

Comparison

Comparison Definition

Comparison is a rhetorical or literary device in which a writer compares or contrasts two people, places, things, or ideas. In our everyday life, we compare people and things to express ourselves vividly. So when we say, someone is “as lazy as a snail,” you compare two different entities to show similarity i.e. someone’s laziness to the slow pace of a snail.

Comparisons occur in literary works frequently. Writers and poets use comparison in order to link their feelings about a thing to something readers can understand. There are numerous devices in literature that compare two different things to show the similarity between them, such as [simile](#), [metaphor](#), and [analogy](#).

Examples of Comparison in Literature

In the following comparison examples, we will try to analyze [literary devices](#) used to show comparisons.

Metaphor

A metaphor makes a hidden comparison between two things or objects that are dissimilar to each other, but have some characteristics common between them. Unlike simile, we do not use “like” or “as” to develop a comparison in a metaphor. Consider the following examples:

Example #1: *When I Have Fears* (By John Keats)

These lines are from *When I Have Fears*, by John Keats.

“Before high-pil’d books, in charact’ry
Hold like rich garnerers the full-ripened grain,”

John Keats compares writing poetry with reaping and sowing, and both these acts stand for the insignificance of a life and dissatisfied creativity.

Example #2: *As You Like It* (By William Shakespeare)

This line is from *As You Like It*, by William Shakespeare.

“All the world’s a stage and men and women merely players...”

Shakespeare uses a metaphor of a stage to describe the world, and compares men and women living in the world with players (actors).

Simile

A simile is an open comparison between two things or objects to show similarities between them. Unlike a metaphor, a simile draws resemblance with the help of words “like” or “as.”

Example #3: *Lolita* (By Vladimir Nabokov)

This line is from the short story *Lolita*, by Vladimir Nabokov.

“Elderly American ladies leaning on their canes listed toward me
like towers of Pisa.”

In this line, Vladimir Nabokov compares old women leaning on their sticks to the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Here the comparison made between two contrasting things creates a hilarious effect.

Analogy

An analogy aims at explaining an unfamiliar idea or thing, by comparing it to something that is familiar.

Example #4: *The Noiseless Patient Spider* (By Walt Whitman)

These lines are from Walt Whitman's poem *The Noiseless Patient Spider*“:

“And you O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to
connect them,
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor
hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.”

Walt Whitman uses an analogy to show similarity between a spider spinning a web and his soul.

Example #5: *Night Clouds* (By Amy Lowell)

These lines are from *Night Clouds*, written by Amy Lowell:

“The white mares of the moon rush along the sky
Beating their golden hoofs upon the glass Heavens.”

Amy constructs an analogy between clouds and mares. She compares the movement of the white clouds in the sky at night with the movement of white mares on the ground.

Allegory

An [allegory](#) uses symbols to compare persons or things, to represent abstract ideas or events. The comparison in allegory is implicit.

Example #6: *Animal Farm* (By George Orwell)

Animal Farm, written by George Orwell, is an allegory that compares animals on a farm to the Communist Revolution in Russia before WW II.

The actions of the animals on the farm can be compared with the good and

corruption after the revolution. The animals on the farm represent different sections of Russian society after the revolution.

For instance, “Pigs” can be compared to those who became the authority after the revolution; “Mr. Jones,” the owner of the farm, is likened to the overthrown Tsar Nicholas II; and “Boxer,” the horse, stands for the laborer class.

Example #7: *Faerie Queen* (By Edmund Spenser)

Faerie Queen is an allegory by Edmund Spenser, in which the good characters of the book can be compared to the various virtues, while the bad characters can be compared to vices. For example, “The Red-Cross Knight” represents Holiness, and “Lady Una” Truth, Wisdom, and Goodness. Her parents symbolize the Human Race, and the “Dragon,” which has imprisoned them, stands for Evil.

Function of Comparison

The above examples of comparison help us realize that, in general, writers utilize different kinds of comparison to link an unfamiliar or a new idea to common and familiar objects. It helps readers to comprehend a new idea, which may have been difficult for them to understand otherwise. The understanding of a new idea turns out to be simpler when viewed with a comparison to something that is familiar to them.

In addition, by making use of various literary tools for comparison, writers increase their chances of catching the attention and interest of their readers, as comparisons help them identify what they are reading to their lives.