

Lesson 3: Literary Elements & Techniques Part 3

(approximately one hour)

Educator Note: In this session, students are going to be asked to apply some of the concepts they’ve played with in the first two sessions in broader ways. For instance, while they’ve been asked to deal with symbolism in relatively isolated contexts, in this session they’ll be asked to think about how those concepts might function in more subtle ways in longer pieces of literature.

It is likely students will find some of the later questions challenging, but you should encourage them not to be intimidated because they don’t know the “right” answer. As long as they can make an argument to convincingly support their case, there can be different ways to answer many of these questions.

Exercise 1

*Found you when your heart was broke,
I filled your cup until it overflowed.*

“Without Me”, Halsey

In the lines quoted above, how does the lyricist use figurative language?

Answer: The lyricist writes, “I filled your cup until it overflowed” (line 2), meaning that she showed a lot of love to the broken-hearted person she met.

Exercise 2

*Woke up feeling like a new James Dean.
I comb my hair like an old-school Sheen.
I'm feeling high like a late-night summer of last year, yeah.
Standing there with the red dress on you,
5 A Killer Queen, like a young Jane Fonda-
Is it me, or am I just having a good year?*

“Cool”, The Jonas Brothers

While the lyrics above are from a popular song, some of the references may not be familiar to you—you may not know, for instance, who James Dean or Jane Fonda are. Using context clues, however, answer the following question to the best of your ability.

Citing specific examples from the text, how does the lyricist use figurative language to characterize himself and the woman he is addressing?

Answer: The narrator says he felt like “a new James Dean” (line 1) and describes the woman in the red dress as a “young Jane Fonda”. Given the title of the song, and lines like “am I just having a good year?”, we can surmise that the narrator sees himself and the woman as ‘cool’ and is communicating this by comparing them to famous cool people.

Exercise 3

Educator Note: In the manner of the Regents exam, I’ve selected a few of the tougher vocabulary words in the next two selections to define at the foot of the page. Sometimes, the chosen words on an exam will be vital to the understanding of the passage. Occasionally, however, the test creators will select words of comparatively less importance and neglect to define more difficult and essential vocabulary.

The following story is set during the Irish Civil War, which took place during the 1920s. A civil war is when people from the same country fight each other.

The long June twilight faded into night. Dublin lay enveloped in darkness but for the dim light of the moon that shone through fleecy clouds, casting a pale light as of approaching dawn over the streets and the dark waters of the Liffey. Around the
 5 ***beleaguered** Four Courts the heavy guns roared. Here and there through the city, machine guns and rifles broke the silence of the night, **spasmodically**, like dogs barking on lone farms. Republicans and Free Staters were waging civil war.*

*On a rooftop near O’Connell Bridge, a Republican sniper lay watching. Beside him lay his rifle and over his shoulders was slung a pair of field glasses. His face was the face of a student, thin and **ascetic**, but his eyes had the cold gleam of the fanatic. They were deep*
 10 *and thoughtful, the eyes of a man who is used to looking at death.*

He was eating a sandwich hungrily. He had eaten nothing since morning. He had been too excited to eat. He finished the sandwich, and, taking a flask of whiskey from his pocket, he took a short drought. Then he returned the flask to his pocket. He paused for a moment, considering whether he should risk a smoke. It was dangerous. The flash
 15 *might be seen in the darkness, and there were enemies watching. He decided to take the risk.*

20 *Placing a cigarette between his lips, he struck a match, inhaled the smoke hurriedly and put out the light. Almost immediately, a bullet flattened itself against the **parapet** of the roof. The sniper took another whiff and put out the cigarette. Then he swore softly and crawled away to the left.*

Cautiously he raised himself and peered over the parapet. There was a flash and a bullet whizzed over his head. He dropped immediately. He had seen the flash. It came from the opposite side of the street.

25 *He rolled over the roof to a chimney stack in the rear, and slowly drew himself up behind it, until his eyes were level with the top of the parapet. There was nothing to be seen-- just the dim outline of the opposite housetop against the blue sky. His enemy was under cover.*

...

30 *Suddenly from the opposite roof, a shot rang out and the sniper dropped his rifle with a curse. The rifle clattered to the roof. The sniper thought the noise would wake the dead. He stooped to pick the rifle up. He couldn't lift it. His forearm was dead. "I'm hit," he muttered.*

Dropping flat onto the roof, he crawled back to the parapet. With his left hand he felt the injured right forearm. The blood was oozing through the sleeve of his coat. There was no pain--just a deadened sensation, as if the arm had been cut off.

