

**The nature, types and  
functions of Lexical Stylistic  
Devices: Irony.**



# Definition of Irony

As a literary device, irony is a contrast or incongruity between expectations for a situation and what is reality. This can be a difference between the surface meaning of something that is said and the underlying meaning. It can also be a difference between what might be expected to happen and what actually occurs. The definition of irony can further be divided into three main types: verbal, dramatic, and situational. We describe these types in detail below.

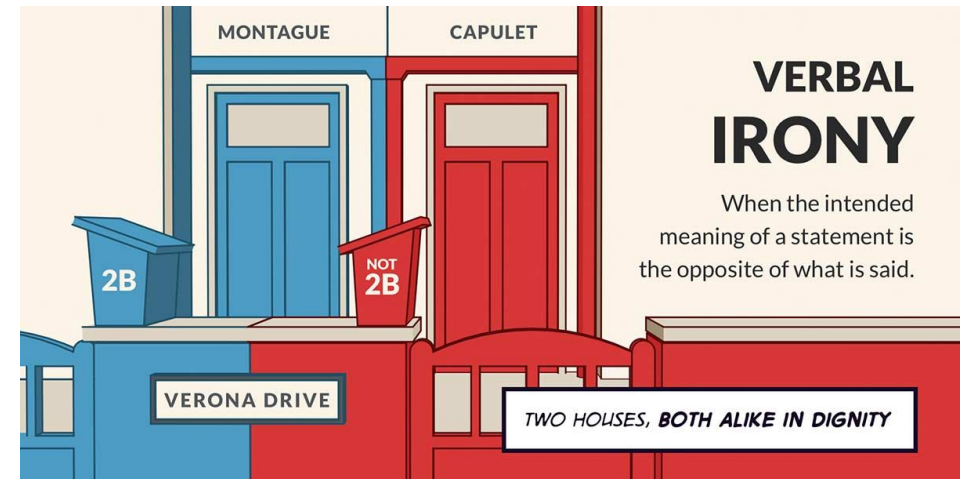


The word “irony” comes from the Greek character Eiron, who was an underdog and used his wit to overcome a stronger character. The Greek word eironeía derived from this character and came to mean “dissimulation” or “purposely affected ignorance.” The word then entered Latin as ironia, and eventually became common as a figure of speech in English in the 16th century.



# Types of Irony

**Verbal irony** takes place when the speaker says something in sharp contrast to his or her actual meaning. The speaker often makes a statement that seems very direct, yet indicates that the opposite is in fact true, or what the speaker really means. Looking at Alanis Morissette's "Ironic" again, the one true instance of irony comes when the man whose plane is going down says, "Well, isn't this nice." Clearly, the plane crash is anything but nice, and thus this utterance conveys the opposite of the man's true feelings. Unlike dramatic and situational irony, verbal irony is always intentional on the part of the speaker.





**Dramatic irony** occurs when the audience has more information than one or more characters in a work of literature. This literary device originated in Greek tragedy and often leads to tragic outcomes. For example, in Shakespeare's *Othello*, the audience is aware that Othello's best friend Iago is villainous and attempting to bring Othello down. The audience is also aware that Desdemona has been faithful, though Othello doesn't know this. The audience can foresee the imminent disaster.

# DRAMATIC IRONY



## Definition

Dramatic irony occurs in everyday life when a situation is happening and yet the person within the situation is unaware of what is occurring.

- For example, if a person were to be mocking a friend for losing his wallet, but did not realise that he had also lost his own wallet, this would be dramatic irony.

When used as a literary device, dramatic

**Situational irony** consists of a situation in which the outcome is very different from what was expected. There are contradictions and contrasts present in cases of situational irony. For example, in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, the citizens of the Emerald City assume that Oz is great and all-powerful, yet the man behind the curtain is revealed to be an old man with no special powers.

## 2 Situational Irony

Situational irony is when something happens and a reversal of expectations occurs.

The key is the **reversal**. For example:



Every time there's a lightning storm, vicious sea-bears come in from the Pacific Ocean and launch an attack. Luckily during tonight's storm I'll be wearing this suit of armor as protection, AND I'll be standing on the roof so I can see them coming!



**The reversal:** the armor, which was intended for protection, is what ended up causing harm.

Hey, that's not ironic!  
The oatmeal is an idiot!



Think so? Keep reading.

# Difference between Irony and Sarcasm

Though there are many similarities between verbal irony and sarcasm, they are not equivalent. However, there are many dissenting opinions about how, exactly, they are different. For example, the Encyclopedia Britannica simply explains that sarcasm is non-literary irony. Others have argued that while someone employing verbal irony says the opposite of what that person means, sarcasm is direct speech that is aggressive humor. For example, when Winston Churchill told Bessie Braddock that “I shall be sober in the morning, and you will still be ugly,” he was being sarcastic and not employing any irony.





