



## Senses

A mouth was talking to a nose and an eye.  
 A passing listening ear  
 Said, "Pardon me, but you spoke so loud  
 I couldn't help but overhear."  
 But the mouth just closed and the nose turned up  
 And the eye just looked away,  
 And the ear with nothing more to hear  
 Went sadly on its way.



This simple poem by Shel Silverstein is a perfect introduction to **sensory language**. It hints at the importance of all five senses working together, of paying attention, of the power of words, and it even uses personification. To get us started, I want to put into your vocabulary (or review as the case may be) the following:

**Imagery** and the Big 3 of figurative language:  
**Personification, Simile, Metaphor**

Let's check out the "big umbrella" term first. **Imagery** is related to image, which usually means something you see, whether real or imagined. **Imagery in a poem is anything in the poem you can experience through your senses.** It can be a description of something visual, but an image may also represent a smell, a taste, something you can touch, or even an internal feeling such as drowsiness or hunger. Using **specific and concrete details** along with **sensory descriptions** also helps you **produce a strong image**.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, there was a whole school of poets called imagists, and you might enjoy some of their work. Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams, and H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) are the ones you'll mainly see in all those textbooks on the classroom bookcase by the front door. To illustrate what can be done with 14 well-chosen words, listen to Pound's "**Station in the Metro**" as I share a slide show I made. [Did you imagine it like this?](#)

### Now to the Big 3

**Personification** is attaching human qualities or characteristics to objects, animals, or ideas. In doing this, the writer gives a sense of animation and immediacy to otherwise impersonal concepts. I'll share six example poems I've chosen because they are short and I can fit a bunch on the handout. I like them as well and hope you do too.

#### The Poem

~Donald Hall

It discovers by night  
 what the day hid from it.  
 Sometimes it turns itself  
 into an animal.  
 In summer it takes long walks  
 by itself, where meadows  
 fold back from ditches  
 Once it stood still In a quiet row of machines.  
 Who knows what it is thinking?



#### Wind and Silver

~Amy Lowell

Greatly shining  
 The Autumn moon floats in the thin sky  
 And the fish-ponds shake their backs and flash their dragon scales  
 As she passes over them.



#### Death Stands Above Me

~Walter Savage Landor

Death stands above me, whispering low  
 I know not what into my ear  
 Of his strange language all I know  
 Is there is not a word of fear.



This poem, **Whale at Twilight**, by Elizabeth Coatsworth, shows how personification can be just part of the poem, not the whole poem. The sea is what is personified, but the poem is really about the whale, don't you think?

The sea is enormous, but calm with evening and sunset,  
rearranging its islands for the night,  
changing its own blues  
smoothing itself against the rocks without playfulness,  
without thought.  
No stars are out,  
only sea birds  
flying to distant reefs.  
No vessels intrude, no lobstermen haul their pots.  
Only somewhere out toward the horizon  
a thin column of water appears  
and disappears again,  
and then rises once more,  
tranquil as a fountain in a garden where no wind blows.



## November Day

~Eleanor Averett

Old haggard wind has plucked the trees  
Like pheasants, held between her knees.  
In rows she hangs them, bare and neat  
Their brilliant plumage at her feet.



## War

~Dan Roth

Dawn came slowly  
Almost not at all.  
The sun crept over the hill  
Cautiously  
Fearful of being hit  
by mortar fire.



**Figurative language** appeals to the emotions and imagination of each reader. It also enables you to say in a few words what might otherwise take many words. That's why it is especially valuable in poetry. Because a figure of speech is a comparison, it can often suggest several similarities. Let's talk about this in relation to the six previous poems. Figurative language also helps you make concrete or real an idea or experience that otherwise might be abstract or even bland. **It makes the unfamiliar become familiar and the general become concrete.** Figures of speech must never be used simply for ornament, however, no matter how much fun they are to think of and write. They must be an integral part of the writing. Whether you use any figure of speech in your writing depends on whether a need exists for using this type of language. **If you use a figure of speech merely to decorate your writing you will not really improve it,** and you will do an injustice to the basic functions of communication.

Besides personification, the other major figures of speech are probably familiar to you. A **simile** points out the likeness between two different objects using like or as for connecting words. Sometimes we drop the connecting word, and then it becomes a **metaphor**; the comparison is implied rather than stated. Let's brainstorm some common similes and metaphors. **Metaphors can be extended** into poems by adding more description and detail.

**Here's a little guide for using figurative language in writing.**

1. Think about a person, object, or scene to be described
2. Choose one or two characteristics to describe what you just thought of
3. Choose something that shares the characteristics you just wrote
4. Write a simile or metaphor that compares the two things and suggests the characteristics you thought of.