35 *Quickly he drew his knife from his pocket, opened it on the breastwork of the parapet, and ripped open the sleeve. There was a small hole where the bullet had entered. On the other side there was no hole. The bullet had lodged in the bone. It must have fractured it. He bent the arm below the wound. The arm bent back easily. He ground his teeth to overcome the pain.*

40 *Then taking out his field dressing, he ripped open the packet with his knife. He broke the neck of the iodine bottle and let the bitter fluid drip into the wound. A paroxysm of pain swept through him. He placed the cotton wadding over the wound and wrapped the dressing over it. He tied the ends with his teeth.*

45 *Then he lay still against the parapet, and, closing his eyes, he made an effort of will to overcome the pain.*

...

The sniper lay still for a long time nursing his wounded arm and planning escape. Morning must not find him wounded on the roof. The enemy on the opposite roof covered his escape. He must kill that enemy and he could not use his rifle. He had only a revolver to do it. Then he thought of a plan.

50 *Taking off his cap, he placed it over the muzzle of his rifle. Then he pushed the rifle slowly upward over the parapet, until the cap was visible from the opposite side of the street. Almost immediately there was a report, and a bullet pierced the center of the cap. The sniper slanted the rifle forward. The cap clipped down into the street. Then catching the rifle in the middle, the sniper dropped his left hand over the roof and let it*
60 *hang, lifelessly. After a few moments, he let the rifle drop to the street. Then he sank to the roof, dragging his hand with him.*

Crawling quickly to his feet, he peered up at the corner of the roof. His ruse had succeeded. The other sniper, seeing the cap and rifle fall, thought that he had killed his man. He was now standing before a row of chimney pots, looking across, with his head
65 *clearly silhouetted against the western sky.*

The Republican sniper smiled and lifted his revolver above the edge of the parapet. The distance was about fifty yards--a hard shot in the dim light, and his right arm was
paining him like a thousand devils. He took a steady aim. His hand trembled with eagerness. Pressing his lips together, he took a deep breath through his nostrils and
70 *fired. He was almost deafened with the report and his arm shook with the recoil.*

Then when the smoke cleared, he peered across and uttered a cry of joy. His enemy had been hit. He was reeling over the parapet in his death agony. He struggled to keep his feet, but he was slowly falling forward as if in a dream. The rifle fell from his grasp, hit the parapet, fell over, bounded off the pole of a barber's shop beneath and then
75 *clattered on the pavement.*

Then the dying man on the roof crumpled up and fell forward. The body turned over and over in space and hit the ground with a dull thud. Then it lay still.

*The sniper looked at his enemy falling and he shuddered. The lust of battle died in him. He became bitten by **remorse**. The sweat stood out in beads on his forehead.*
80 *Weakened by his wound and the long summer day of fasting and watching on the roof, he revolted from the sight of the shattered mass of his dead enemy. His teeth chattered, he began to gibber to himself, cursing the war, cursing himself, cursing everybody.*

85 *He looked at the smoking revolver in his hand, and with an oath he hurled it to the roof at his feet. The revolver went off with a concussion and the bullet whizzed past the sniper's head. He was frightened back to his senses by the shock. His nerves steadied. The cloud of fear scattered from his mind and he laughed.*

90 *Taking the whiskey flask from his pocket, he emptied it a drought. He felt reckless under the influence of the spirit. He decided to leave the roof now and look for his company commander, to report. Everywhere around was quiet. There was not much danger in going through the streets. He picked up his revolver and put it in his pocket. Then he crawled down through the skylight to the house underneath.*

95 *When the sniper reached the laneway on the street level, he felt a sudden curiosity as to the identity of the enemy sniper whom he had killed. He decided that he was a good shot, whoever he was. He wondered did he know him. Perhaps he had been in his own company before the split in the army. He decided to risk going over to have a look at him. He peered around the corner into O'Connell Street. In the upper part of the street there was heavy firing, but around here all was quiet.*

100 *The sniper darted across the street. A machine gun tore up the ground around him with a hail of bullets, but he escaped. He threw himself face downward beside the corpse. The machine gun stopped.*

Then the sniper turned over the dead body and looked into his brother's face.

From "The Sniper", Liam O'Flaherty

beleaguered: suffering difficulties

spasmodically: sudden and brief

ascetic: strict & severe

parapet: low protective wall at the edge of a rooftop

remorse: regret

Educator Note: The ELA Regents Exams provide a short glossary of terms and definitions in the reading. Students need to know that they should check these words, but they are not necessarily important to the reading or questions.

1. How is the protagonist characterized?

Answer: The protagonist is characterized as having eyes with "the cold gleam of the fanatic" that are "used to looking at death" (lines 9-11).