# Common Examples of Irony

Verbal irony: “What a pleasant day” (when it is raining heavily)

Situational irony: Referring to WWI as “the war to end all wars”

Situational irony: In 1925 when the New York Times declared that the crossword puzzle was a craze that was “dying out fast”

Dramatic irony: The movie “The Truman Show”, where only Truman doesn’t know that he’s being filmed at all times

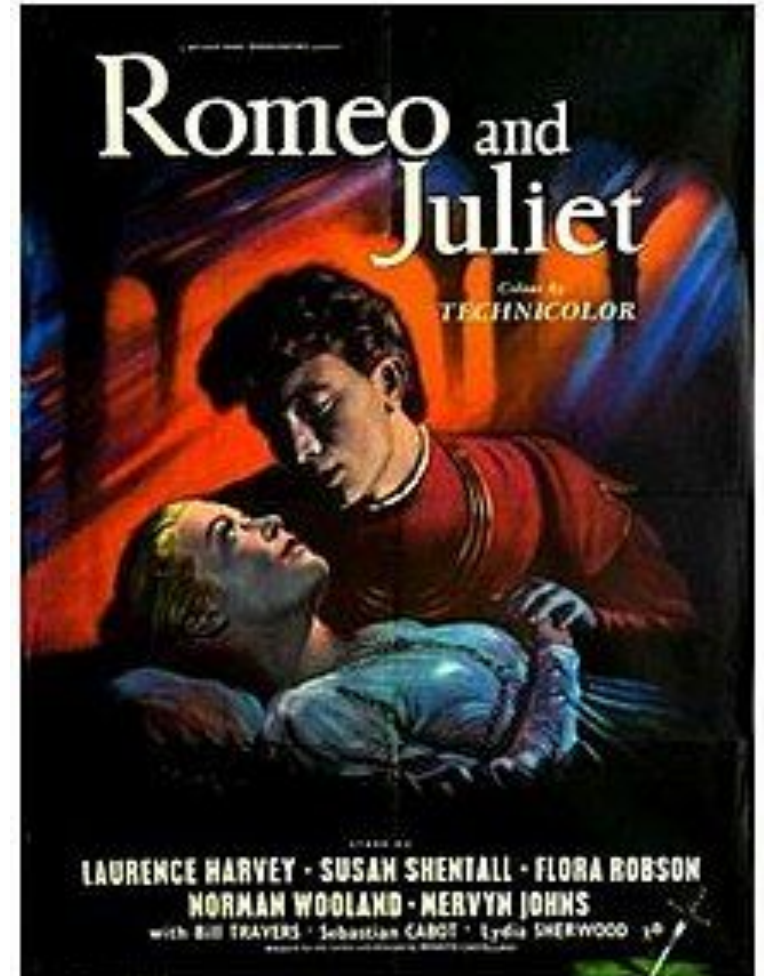


# Examples of Irony in Literature

## Example #1

Romeo and Juliet by Shakespeare

In this famous love story the audience can foresee the tragic ending long before Romeo and Juliet themselves know what's going to happen. At the end of the play, Romeo finds Juliet and believes her to be dead though the audience knows she's taken a sleeping potion. Romeo kills himself with this false knowledge. Juliet then wakes up and, finding Romeo truly dead, kills herself as well. This irony example is one of dramatic irony as the audience has more information than the characters.



# Example #2

“The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry

In this short story, a young, poor couple struggle with what to buy each other for Christmas. The woman cuts her hair and sells it to buy a watchband for her husband. Meanwhile, the husband sells his watch face to buy combs for his wife’s hair. This is an example of situational irony, since the outcome is the opposite of what both parties expect.

Answer: B is the best answer.

*The Gift of  
the Magi*



# Test Your Knowledge of Irony

1. Choose the best irony definition:

A. An unfortunate coincidence in which the worst possible ending comes to pass.

B. A contrast between expectations for what is going to happen and what actually does happen.

C. A biting comment meant to be both humorous and true.

Answer: B is the best answer.

2. Is the following an example of situational, dramatic, or verbal irony?

In Oedipus Rex, Oedipus kills his own father without realizing that the man is actually his father. This act brings on a plague and Oedipus swears that he will murder the man responsible, not knowing that he himself is responsible.

- A. Dramatic irony
- B. Situational irony
- C. Verbal irony

Answer: This is an example of dramatic irony, since the audience has more information than Oedipus does. A is thus the correct answer.



3. American President John F. Kennedy's final reported conversation was with a woman who announced, "Mr. President, you can't say that Dallas doesn't love you." JFK agreed, "That's very obvious." Why is this an example of irony?

A. The event was very tragic, and thus it was ironic.

B. JFK was aware that he was in danger, and thus employed verbal irony when he asserted that Dallas must love him, knowing this wasn't the case.

C. In retrospect, this conversation was ironic because the outcome of the situation was completely at odds with what anyone would have expected to happen.

Answer: C is the correct answer.

# Thank you for your attention!

**Three Types of Irony**

- 1 Verbal Irony**  
is like sarcasm.  
  
Yay! Great weather.
- 2 Dramatic Irony**  
is like a secret only the audience knows.  

- 3 Situational Irony**  
is an event that mocks the circumstances.  