?"

Mrs. Slocombe: "Our drawers. They're sticking. And it's always the same in damp weather."

Mr. Rumbold: "Really..."

Mrs. Slocombe: "They sent a man who put beeswax on them, but that made them worse."

Mr. Rumbold: "I'm not surprised."

Miss Brahms: "I think they need sandpapering."

Underwear and the sliding part of a cabinet (where items are placed) are both called "drawers." One can't help but laugh when one thinks of drawers as underwear, and hears the characters say their drawers are "sticking," and are thus "a positive disgrace," and when a man "...put beeswax on them," which "... made them worse."

Example #4: *The Odyssey* (By Homer)

It happens that Odysseus lands on the island of one-eyed giant Polyphemus and enters his caves with his twelve valiant soldiers. However, he is caught

When the Cyclops asks his name, he tells him that his name is “Nobody” and then plans with his surviving soldiers to blind him with a log made hot and sharpened with knives. When they succeed, the Cyclops cries out at the top of his [voice](#) saying, “Nobody has hurt me. Nobody is going to kill me.”

Here, “Nobody” has been used as a double entendre as it has double meanings. On the one hand, it means that “Nobody” that is Odysseus has blinded him while on the other hand it means that nobody has done this to the Cyclops.

Function of Double Entendre

As double entendre is a phrase that expresses double meanings, the purpose of using double entendre is usually to articulate one thing perfectly and indirectly. This is generally an insult, or an insinuation. Shakespeare made use of this device to add [humor](#) to his work. If the audience is able to understand the different meanings that the actors or characters are trying to convey, double entendres will surely create laughter, or put forward a certain suggestion.