

Atmosphere

Definition of Atmosphere

A literary technique, atmosphere is a type of feeling that readers get from a [narrative](#), based on details such as [setting](#), background, objects, and [foreshadowing](#). A mood can serve as a vehicle for establishing atmosphere. In literary works, atmosphere refers to emotions or feelings an author conveys to his readers through description of objects and settings, such as in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* tales, in which she spins a whimsical and enthralling atmosphere. Bear in mind that atmosphere may vary throughout a literary piece.

Difference Between Atmosphere and Mood

Many people use both terms interchangeably, as there is no concrete difference between them. However, in literature we find a mild difference. This is because atmosphere is a broader term, and may be set by a certain venue, such as a theater.

However, mood is a more specific and narrow term, concerning emotions of a certain individual or group of individuals, and it does not incorporate the emotions or feelings radiating throughout a venue. Simply, mood is about internal feelings, while atmosphere exists at a particular spot. Besides, a mood contributes for building up the entire atmosphere of a narrative.

Examples of Atmosphere in Literature

Example #1: *An Unspoken Hunger* (By Terry Tempest Williams)

“It is an unspoken hunger we deflect with knives – one avocado between us, cut neatly in half, twisted then separated from the large wooden pit. With the green fleshy boats in hand, we slice

vertical strips from one end to the other. Vegetable planks. We smother the avocado with salsa, hot chiles at noon in the desert. We look at each other and smile, eating avocados with sharp silver blades, risking the blood of our tongues repeatedly.”

Here, Williams creates a dangerous atmosphere, where she presents the hazards of knives and avocados. In fact, when an author tries to establish atmosphere by using objects, these objects represent unspoken reality. Besides, appearance of two characters also adds to a sexually charged atmosphere.

Example #2: *The Vision* (By Dean Koontz)

“The woman raised her hands and stared at them; stared through them.

Her [voice](#) was soft but tense. ‘Blood on his hands.’ Her own hands were clean and pale.”

When we read these lines, they immediately bring to our mind an emotional response, and draw our attention. This is exactly what atmosphere does in a literary work.

Example #3: *The Raven* (By Edgar Allen Poe)

“Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore –
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door –
“Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door –
Only this and nothing more.”

In this excerpt, the experience of readers is suspenseful and exciting, as they anticipate horror due to feelings within the narrative. As we see, this [character](#) hears tapping on the door and, when opens it, he finds nobody

Example #4: *A Tale of Two Cities* (By Charles Dickens)

Charles Dickens, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, creates an important atmosphere whenever a major event occurs in a plot. For instance, we see a ghostly mood of a messenger's entrance in Dover mail, which indicates things of the future. Then, Dickens builds up an atmosphere through the actions of his characters in the room of Dr. Manetas.

Within this, the author gives attributes to these places with different concepts and ideas. For instance, when Jerry goes to find Dover mail, to convey a message to Mr. Lorry, Dickens creates a gloomy and mysterious atmosphere, alluding to the darker end. Another type of atmosphere we see in the courtroom towards the end. During the scene, you would notice the public is searching and buzzing for victim after victim. Thus Dickens links the atmosphere of this place with death.

Function of Atmosphere

The purpose of establishing atmosphere is to create emotional effect. It makes a literary work lively, fascinating, and interesting by keeping the [audience](#) more engaged. It appeals to the readers' senses by making the story more real, allowing them to comprehend the idea easily. Since atmosphere makes the audience feel in an indirect way, writers can convey harsh feelings with less severity. Writers control the impact of prevailing atmosphere by changing the description of settings and objects.