

Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia Definition

Onomatopoeia, pronounced on-*uh*-mat-*uh*-**pee**-*uh*, is defined as a word which imitates the natural sounds of a thing. It creates a sound effect that mimics the thing described, making the description more expressive and interesting.

For instance, saying, “The gushing stream flows in the forest” is a more meaningful description than just saying, “The stream flows in the forest.” The reader is drawn to hear the sound of a “gushing stream,” which makes the expression more effective.

In addition to the sounds they represent, many onomatopoeic words have developed meanings of their own. For example, the word “whisper” not only represents the wispy or breathy sound of people talking quietly, but also describes the action of people talking quietly.

Common Examples of Onomatopoeia

The **buzzing** bee flew away.

The sack fell into the river with a **splash**.

The books fell on the table with a loud **thump**.

He looked at the **roaring**

The **rustling** leaves kept me awake.

The different sounds of animals are also considered as examples of onomatopoeia. You will recognize the following sounds easily:

Meow

Moo

Neigh

Tweet

Oink

Baa

Groups of Onomatopoeic Words

Onomatopoeic words come in combinations, as they reflect different sounds of a single object. For example, a group of words reflecting different sounds of water are: plop, splash, gush, sprinkle, drizzle, and drip.

Similarly, words like growl, giggle, grunt, murmur, blurt, and chatter denote different kinds of human [voice](#) sounds.

Moreover, we can identify a group of words related to different sounds of wind, such as swish, swoosh, whiff, whoosh, whizz, and whisper.

Examples of Onomatopoeia in Literature

Onomatopoeia is frequently employed in literature. We notice, in the following examples, the use of onomatopoeia gives [rhythm](#) to the texts. This makes the descriptions livelier and more interesting, appealing directly to the senses of the reader.

Below, a few Onomatopoeia examples are highlighted in bold letters:

Example #1: *Come Down, O Maid* (By Alfred Lord Tennyson)

“The **moan** of doves in immemorial elms,
And **murmuring** of innumerable bees...”

Example #2: *The Tempest* (By William Shakespeare)

“Hark, hark!
Bow-wow.
The watch-dogs bark!
Bow-wow.
Hark, hark! I hear
The strain of strutting chanticler
Cry, ‘**cock-a-diddle-dow!**’”

Example #3: *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (By Ernest Hemingway)

“He saw nothing and heard nothing but he could feel his heart pounding and then he heard the **clack** on stone and the leaping, dropping **clicks** of a small rock falling.”

Example #4: *The Marvelous Toy* (By Tom Paxton)

“It went **zip** when it moved and **bop** when it stopped,
And **whirr** when it stood still.
I never knew just what it was and I guess I never will.”

Example #5: *Get Me to the Church on Time* (By Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe)

“I’m getting married in the morning!
Ding dong! the bells are gonna chime.”

Onomatopoeia and Phanopoeia

Onomatopoeia, in its more complicated use, takes the form of *phanopoeia*. Phanopoeia is a form of onomatopoeia that describes the sense of things, rather than their natural sounds. D. H. Lawrence, in his poem *Snake*, illustrates the use of this form:

“He reached down from a fissure in the earth-wall in the gloom
And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied down, over
the
edge of the stone trough
And rested his throat upon the stone bottom,
And where the water had dripped from the tap, in a small
clearness
He sipped with his straight mouth...”

The rhythm and length of the above lines, along with the use of “hissing” sounds, create a picture of a snake in the minds of the readers.

Function of Onomatopoeia

Generally, words are used to tell what is happening. Onomatopoeia, on the other hand, helps readers to hear the sounds of the words they reflect. Hence, the reader cannot help but enter the world created by the poet with the aid of these words. The beauty of onomatopoeic words lies in the fact that they are bound to have an effect on the readers’ senses, whether that effect is understood or not. Moreover, a simple plain expression does not have the same emphatic effect that conveys an idea powerfully to the readers. The use of onomatopoeic words helps create emphasis.

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