

# Synecdoche

## Synecdoche Definition

Synecdoche is a literary device in which a part of something represents the whole, or it may use a whole to represent a part. Synecdoche may also use larger groups to refer to smaller groups, or vice versa. It may also call a thing by the name of the material it is made of, or it may refer to a thing in a container or packaging by the name of that container or packing.

## Difference Between Synecdoche and Metonymy

Synecdoche examples are often misidentified as [metonymy](#) (another literary device). While they resemble one another to some extent, they are not the same. Synecdoche refers to the whole of a thing by the name of any one of its parts. For example, calling a car “wheels” is a synecdoche because a part of the car, its “wheels,” stands for the whole car. However, in metonymy, the word used to describe a thing is closely linked to that particular thing, but is not necessarily a part of it. For example, using the word “crown” to refer to power or authority is a metonymy, used to replace the word “king” or “queen.”

## Synecdoche Examples from Everyday Life

It is very common to refer to a thing by the name of its parts. Let us look at some of the examples of synecdoche that we often hear in casual conversations:

The word “bread” refers to food or money, as in “Writing is my bread and butter,” or “He is the sole breadwinner.”

The phrase “gray beard” refers to an old man.

The word “sails” refers to a whole ship.

The word “suit” refers to a businessman.

The word “boots” usually refers to soldiers.

The term “coke” is a common synecdoche for all carbonated drinks.

“Pentagon” is a synecdoche when it refers to a few decision makers.  
The word “glasses” refers to spectacles.

## Examples of Synecdoche in Literature

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### Example #1: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (By Samuel Taylor Coleridge)

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“The western wave was all a-flame.  
The day was well was nigh done!  
Almost upon the western wave  
Rested the broad bright Sun”

The “western wave” is a synecdoche, as it refers to the sea by the name of one of its parts, a wave.

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### Example #2: *Sonnet 116* (By William Shakespeare)

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“O no! It is an ever-fixed mark  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken.”

The phrase “ever-fixed mark” refers to a lighthouse.

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### Example #3: *Ozymandias* (By Percy Bysshe Shelly)

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“Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them.”

“The hand” in these lines refers to the sculptor, who carved the “lifeless things” into a grand statue.

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### Example #4: *The Secret Sharer* (By Joseph Conrad)

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“At midnight I went on deck, and to my mate’s great surprise put the ship round on the other tack. His terrible whiskers flitted round me in silent criticism.”

The word “whiskers” mentioned in the above lines refers to the whole face of the narrator’s mate.

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**Example #5: *The Description of the Morning* (By Jonathan Swift)**

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“Prepar’d to scrub the entry and the stairs.  
The youth with broomy stumps began to trace.”

In the above lines, the phrase “broomy stumps” refers to the whole broom.

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**Example #6: *The Lady or the Tiger?* (By Frank R. Stockton)**

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“His eye met hers as she sat there paler and whiter than anyone in the vast ocean of anxious faces about her.”

“Faces” refers to people, not just their faces.

## **Function of Synecdoche**

Literary [symbolism](#) is developed by the writers who employ synecdoche in their literary works. By using synecdoche, writers give otherwise common ideas and objects deeper meanings, and thus draw readers’ attention.

Furthermore, the use of synecdoche helps writers to achieve brevity. For instance, saying “The soldiers were equipped with steel” is more concise than saying “The soldiers were equipped with swords, knives, daggers, and arrows.”

Like any other literary device, synecdoche when used appropriately adds a distinct color to words, making them appear vivid. To insert this “life” factor to literary works, writers describe simple ordinary things creatively with the aid of this literary device.