

Situational Irony

Definition of Situational Irony

Situational [irony](#) is a literary device that you can easily identify in literary works. Simply, it occurs when incongruity appears between expectations of something to happen, and what actually happens instead. Thus, something entirely different happens from what [audience](#) may be expecting, or the final outcome is opposite to what the audience is expecting. Situational irony generally includes sharp contrasts and contradictions. The purpose of ironic situations is to allow the readers to make a distinction between appearances and realities, and eventually associate them to the [theme](#) of a story.

Examples of Situational Irony from Literature

Example #1: *Harry Potter* (By J. K. Rowling)

The *Harry Potter* series is one of the most popular novel series having employed situational irony. Through seven novels, the audience believes that Harry can kill Voldemort, the evil lord. However, the audience is thrown off guard near the end of this series when it becomes clear that Harry must allow the evil lord to kill him, so that Voldemort's soul could become mortal once again. Hence, Harry allows himself to be killed in order to defeat Voldemort, which is exactly the opposite of the audience's expectations. By using situational irony, Rowling has done a great job of adding a twist to the story to further a complex [conflict](#).

Example #2: *The Story of an Hour* (By Kate Chopin)

A very famous example of this form of irony occurs toward the end of the short story, *The story of an Hour*, by Kate Chopin. In this story, the wife of

Mr. Brently comes to know that he is no more alive and has died from an accident, so she feels contented to live a long life of freedom with no restrictions. However, at the end of the tale, her husband comes back unexpectedly and, upon seeing him, instantly she dies from shock.

Example #3: *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (By L. Frank Baum)

The whole story of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* presents a case of situational irony. Dorothy goes to the wizard in order to find a way home, only to learn that she is capable of doing so herself. Scarecrow wished to become intelligent, but he discovers himself a perfect genius. Woodsman considers himself as not capable of love; nevertheless he learns that he has a good heart. Lion appears as a coward, and turns out to be extremely fearless and courageous.

Example #4: *Romeo and Juliet* (By William Shakespeare)

Romeo strives to bring out peace between Tybalt and Mercutio, and eventually between the Capulets and the Montagues. However, Mercutio's death, and subsequently Romeo's pledge to kill Tybalt, escalate a situation leading to his banishment, and finally to the death of both Romeo and Juliet.

Example #5: *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (By T. S. Eliot)

Eliot makes [comparison](#) between an evening with “a patient etherized upon a table.” By portraying a beautiful natural image, and comparing it with a painful and difficult medical procedure of the modern world, the poet makes use of situational irony for depicting a natural beauty's loss in the corrupted world.

Example #6 *The Necklace* (By Guy de Maupassant)

The plot of de Maupassant's entire short story *The Necklace* is an example of situational irony. For keeping up appearances, the leading [character](#), Mathilda, borrows a necklace from a wealthy friend but loses it. In order to return her friend's necklace, Mathilda and her husband replace this jewel

with another expensive one, however due to this replacement they went through a serious financial crisis. Years later, Mathilda meets this friend again, and learns that the jewelry she replaced with real and costly gemstones was merely a costume and artificial piece of jewelry.

Function of Situational Irony

The function of situational irony is to lay emphasis on important scenes and make strange and unusual images vivid. It creates an unexpected turn at the end of a story, and makes audience laugh or cry. Therefore, situational irony could be tragic or funny. Usually writers employ strong word connections with situational irony and add fresh thoughts, variations, and embellishments to their works. It may range from the most comic to the most tragic situations. Its comical use usually creates an unexpected turnaround in a plot for the betterment. Sometimes, these forms of irony occur because people identify certain events and situations as unfair or odd.

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