

Assonance

Assonance Definition

Assonance takes place when two or more words, close to one another repeat the same vowel sound, but start with different consonant sounds.

For instance, in the following sentence:

“Men sell the wedding bells.”

The same vowel sound of the short vowel “-e-” repeats itself in almost all the words, excluding the definite article. The words do share the same vowel sounds, but start with different consonant sounds – unlike [alliteration](#), which involves [repetition](#) of the same consonant sounds. Below are a few assonance examples that are common.

Common Assonance Examples

We light fire on the mountain.
I feel depressed and restle
Go and mow the lawn.
Johnny went here and there and everywhe
The engineer held the steering to steer the vehicle.

Brief Examples of Assonance

“If I bleat when I speak it’s because I just got . . . flee”
— *Deadwood*, by Al Swearengin
“Those images that yet,
Fresh images beget,
That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.”
— *Byzantium*, by W. B. Yeats
“Strips of tinfoil winking like people”
— *The Bee Meeting* by Sylvia Plath

“I must confess that in my quest I felt depressed and restless.”

— *With Love*, by Thin Lizzy

Examples of Assonance in Literature

Assonance is primarily used in poetry, in order to add [rhythm](#) and music, by adding an internal [rhyme](#) to a poem. Let us look at some examples of assonance from literature:

Example #1: Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening (By Robert Frost)

Try to recognize the use of assonance in Robert Frost’s poem *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*:

“He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound’s the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.
The woods are lovelyy, dar and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.”

The underlined bold letters in the above extract are vowels that are repeated to create assonance.

Example #2: *Early Moon* (By Carl Sandburg)

Assonance sets the mood of a passage in Carl Sandburg’s *Early Moon*:

“Poetry is old, ancient, goes back far. It is among the oldest of living things. So old it is that no man knows how and why the first poems came.”

Notice how the long vowel, “o”, in the above extract, helps emphasize the idea of something being old and mysterious.

Example #3: *Outer Dark* (By Cormac McCarthy)

The sound of long vowels slows down the pace of a passage, [setting](#) an [atmosphere](#) that is grave and serious. Look at the following example from Cormac McCarthy's *Outer Dark*:

“And stepping softly with her air of blooded ruin about the glade
in a frail agony of grace she trailed her rags through dust and
ashes, circling the dead fire, the charred billets and chalk bones,
the little calcined ribcage.”

The repetition of the long vowel sound in the above passage lays emphasis on the frightening atmosphere that the writer wants to depict.

Example #4: *Do Not Go Gentle into the Good Night* (By Dylan Thomas)

Similarly, we notice the use of long vowels in a passage from Dylan Thomas' famous poem, *Do Not Go Gentle into the Good Night*:

“Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage, against the dying of the light.
Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight,
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”

The poet deliberately uses assonance in the above lines to slow down the pace of the poem, and to create a somber mood, as the subject of the poem is death.

Example #5: *Daffodils* (By William Wordsworth)

William Wordsworth employs assonance to create an [internal rhyme](#) in his poem *Daffodils*:

“I wandered **l**onely as a cloud
That **f**loats on high **o**‘er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A **h**ost, of **g**olden daff**o**dils;
Beside the lake, **b**ene**a**th the **t**rees,
Fluttering and dancing in the **b**ree**z**e...”

Example #6: *The Feast of Famine* (By Robert Louis Stevenson)

“From folk that sat on the terrace and drew out the even long
Sudden crowings of laughter, monotonous drone of song;
The quiet passage of souls over his head in the trees;
And from all around the haven the crumbling thunder of seas.”
Farewell, my home,” said Rua. “Farewell, O quiet seat!
To-morrow in all your valleys the drum of death shall beat.”

This is a good example of assonance, in which almost all the lines contain one example of assonance. All the examples have been written in bold. In the first line, the /a/ sound has been repeated. In the second line, the /o/ sound, as in *dog*, has been repeated. In the third line, the /o/ sound as in *go* has been repeated. In fourth line, /ʌ/ as in *must* has been repeated. In the fifth line, the /a/ sound as in *air*, and the /e/ sound, as in *ten* have been repeated. In the sixth line, the long /e/ sound, as in *sheep* has been repeated.

Example #7: *When I have Hears* (By John Keats)

“When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,
Before high-piled books, in charactery,
Hold like rich garners the full ripened grain ...”

This excerpt has been taken from John Keats’ [sonnet](#), *When I Have Fears*. The first line exhibits repetition of the long /i/ sound, as in *tripe*. The second line again contains the same long /i/ sound. The fourth line repeats

Example #8: *The Master* (By Edgar Allan Poe)

“And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me – filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating`
‘Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door –
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door; ”
This it is, and nothing more.”

The Master, by Edgar Allan Poe, is teeming with the examples of assonance. The first line repeats the /ur/ sound, as in *bird*. The second line starts with the repetition of the short /i/ sound, and ends with the repetition of the short /e/ sound. The fourth line repeats the long /i/ sound twice. The third line has a short /i/ sound twice. The last line has again short /i/ sound repeated four times.

Function of Assonance

Similar to any other literary device, assonance has a very important role to play in both poetry and [prose](#). Writers use it as a tool to enhance a musical effect in the text by using it for creating internal rhyme. This consequently enhances the pleasure of reading a literary piece. In addition, it helps writers to develop a particular mood in the text that corresponds with its subject matter.