What is a literary device?

- A literary device refers to methods authors use to convey what they want.
- Here are some devices that are commonly used in comprehension passages. More devices can be found in the notes for Text 1.

1. **Analogy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What it is</th>
<th>An analogy is a comparison in which an idea or a thing is compared to another thing that is quite different from it. Metaphors and similes are examples of analogies.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Function</td>
<td>It aims at explaining that idea or thing by comparing it to something that is familiar.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>The lines below were taken from George Orwell’s narrative essay “A Hanging” where it exhibits an analogy between a prisoner and a fish.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“They crowded very close about him, with their hands always on him in a careful, caressing grip, as though all the while feeling him to make sure he was there. It was like men handling a fish which is still alive and may jump back into the water.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The people are taking a prisoner to the gallows to be hanged. They are holding him firmly as if he were a fish which might slip and escape.</td>
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1.1 **Simile**

- A figure of speech involving the explicit comparison of two unlike things using connective such as ‘like’ and ‘as’.
- While the two things being compared are different in most ways, they are similar to each other in one important way.
  - Hence, you have to figure out the similar characteristic of the two things.

> My spirits were at the lowest ebb imaginable. Suddenly I started to feel little pricking sensations about my midriff. I scratched the flesh thinly covering my rib cage. It felt like a page of Braille. Fleas! The sheepskins added to my bedding had left my sleeping bag infested with parasites.

What is effective about the simile “like a page of Braille”? [1]

Answer: It suggests that there were many small bumps on the writer’s skin.

1.2 **Metaphor**

- A figure of speech which states that something is equivalent to another thing which is not usually associated with (refer to simile for comparison).
- Metaphors are also known more occasionally as examples of imagery.
  - Hence, we have to visualize one thing as being another, instead of just being like another.

> Mark’s relationship with Grace often took him on an emotional rollercoaster ride.

Explain the effectiveness of the metaphor in the above statement. [1]

Answer: It suggests that Mark experienced periods extreme emotions in his relationship.
2 Connotation

**What it is**
Connotation refers to a meaning that is implied by a word apart from the thing which it describes explicitly. Words carry cultural and emotional associations or meanings in addition to their literal meanings or denotations.

**Function**
Connotative meanings of words allow writers to add to their works, dimensions which are broader, more vivid and fresher. In comprehension, inference questions often require you to identify and understand connotations. Hence, try to think of all the ideas associated with the word or phrase, instead of fretting over its dictionary meaning.

**Example**
For instance, “Wall Street” literally means a street situated in Lower Manhattan but connotatively it refers to “wealth” and “power”.

3 Denotation

**What it is**
Denotation is generally defined as literal or dictionary meanings of a word in contrast to its connotative or associated meanings.

**Function**
Connotative meanings of words allow writers to add to their works, dimensions which are broader, more vivid and fresher.

**Example**
An example of denotation literary term can be found in the poetic work of Robert Frost’s “Mending Wall”:

“We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.”

In the above lines, the word “wall” is used to suggest a physical boundary which is its denotative meaning but it also implies the idea of “emotional barrier”.

4 Foreshadowing

**What it is**
Foreshadowing is a literary device in which a writer gives an advance hint of what is to come later in the story. Foreshadowing often appears at the beginning of a story or a chapter and helps the reader develop expectations about the coming events in a story.

**Function**
Foreshadowing is often adopted to build anticipation in the minds of readers about what might happen next and thus adding dramatic tension to a story. It can be deliberately employed to create suspense.

**Example**
Charles Dickens in “Great Expectations” uses a description of weather to foreshadow the momentous changes in Pip’s life and outlook:

“Stormy and wet, stormy and wet; and mud, mud, mud, deep in all the streets. Day after day, a vast heavy veil had been driving over London from the East, and it drove still, as if in the East there were an Eternity of cloud and wind. So furious had been the gusts, that high buildings in town had had the lead stripped off their roofs; and in the country, trees had been torn up, and sails of windmills carried away; and gloomy accounts had come in from the coast, of shipwreck and death. Violent blasts of rain had accompanied these rages of wind, and the day just closed as I sat down to read had been the worst of all.”