2. What are some examples of imagery in this story? Specify what senses the author appeals to.

Sample Answers:

Sight: *“Dublin lay enveloped in darkness but for the dim light of the moon that shone through fleecy clouds, casting a pale light as of approaching dawn over the streets and the dark waters of the Liffey.”*

Taste: *“He broke the neck of the iodine bottle and let the bitter fluid drip into the wound.”*

Sound: *“machine guns and rifles broke the silence of the night, spasmodically, like dogs barking on lone farms”*

Touch: *“There was no pain--just a deadened sensation, as if the arm had been cut off.”*

Mood is probably a term you’ve heard your English teacher use. The **mood** is the feeling or atmosphere of a story. For instance, a horror story might have a frightening, suspenseful, or dangerous mood, while a story about the author’s childhood might have a happy and loving mood. An author creates the mood of a story in many different ways, including with the imagery they use. Keep this in mind as you answer the next question.

3. What mood or feeling does this story have? Explain how the imagery helps create this mood.

Answer: This story has a threatening and tense mood. The author uses imagery to create this mood by setting the story during a dark, haunting night, with sporadic gunshots echoing through the air, as well as vividly describing the sensations of being shot.

4. What might the protagonist’s action in the line below symbolize?

He looked at the smoking revolver in his hand, and with an oath he hurled it to the roof at his feet.

Answer: The protagonist throws his gun away, which symbolizes his sudden feeling of disgust for the violent act he’s just committed.

5. Given that the story takes place during a civil war, what do you think the symbolic meaning of the sniper’s duel might be?

Answer: On a literal level, the story is about a man who unwittingly kills his brother. On a symbolic level, it is a story about the horrible results of civil war, when people fight against

their fellow citizens, neighbors, and even family. It can even symbolize the fact that in any war, we are killing our “brother man”.

Exercise 4

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband’s death.

*It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half **concealing**. Her husband’s friend Richards was there, too, near her. It was he who had
5 been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard’s name leading the list of “killed.” He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message.*

*She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability
10 to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild **abandonment**, in her sister’s arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself, she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.*

*There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her
15 soul.*

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all a quiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

20 There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.

She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.

*25 She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke **repression** and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought.*

*There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She
30 did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air.*

Now her bosom rose and fell **tumultuously**. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will—as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been. When she abandoned herself, a
 35 little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: “free, free, free!” The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulse beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.

She did not stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and
 40 exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial. She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.

45 There would be no one to live for during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination.

50 And yet she had loved him—sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being!

“Free! Body and soul free!” she kept whispering.

Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for
 55 admission. “Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door—you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven’s sake open the door.”

“Go away. I am not making myself ill.” No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.

Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days,
 60 and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long.

She arose at length and opened the door to her sister’s importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister’s waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting
 65 for them at the bottom.

*Someone was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, **composedly** carrying his grip-sack and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of the accident and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine’s piercing cry; at Richards’ quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife.*

70 *When the doctors came, they said she had died of heart disease—of the joy that kills.*

“The Story of an Hour”, Kate Chopin

Concealing: hiding

Abandonment: giving up of self-control

Repression: rejection of emotions or ideas

Tumultuously: violently

Composedly: calmly

1. In 3-5 sentences, summarize what happens in this story.

Answer: A woman’s husband is believed to have died in a railroad accident. Those close to her try to break the news gently because she has a heart condition. She is overcome with grief and sadness for a moment, but then she begins to feel “free” as she realizes she will have a lot more control over the rest of her life without her husband. Her husband, however, did not actually die, and when she sees him alive and well, she dies of a heart attack. People say she died of happiness, though the reader might suggest other reasons.

2. Explain how the characterization of Mrs. Mallard in the story’s first line foreshadows the ending.

Answer: The reader learns of Mrs. Mallard’s heart condition in the first line, which is what eventually causes her death in the final line.

3. How many examples of imagery can you identify in the following paragraphs? Specify what sense each example appeals to.

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.

Sample Answers:

Sight

“tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life”

“patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds”

Taste

“delicious breath of rain was in the air”

Sound

“a peddler was crying his wares”

“notes of a distant song...reached her faintly”

“countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves”

4. What mood or feeling does the imagery in this section of the story create?

Answer: The imagery creates a feeling of natural beauty and vibrant life.

5. How does the mood created by this imagery contrast with the news Mrs. Mallard has just received? How might this reflect Mrs. Mallard’s emotional state?

Educator Note: Mrs. Mallard has just been told that her husband has died. What she notices in the natural world is music and “new spring life”, and blue sky shining through the clouds. This reflects the feeling of freedom that she is overcome with as she imagines her life without her husband.