

# Paradox

## Paradox Definition

The term *paradox* is from the Greek word *paradoxon*, which means “contrary to expectations, existing belief, or perceived opinion.”

It is a statement that appears to be self-contradictory or silly, but which may include a latent truth. It is also used to illustrate an opinion or statement contrary to accepted traditional ideas. A paradox is often used to make a reader think over an idea in innovative way.

## Examples of Paradox

Your enemy's friend is your enemy.

I am nobody.

“What a pity that youth must be wasted on the young.” – George Bernard Shaw

Wise fool

Truth is honey, which is bitter.

“I can resist anything but temptation.” – Oscar Wilde

From the above examples of paradox, we can say that paradox creates a humorous effect on the readers because of its ridiculousness.

## Examples of Paradox in Literature

In literature, paradox is not just a clever or comical statement or use of words. Paradox has serious implications because it makes statements that often summarize the major themes of the work they are used in. Let us analyze some paradox examples from some famous literary works:

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**Example #1: *Animal Farm* (By George Orwell)**

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In George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, one part of the cardinal rule is this statement:

"All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others."

This statement seems to not make any sense. However, on closer examination, it becomes clear that Orwell points out a political truth. The government in the novel claims that everyone is equal, but it has never treated everyone equally. It is the concept of equality stated in this paradox that is opposite to the common belief of equality.

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### **Example #2: *Hamlet* (By William Shakespeare)**

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In William Shakespeare's famous play *Hamlet*, the [protagonist](#) Hamlet says:

"I must be cruel to be kind."

This announcement does not seem to make sense. How can an individual treat others kindly even when he is cruel? However, Hamlet is talking about his mother, and how he intends to kill Claudius to avenge his father's death.

This act of Hamlet will be a [tragedy](#) for his mother, who is married to Claudius. Hamlet does not want his mother to be the beloved of his father's murderer any longer, and so he thinks that the murder will be good for his mother.

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### **Example #3: *Romeo and Juliet* (By William Shakespeare)**

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From William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*:

"The earth that's nature's mother is her tomb;  
What is her burying grave, that is Rainbow in her womb..."

The contradictory ideas of the earth being the birthplace and a graveyard

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#### Example #4: *My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold* (By William Wordsworth)

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In his short [lyric](#) *My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold*, William Wordsworth remembers the joys of his past and says:

“The child is father of the man...”

This statement has a seemingly incorrect supposition, but when we look deep into its meaning, we see the truth. The poet is saying that the childhood experiences become the basis for all adult occurrences. The childhood of a person shapes his life, and consequently “fathers” or creates the grown-up adult. So, “The child is father of the man.”

#### Function of Paradox

The above reading may bring out the question, “Why is paradox used when a message can be conveyed in a straightforward and simple manner?” The answer lies in the nature and purpose of literature. One function of literature is to make the readers enjoy reading. Readers enjoy more when they extract the hidden meanings out of the writing rather than something presented to them in an uncomplicated manner. Thus, the chief purpose of a paradox is to give pleasure.

In poetry, the use of paradox is not confined to mere wit and pleasure; rather, it becomes an integral part of poetic [diction](#). Poets usually make use of paradox to create a remarkable thought or image out of words.

Some types of paradox in poetry are meant to communicate a tone of [irony](#) to its readers as well as lead their thoughts to the immediate subject. Paradox in most poems normally strives to create feelings of intrigue and interest in readers’ minds, to make them think deeper and harder to enjoy the real message of the poem.

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