

Rhetorical Question

Definition of Rhetorical Question

A rhetorical question is asked just for effect, or to lay emphasis on some point being discussed, when no real answer is expected. A rhetorical question may have an obvious answer, but the questioner asks it to lay emphasis to the point. In literature, a rhetorical question is self-evident, and used for [style](#) as an impressive persuasive device.

Broadly speaking, a rhetorical question is asked when the questioner himself knows the answer already, or an answer is not actually demanded. So, an answer is not expected from the [audience](#). Such a question is used to emphasize a point or draw the audience's attention.

Common Rhetorical Question Examples

Rhetorical questions, though almost needless or meaningless, seem a basic need of daily language. Some common examples of rhetorical questions from daily life are as follows:

“Who knows?”
“Are you stupid?”
“Did you hear me?”
“Ok?”
“Why not?”

Mostly, it is easy to spot a rhetorical question because of its position in the sentence. It occurs immediately after a comment made, and states the opposite of it. The idea again is to make a point more prominent. Some rhetorical question examples are as follows. Keep in mind that they are also called “tag questions” if used in everyday conversation.

“It’s too hot today, *isn’t it?*”
“The actors played the roles well, *didn’t they?*”

Examples of Rhetorical Question in Literature

Rhetorical questions in literature are as important as they are in daily language, or perhaps even more so. The reason is the significant change a rhetorical question can bring about. The absence or presence of a rhetorical question in some of the most famous lines in literature would change the impact altogether. Some examples of rhetorical questions in literature show that writers sometimes [ask](#) questions, and then goes on to answer them to produce a desired effect.

Example #1: *Romeo and Juliet* (By William Shakespeare)

JULIET:

” ’Tis but thy name that is my enemy.

Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.

What’s Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot,

Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part

Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!

What’s in a name? That which we call a rose

By any other name would smell as sweet.”

A very good example of rhetorical question in literature is from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Here, Juliet makes a statement that a man’s name does not define him as a person. She draws attention to this issue by asking two important rhetorical questions, as noted in bold.

Example #2: *Ode to the West Wind* (By Percy Bysshe Shelley)

Percy Bysshe Shelley ends his masterpiece *Ode to the West Wind* with a rhetorical question:

“...O Wind,

If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?”

In this excerpt, Shelley achieves the desired effect by asking a rhetorical question, rather than making a statement. The answer to this question is not sought; rather, an effect is successfully created giving a fine finishing

Example #3: *Creation* (By Hladia Porter Stewart)

Mrs. Hladia Porter Stewart in her poem *Creation* employs rhetorical questions to create effect and achieve the desired appeal of the poem.

“What made you think of love and tears
And birth and death and pain?”

Without rhetorical question, it might have been impossible for the poet to express herself as impressively as she does here.

Example #4: *The Solitary Reaper* (By William Wordsworth)

“Will no one tell me what she sings?”

Notice, an answer is not expected to this question. The poet prefers a rhetorical question to a plain statement to emphasize his feelings of pleasant surprise. Thus, the poem’s meaning is enhanced by the use of a rhetorical question.

Example #5: *The Merchant of Venice* (By William Shakespeare)

“If you prick us, do we not bleed?
If you tickle us, do we not laugh?
If you poison us, do we not die?
And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?”

The [character](#) Shylock, in Shakespeare’s play *The Merchant of Venice*, asks a series of rhetorical questions in this excerpt. The questions don’t necessarily need answers. They are neither questions nor plain statements, but rather something in between the two.

Function of Rhetorical Question

Writers employ rhetorical questions for rhetorical effects, and we cannot

becomes all the more powerful, and our interest is aroused to continue to read and enjoy the technical and aesthetic beauty that a rhetorical question generates. Moreover, it is a requirement in persuasive speeches.