

Examples of Figurative Language in Poetry

Directions: Great poets are masters of figurative language. Use this chart to identify figurative language, analyze a poem (or poems), and determine theme. In the left column, provide a specific example of figurative language from the poem you are reading. In the middle column, identify the type of figurative language being used (metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, allusion, etc...). In the right column, analyze and explain the passage.

Specific Example of Figurative Language	Type of Figurative Language	Explanation/Analysis

Examples of Figurative Language in Poetry Answer Key for “Dreams” by Langston Hughes

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Specific Example of Figurative Language	Type of Figurative Language	Explanation/Analysis
“Hold fast to dreams For if dreams die Life is a broken-winged bird That cannot fly.”	Metaphor	A life without dreams is being compared to a broken-winged bird. Birds without wings are soon to be dead birds. When one’s dreams are vanquished or given up on, one dies inside. Just as a broken-winged bird is useless, a life without dreams is useless.
Life is a broken-winged bird That cannot fly”	Hyperbole	If this line came from a less-skilled writer, he or she could be accused of redundant writing. In Hughes’ case it’s hyperbole. The “cannot fly” part is implied by the broken wings. Hughes’ use of hyperbole emphasizes the plight of the bird and the dreamless.
“For if dreams die”	Personification	One of the poem’s primary themes is the life-giving effect of dreams. It, therefore, behooves the poet to personify dreams for thematic purposes.
“Hold fast to dreams”	Repetition/Anaphora	Isn’t this the message the poet is attempting to communicate. The repetition appears at the beginning of both stanzas (anaphora) and sets the tone for the entire poem.
“Life is a barren field Frozen with snow.”	Metaphor/Hyperbole	The same figurative language principles apply for this metaphor that apply to the metaphor in stanza 1. There is an element of reverse personification with life being compared to something that’s not living. I don’t think there’s a literary term for that. Maybe we’ll make one up—depersonalization. Bring that up at your next department meeting.

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