

Hypophora

Definition of Hypophora

Hypophora is a [figure of speech](#) in which a writer raises a question, and then immediately provides an answer to that question. Commonly, a question is asked in the first paragraph, and then the paragraph is used to answer the question. It is also known as “antipophora,” or “anthypophora.” At first look, examples of hypophora may seem similar to [rhetorical question](#) examples, but there is a slight difference as explained below.

Difference Between Hypophora and Rhetorical Question

The basic difference between hypophora and a rhetorical question is that, in a rhetorical question, the answer is not provided by the writer, since it does not require an answer. Such as, “... for if we lose the ability to perceive our faults, what is the good of living on?” (*Marcus Aurelius*). However, in hypophora, the writer first poses a question, and then answers that question immediately; such as in this example:

“What should young people do with their lives today? Many things, obviously. But the most daring thing is to create stable communities in which the terrible disease of loneliness can be cured.”

(*Palm Sunday: An Autobiographical Collage*, by Kurt Vonnegut)

Examples of Hypophora in Literature

Example #1: *A Christmas Memory* (By Truman Capote)

“Thirty-one cakes, dampened with whiskey, bask on window sills and shelves.

Who are they for?

Friends. Not necessarily neighbor friends: indeed, the larger share is intended for persons we’ve met maybe once, perhaps not at all. People who’ve struck our fancy. Like President Roosevelt.”

In this example, the [speaker](#) raises a question in the beginning, and then answers it in the course of the passage. The question is shown in bold, that is “Who are they for?” The author wants to heighten the effect of important topics by asking a question.

Example #2: *Henderson the Rain King* (By Saul Bellow)

“What made me take this trip to Africa? There is no quick explanation. Things got worse and worse and worse and pretty soon they were too complicated.”

In this passage, the writer asks the question and immediately explains. This creates a rhetorical effect, which lies in providing the answer that readers might expect to be given by a writer.

Example #3: *Cherry Orchard* (By Anton Chekov)

TROFIMOV:

“Who knows? And what does it mean—you’ll die? Perhaps a man has a hundred senses, and when he dies only the five known to us are destroyed and the remaining ninety-five are left alive ...”

LUBOV:

“You want giants, do you? ... They’re only good in stories, and even there they frighten one ...”

TROFIMOV:

“Isn’t it all the same whether the estate is sold to-day or isn’t? It’s been all up with it for a long time; there’s no turning back,

There are three hypophora examples in this excerpt, shown in bold. Initially, the characters pose questions, and then answers in order to draw the attention of readers.

Example #4: *Waiting for Godot* (By Samuel Beckett)

ESTRAGON:

(gesture toward the universe). “**This one is enough for you?** (Silence.) It’s not nice of you, Didi. Who am I to tell my private nightmares to if I can’t tell them to you ...”

ESTRAGON:

“That would be too bad, really too bad. (Pause.) **Wouldn’t it, Didi, be really too bad?** (Pause.) When you think of the beauty of the way. (Pause.) And the goodness of the wayfarers. (Pause. Wheedling.) Wouldn’t it, Didi?”

Waiting for Godot is filled with this rhetorical device. Such as here, Estragon asks questions and then provides explanations to answer his own questions. The questions create curiosity, and also bring a new topic of discussion.

Function of Hypophora

The major purpose of using hypophora is to create curiosity among the readers, while a well-timed silence produces heightened effect, and creates interest. It helps to capture the attention of the [audience](#). However, hypophora can also be employed to introduce new discussions or topics of importance about which the readers might not have information. Also, it can be used as a directional device to change the topic. It can raise the types of question readers might already have on their minds and would like to get answers to. In addition, it is frequently used in political speeches as well as literary works.