The text describes Pip’s observation on the weather before Magwitch’s arrival. Just as the angry winds leaves a trail of destruction in London, Magwitch’s disclosure opens a path of destruction in Pip’s life.
5  Hyperbole

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What it is</th>
<th>Hyperbole, derived from a Greek word meaning “over-casting” is a figure of speech, which involves an exaggeration of ideas for the sake of emphasis.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Function</td>
<td>A figure of speech that uses exaggeration to catch the reader’s attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>“I’d rather die a thousand deaths than be your slave! This statement is a hyperbole, because one can only die once. The exaggeration is used here to emphasise the intensity of her hatred for her captor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6  Repetition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What it is</th>
<th>Repetition is a literary device that repeats the same words or phrases a few times</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Function</td>
<td>It is used to make an idea clearer or to emphasize its significance in the entire text. In a visual text such as an advertisement, it adds rhythm to it and thus, making it more pleasurable to read and easier to remember. This can help the viewers to remember a product better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Here is an excerpt from Winston Churchill’s speech during the Second World War:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

“We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender.”

Repetition is used in the speech to emphasize on the importance of the war for England. The repeated ‘we’ helps the listeners to relate better to the subject and to stir up patriotic sentiments among the people. |

7  Juxtaposition

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>What it is</th>
<th>Juxtaposition is a literary technique in which two or more ideas, places, characters and their actions are placed side by side in a narrative or a poem for the purpose of developing comparisons and contrasts.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Function</td>
<td>It highlights contrast between two things and allows the reader to understand the quality of one thing by comparing it to another. The comparison drawn adds vividness to a given image and provides a logical connection between two various vague concepts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>“A butler spends his days in a beautiful mansion dressed in a tuxedo, but returns home to a closet-sized apartment in a rundown part of town.”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This sentence juxtaposes two settings: a wealthy person’s mansion and a poor butler’s apartment. Such juxtaposition serves to highlight the difference between the butler’s quality of living and that of his employer. |

9  Dialogue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What it is</th>
<th>The use of direct speech in a text.</th>
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<td>Function</td>
<td>As people often use lively language when they speak, direct speech allows the writer to put that lively language directly into the story. It helps to increase the pace of the story and creates a more animated setting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 9 Personification

**What it is**
The attribution of human nature or character or abilities to animals, or inanimate objects.

Examples of personification:
- The stars danced playfully in the moonlit sky.
- The run down house appeared depressed.
- The first rays of morning tiptoed through the meadow.

**Function**
Personification adds vividness to expressions as we always look at the world from a human perspective. Because it is easier to readers to relate to something that is human or that possesses human traits, writers use this technique to help readers understand the nature and actions of inanimate things.

**Example**
Taken from L. M. Montgomery’s “The Green Gables Letters”,

“I hied me away to the woods—away back into the sun-washed alleys carpeted with fallen gold and glades where the moss is green and vivid yet. The woods are getting ready to sleep—they are not yet asleep but they are disrobing and are having all sorts of little bed-time conferences and whisperings and good-nights.”

The lack of activity in the forest has been beautifully personified as the forest getting ready to sleep, busy in bedtime chatting and wishing goodnights, all of which are human customs.

### 10 Short, declarative sentences

**What it is**
A sentence that is made up of a minimal number of words. Phrases or even words may be used as sentences.

**Function**
While lengthier sentences are used to investigate an idea more thoroughly, give vivid description, and develop tension, the reader may have forgotten some key points by the end of the sentence. Short sentences help to prevent this and be used to

- Grab attention at the start, and at the end, to summarize and signal completion.
- Create punch and make a point. (Create a dramatic effect)
- Create a natural pause after a sentence to give the other person space in which to consider what is said. This also adds ‘thoughtfulness’ to what is being said.
- Get the point across in a sharp, short way that really hits the reader and keeps them engaged because it avoids unnecessary rambling.
- Makes the text more intense, like in ghost stories where the intention is to be suspenseful, scary and generate strong emotions in the reader.

**Example**
He stopped. He looked around. Nobody was in sight. Nothing, as a matter of fact.

### 11 Rhetorical question

**What it is**
A rhetorical question is asked just for effect or to lay emphasis on some point discussed when no real answer is expected. A rhetorical question may have an obvious answer but the questioner asks rhetorical questions to lay emphasis to the point.

**Function**
- To emphasize a point or draw the audience’s attention / as a persuasive device

**Example**
- “It’s too hot today. Isn’t it?”
- “The actors played the roles well. Didn’t they?”

*Adapted from literarydevices.net*