

Irony

Definition of Irony

Irony is a [figure of speech](#) in which words are used in such a way that their intended meaning is different from the actual meaning of the words. It may also be a situation that ends up in quite a different way than what is generally anticipated. In simple words, it is a difference between appearance and reality.

Types of Irony

On the grounds of the above definition, we distinguish two basic types of irony: (1) [verbal irony](#), and (2) [situational irony](#). Verbal irony involves what one does not mean. For example, when in response to a foolish idea, we say, “What a great idea!” This is verbal irony. Situational irony occurs when, for instance, a man is chuckling at the misfortune of another, even when the same misfortune is, unbeknownst to him, befalling him.

Difference Between Dramatic Irony and Situational Irony

[Dramatic irony](#) is frequently employed by writers in their works. In situational irony, both the characters and the [audience](#) are fully unaware of the implications of the real situation. In dramatic irony, the characters are oblivious of the situation, but the audience is not. For example, in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, we know well before the characters that they are going to die. In real life circumstances, irony may be comical, bitter, or sometimes unbearably offensive.

Common Examples of Irony

Let us analyze some interesting examples of irony from our daily life:

I posted a video on YouTube about how boring and useless YouTube is.
The name of Britain’s biggest dog was “Tiny.”

You laugh at a person who slipped stepping on a banana peel, and the next thing you know, you've slipped too.
The butter is as soft as a slab of marble.
“Oh great! Now you have broken my new camera.”

Short Examples of Verbal Irony

The doctor is as kind hearted as a wolf.
He took a much-needed vacation, backpacking in the mountains.
Unfortunately, he came back dead tired.
His friend's hand was as soft as a rock.
The desert was as cool as a bed of burning coals.
The student was given 'excellent' on getting zero in the exam.
The roasted chicken was as tender as a leather boot.
He was in such a harried state that he drove the entire way at 20 miles per hour.
He enjoyed his job about as much as a root canal.
My friend's kids get along like cats and dogs.
Their new boss was as civilized as a shark.
The new manager is as friendly as a rattlesnake.
The weather was as balmy as a winter day in Siberia.
A vehicle was parked right in front of the no-parking sign.
The CEO of a big tobacco company said he did not smoke.
The fear of long words is called “Hippopotomonstrosesquippedalio phobia.”

Irony Examples in Literature

Example #1: *Romeo and Juliet* (By William Shakespeare)

We come across the following lines in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Act I, Scene V:

“Go [ask](#) his name: if he be married.
My grave is like to be my wedding bed.”

Juliet commands her nurse to find out who Romeo was, and says if he were married, then her wedding bed would be her grave. It is a verbal irony because the audience knows that she is going to die on her wedding bed.

Example #2: *Julius Caesar* (By William Shakespeare)

Shakespeare employs this verbal irony in *Julius Caesar*, Act I, Scene II:

CASSIUS: ” ‘Tis true this god did shake.”

Cassius, despite knowing the mortal flaws of Caesar, calls him “this god”.

Example #3: *Oedipus Rex* (By Sophocles)

In the Greek [drama](#) *Oedipus Rex*, written by Sophocles:

“Upon the murderer I invoke this curse – whether he is one man
and all unknown,
Or one of many – may he wear out his life in misery to miserable
doom!”

The above lines are an illustration of verbal and dramatic irony. It was predicted that a man guilty of killing his father and marrying his own mother brought A curse on the city and its people. In the above-mentioned lines, Oedipus curses the man who is the cause of the curse. He is ignorant of the fact that he himself is that man, and thus he is cursing himself. The audience, on the other hand, knows the situation.

Example #4: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (By Samuel Coleridge)

Irony examples are not only found in stage plays, but in poems too. In his poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge wrote:

“Water, water, everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.”

In the above-stated lines, the ship – blown by the south wind – is stranded in the uncharted sea. Ironically, there is water everywhere, but they do not have a single drop of drinkable water.

This is an example of situational irony, in which the wife sells her most prized possession – her hair – to get her husband a Christmas present; and the husband sells his most dear possession – the gold watch – to get his wife a Christmas present. By the end, it is revealed that neither has the utility of the present bought by the other, as both sell their best things to give the other one a gift. Combs, the gift for the wife, is useless because she has sold her hair. The gold watch chain, the gift for the husband, is useless because he has sold the watch to get the combs. The situation becomes ironic for such an incident.

Example #6: *Othello* (By William Shakespeare)

There are many examples of verbal irony, in which the [speaker](#) means the opposite of what he says, in *Othello* by Shakespeare, as given below:

OTHELLO: “O, thou art wise! ‘Tis certain” (IV.I.87), “Honest Iago . . . ” (V.II.88), (II.III.179) & (I.III.319), “I know, Iago, Thy honesty and love doth mince this matter” (II.III.251–52).

These few lines tell us how Othello uses irony to talk about Iago.

IAGO: “My lord, you know I love you.” (III.III.136)

This shows that Iago only uses this phrase superficially, with quite the opposite meaning.

Example #7: *The Tell-Tale Heart* (By Edgar Allan Poe)

In the short story *The Tell-Tale Heart*, by Edgar Allan Poe, there are many instances of irony as given below:

The murderer poses that he is a wise and intelligent person, who takes each step very carefully to kill the victim. However, the way the old’s man eye prompts him to murder the victim is very ironic. He behaves absolutely insanely throughout the story.

Another instance of irony in the same story is that the killer himself confesses his crime without being asked by the police. The police are there just to investigate the shriek some neighbor has reported.

confesses his crime of murder in their presence. He even tells where he has buried the dead body.

Function of Irony

Like all other figures of speech, irony brings about some added meanings to a situation. Ironical statements and situations in literature develop readers' interest. Irony makes a work of literature more intriguing, and forces the readers to use their imaginations to comprehend the underlying meanings of the texts. Moreover, real life is full of ironical expressions and situations. Therefore, the use of irony brings a work of literature to the life.

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