AP Language Terms Clarified and Simplified

What is Figurative Language?

Figurative language is language that uses words or expressions with a meaning that is different from the literal interpretation. When a writer uses literal language, he or she is simply stating the facts as they are. Figurative language, in comparison, uses exaggerations or alterations to make a particular linguistic point. Figurative language is very common in poetry, but is also used in prose and nonfiction writing as well.

Types of Figurative Language

- **Simile**: A simile is a comparison that often uses the words "like" or "as." One example of a simile is "Jamie runs as fast as the wind."
- **Metaphor**: A metaphor is a comparison made between things which are essentially not alike. It is similar to a simile, but does not use "like" or "as." An example is "Nobody invites Edward to parties because he is a wet blanket."
- **Personification**: When something that is not human is given human-like qualities. "The leaves danced in the wind on the cold October afternoon."
- **Hyperbole**: Exaggerating/overstating, often in a humorous way and to make a particular point. "My eyes widened at the sight of the mile-high ice cream cones we were having for dessert."
- **Onomatopoeia**: The action of the word imitates the sound associated with it. "The bees buzz angrily when their hive is disturbed."
- **Idiom**: An idiom is an expression used by a particular group of people with a meaning that is only known through common use. "I'm just waiting for him to kick the bucket." Many idioms that are frequently used are also considered clichés.
- **Symbolism**: Symbolism occurs when a noun that has meaning in itself is used to represent something entirely different. Example: An image of the American flag to represent patriotism and a love for one's country.

What is a Trope?

A **trope** is simply a figure of speech. When using this literary device, the word or words have an intended meaning that is different from the literal meaning. In other words, there is a shift from the literal meaning of a word or words to a non-literal meaning.

Types of Trope

There are many different types of tropes depending on how the meaning is changed.

Hyperbole: This trope uses *exaggeration* to get its point across

Irony: With irony, a word or words are *taken in the opposite way* from their literal meaning.

Litotes: This trope *understates* to emphasize a point and is opposite to a hyperbole.

Metaphor The metaphor *compares two things* that have *very little in common* but do share a trait or characteristic. It says something is something else to show what they have in common.

Metonymy: With the metonymy trope, a *word or phrase is substituted* for another that is closely associated to it.

Oxymoron: The oxymoron literally means "sweet and sour" and uses *words that contradict* each other. Often, these are quite humorous.

Personification: This trope gives human attributes to things that are not human

Pun: A pun repeats a word or phrase but *means it in a different way*.

Rhetorical Question: This is a question that you do not expect anyone to answer.

Simile: This trope *compares two things* that have *some things in common*.

Synecdoche: This uses a *part of something to represent the whole*.

Zeugma: This trope uses *one verb with two or more words* and each time there is a different meaning.