

# Foreshadowing

## Definition of Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is a literary device in which a writer gives an advance hint of what is to come later in the story. Foreshadowing often appears at the beginning of a story, or a chapter, and helps the reader develop expectations about the coming events in a story. There are various ways to create foreshadowing.

A writer may use [character](#) dialogues to hint at what may occur in the future. In addition, any event or action in the story may throw a hint to the readers about future events or actions. Even a title of a work or a chapter title can act as a clue that suggests what is going to happen. Foreshadowing in [fiction](#) creates an [atmosphere](#) of [suspense](#) in a story, so that the readers are interested to know more.

## Short Examples of Foreshadowing

The final graveyard flower is blooming, and its smell drifts through their house, speaking gently the names of their dead.

(Foreshadows death)

The evening was still. Suddenly, a cool breeze started blowing and made a windy night.

(Foreshadows thunderstorm)

The most awful thing happened on a stormy evening,  
The battle between good and evil started.

(Foreshadows danger)

Mary pulled back the curtains and saw some magpies sitting on the wall.

(Foreshadows gossip)

They thought there would not be more bodies; however, they could not believe the thought.

(Foreshadows murder)

An old man opens his drawer to find a magnifying glass, and sees a revolver.

(Foreshadows warning)

In the middle of the night, the father hears the back door opening. He rushes to check on his kids, but a masked intruder is blocking the way with a knife.

(Foreshadows threat)

Rainbow sparks,

With shining lights.

(Foreshadows optimism)

Inhale fresh air, exhale bad breath.

(Foreshadows new ideas)

From the window, the gusts look so furious, the roofs of high buildings are stripped off, and the trees are torn up in the city.

(Foreshadows someone's angst)

Michael sees his own face under Donavan's mask.

(Foreshadows Donavan is his father)

They have made up their minds to remove an evil eye forever.

(Foreshadows harm to an evil character)

I observed devices,

The symbols in the books

To indicate the written future.

(Foreshadows writer)

As the twilight colors blush

The eyes of the night arouse.

(Foreshadows night)

The same old thinking and the same old results.

(Foreshadows change)

## Foreshadowing Examples in Literature

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### Example #1: *Romeo and Juliet* (By Robert Francis)

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Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is rich with foreshadowing examples, one of which is the following lines from Act 2, Scene 2:

“Life were better ended by their hate,  
Than death prorogued, wanting of thy love”

In the balcony scene, Juliet is concerned about Romeo's safety as she fears her kinsmen may catch him. Romeo says, in the above lines, that he would rather have her love and die sooner, than not obtain her love and die later. Eventually, he gets her love and dies for her love, too.

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## Example #2: *Great Expectations* (By Charles Dickens)

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Charles Dickens in *Great Expectations* uses a description of weather in Chapter 39 to foreshadow the momentous changes in the life of a character named Pip:

“Stormy and wet, stormy and wet; and mud, mud, mud, deep in all the streets. Day after day, a vast heavy veil had been driving over London from the East, and it drove still, as if in the East there were an Eternity of cloud and wind. So furious had been the gusts, that high buildings in town had had the lead stripped off their roofs; and in the country, trees had been torn up, and sails of windmills carried away; and gloomy accounts had come in from the coast, of shipwreck and death. Violent blasts of rain had accompanied these rages of wind, and the day just closed as I sat down to read had been the worst of all.”

The above lines are Pip’s observation on the weather before Magwitch’s arrival. It is a foreshadowing as well as a representation of Pip’s inner chaos. Just as the angry winds leave a trail of destruction in London, Magwitch’s disclosure opens a path of destruction in Pip’s life.

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## Example #3: *Da Vinci Code* (By Dan Brown)

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Examples of foreshadowing are also found in mystery and detective stories. The kind of foreshadowing usually found in mystery or detective novels is referred to as “Red-Herring” – this is a misleading clue that distracts readers by giving them wrong hints about future events.

For example, the character of Bishop Aringarosa in *Da Vinci Code*, by Dan Brown, is shown to act in such a suspicious way that the readers are bound to suspect him to be the mastermind of the whole conspiracy in the church. His mysterious actions seemingly foreshadow the exposure of his crime in a later part of the [narrative](#), but it is later revealed that he was innocent and not involved in any secret action. Characters like Bishop Aringarosa contribute to the mystery and suspense of the novel.

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#### **Example #4: *Of Mice and Men* (By John Steinbeck)**

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In John Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men*, George killing Candy's dog foreshadows George killing Lennie, because Lennie is identical to the dog. Even the nature of the death of the dog was the same as Lennie's, as both were shot in the back of the head. He chooses to kill Lennie himself in order to save him from being killed by a stranger.

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#### **Example #5: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (By S. T. Coleridge)**

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“Her lips were red, her looks were free ...  
Who thicks man's blood with cold.”

This part is the [climax](#) of ship's misfortune, depicted in a supernatural way. The arrival of a ghostly ship with ghosts as “Life-in-Death” turns the mariners lose hope and make them scared to death. This indirectly foreshadows the death of the entire crew and builds anticipation for the readers what is about to happen next.

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#### **Example #6: *The Highwayman* (By Alfred Noyes)**

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“The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees...  
Riding—riding—  
The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn-door.”

The above lines are entirely filled with melancholic tone and foreshadowing. The very first line calls wind “a torrent of darkness,” where darkness is a foreshadowing danger. The depiction of night and weather as ‘darkness’ foretells the coming of a dark tale.

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#### **Example #7: *The Tide Rises, The Tide Falls* (By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)**

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“The tide rises, the tide falls,

And the tide rises, the tide falls.”

The title of the poem foreshadows the entire poem, how nature and life start and end. It is about the tides, their motions, and the circle of life. The darkness and ups and downs of tides foretell that the travelers would never return.

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#### **Example #8: *David* (By Earle Birney)**

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“Away from the wind, and landed in gentian and saxifrage  
Spilled on the moss ...  
Cliff and splashed unseen into mist in the shadows.”

This excerpt gives descriptions of “darkening firs,” “sudden whirring of water,” and “splashed unseen,” foretelling a pending danger and some disaster about to happen.

#### **Function of Foreshadowing**

Generally, the function of foreshadowing is to build anticipation in the minds of readers about what might happen next, thus adding dramatic tension to a story. It is deliberately employed to create suspense in mystery novels, usually by giving false clues – or red herrings – to distract readers. Moreover, foreshadowing can make extraordinary and bizarre events appear credible, as the events are predicted beforehand so that readers are mentally prepared for them.

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