Poetry Study

Paradox, Irony, Understatement, and Overstatement
September 12th

• Daily Description: Write a simile to describe walking in sand.

• Agenda:
  – Daily Description
  – Poetry I Love
  – Paradox and Irony
  – Understatement and Overstatement
Today’s Objectives

• I will know different types of figurative language.

• I will be able to identify figurative language in poems and be able to use figurative language to write my own descriptions.
Poetry I Love
What’s the Problem?

• Aesop tells the tale of a traveler who sought refuge with a Satyr on a bitter winter night. On entering the Satyr’s lodging, he blew on his fingers, and was asked by the Satyr why he did it. “To warm them up,” he said. Later, on being served a piping-hot bowl of porridge, he blew on it, too, and again was asked why he did it. “To cool it off,” he explained. The Satyr thereupon thrust him out of doors, for he would have nothing to do with a man who could blow hot and cold with the same breath.
Paradox

• An apparent contradiction that is nevertheless somehow true.

  – Paradoxical situation
  – Verbal paradox
    • “destroy with faint praise”
  – Paradoxical statement – one of the words being used figuratively or with one or more denotation.
Brainstorming a pair of ducks
Much Madness is divinest Sense

• What is the paradox?
• Does the speaker believe that the majority is correct? How do we know?
Irony

• Verbal irony – saying the opposite of what one means

• Sometimes sarcasm employs irony
  – Sarcasm is bitter or cutting speech that is intended to would

• But irony is not always sarcastic
Barbie Doll

• How is the girl in the poem different from a Barbie doll?
• How do the girl’s “strong arms and back” and her “manual dexterity” contribute to her fate?
• How does the verbal irony contribute to the poem?
• Dramatic Irony – a discrepancy between what the speaker says and what the poem means.
The Chimney Sweeper

- Who is the speaker in this poem?
- How does the speaker’s attitude differ from the poet’s?
- How might lines 11-20 be an allegory?
• Situational irony – the actual circumstances are not what would seem appropriate, or what happens is not what you would expect.
The Widow’s Lament in Springtime
Ozymandias

• What is ironic about the survival of the statue in regards to the sculptor?
• What is ironic about the words and the state of the statue
• Of what is Ozymandias a symbol?
Overstatement

• Also known as hyperbole
• Exaggeration in the service of truth
• Used for emphasis – not expected to be taken literally.
  – “I’m starved”
  – “You could have knocked me down with a feather”
  – “I’ll die if I don’t get eat some ice cream.”
  – “There were literally millions of people at the beach.”
A paradoxical situation...

- You can emphasize truth either by overstating it or by understating it.
Understatement

• saying less than one means
• “This looks like a nice snack.”
• Or saying what is true but with much less force than the situation might require.
  – Ex: “It hurts a little.”
Mid-Term Break
By Seamus Heaney

I sat all morning in the college sick bay
Counting bells knelling classes to a close.
At two o’clock our neighbors drove me home.

In the porch I met my father crying –
He had always taken funerals in stride –
And Big Jim Evens saying it was a hard blow.
The baby cooed and laughed and rocked the pram
When I came in, and I was embarrassed
By old men standing up to shake my hand

And tell me they were “sorry for my trouble.”
Whispers informed strangers I was the eldest,
Away at school, as my mother held my hand

In hers and coughed out angry tearless sighs.
At ten o’clock the ambulance arrived
With the corpse, stanched and bandaged by the nurses.
Next morning I went up into the room. Snowdrops
And candles soothed the bedside; I saw him
For the first time in six weeks. Paler now

Wearing a poppy bruise on his left temple,
He lay in the four-foot box as in his cot.
No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear.

A four-foot box, a foot for every year.
• Summarize the events in the poem.
• Does the poet use overstatement or understatement?
Paradox, Overstatement, Understatement, or Irony?

• Poetry is a language that tells us, through a more or less emotional reaction, something that cannot be said.
• A man who could make so vile a pun would not scruple to pick a pocket.
• Where ignorance is bliss, ‘Tis folly to be wise.
• All night I made my bed to swim; with my tears I dissolved my couch.
• Believe him, he has known the world too long/And seen the death of much immortal song.
• Cowards die many times before their deaths/ The valiant never taste of death but once.
• ...all men would be cowards if they durst.
Seek and Find

• Using the *Favorite Poems* text, find examples of as many different types of figurative language as you can. Write your team name, the example, and the page number on which it is found on the board.
Writing About Poetry