**IMAGERY**

**Definition of Imagery**

As a literary device, imagery consists of descriptive language that can function as a way for the reader to better imagine the world of the piece of literature and also add [symbolism](http://www.literarydevices.com/symbolism/) to the work. Imagery draws on the five senses, namely the details of **taste**, **touch**, **sight**, **smell**, and **sound**. Imagery can also pertain to details about movement or a sense of a body in motion (kinesthetic imagery) or the emotions or sensations of a person, such as fear or hunger (organic imagery or subjective imagery). Using imagery helps the reader develop a more fully realized understanding of the imaginary world that the author has created.

**Common Examples of Imagery**

We use imagery in everyday speech to convey our meaning. Here are some examples of imagery from each of the five senses:

* **Taste**: The familiar tang of his grandmother’s cranberry sauce reminded him of his youth.
* **Sound**: The concert was so loud that her ears rang for days afterward.
* **Sight**: The sunset was the most gorgeous they’d ever seen; the clouds were edged with pink and gold.
* **Smell**: After eating the curry, his breath reeked of garlic.
* **Touch**: The tree bark was rough against her skin.

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**Significance of Imagery in Literature**

Imagery examples are prevalent in all types of literature from cultures around the world. Poets, novelists, and playwrights use imagery for many reasons. One of the key usages is that the imagery in a piece can help create mood, such as the [cliché](http://www.literarydevices.com/cliche/)d opening “It was a dark and stormy night.” While this line is too hackneyed for any author to actually use it, it is a good example of imagery in that the reader immediately pictures the kind of [setting](http://www.literarydevices.com/setting/) in which the story may take place. This particular imagery also creates a mood of foreboding. Indeed, even Shakespeare used this type of opening for his famous play *MacBeth*: the three witches in the beginning speak of the “thunder, lightning [and] rain” and the “fog and filthy air.”

While an author may use imagery just to help readers understand the fictive world, details of imagery often can be read symbolically. In the previous example of *MacBeth*, the thunder and lightning that open the play symbolize both the storm that is already taking place in Scotland and the one that is about to begin once MacBeth takes over the throne. Thus, when analyzing literature it is important to consider the imagery used so as to understand both the mood and the symbolism in the piece.

**Examples of Imagery in Literature**

**Example #1: Taste**

On rainy afternoons, embroidering with a group of friends on the begonia porch, she would lose the thread of the conversation and a tear of nostalgia would salt her palate when she saw the strips of damp earth and the piles of mud that the earthworms had pushed up in the garden. Those secret tastes, defeated in the past by oranges and rhubarb, broke out into an irrepressible urge when she began to weep. She went back to eating earth. The first time she did it almost out of curiosity, sure that the bad taste would be the best cure for the temptation. And, in fact, she could not bear the earth in her mouth. But she persevered, overcome by the growing anxiety, and little by little she was getting back her ancestral appetite, the taste of primary minerals, the unbridled satisfaction of what was the original food.

(*One Hundred Years of Solitude*by Gabriel García Márquez)

This passage from Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* discusses one of the character’s pica eating disorder. There are many examples of imagery using the sense of taste, including “a tear would salt her palate,” “oranges and rhubarb,” and “the taste of primary minerals.” The imagery in this excerpt makes the experience of an eating disorder much more vivid and imaginable to the reader.

**Example #2: Sound**

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound’s the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.

(“Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” by Robert Frost)

When most people think of Robert Frost’s famous poem “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” the final refrain comes to mind: “And miles to go before I sleep.” Yet the short poem contains many imagery examples that are simple yet set the scene well. In this excerpt, there is a [juxtaposition](http://www.literarydevices.com/juxtaposition/) of two sounds: the bright noise of the horse’s harness bells and the nearly silent sound of wind and snowflake. While the reader knows that this is a dark night, the sense of sound makes the scene even more realistic.

**Example #3: Sight**

Outside, even through the shut window-pane, the world looked cold. Down in the street little eddies of wind were whirling dust and torn paper into spirals, and though the sun was shining and the sky a harsh blue, there seemed to be no colour in anything, except the posters that were plastered everywhere. The black mustachioed face gazed down from every commanding corner. There was one on the house-front immediately opposite. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption said, while the dark eyes looked deep into Winston’s own. Down at street level another poster, torn at one corner, flapped fitfully in the wind, alternately covering and uncovering the single word INGSOC. In the far distance a helicopter skimmed down between the roofs, hovered for an instant like a bluebottle, and darted away again with a curving flight.

(*1984*by George Orwell)

One of the central conceits of George Orwell’s classic dystopian novel *1984* is the all-pervasive surveillance of this society. This is a world that has its eyes constantly open—“Big Brother is watching you” is the motto of the society—yet the world itself is almost colorless. All that the main character, Winston, sees is “whirling dust,” “torn paper,” and posters of a “black mustachioed face” with “dark eyes.” These sensory details contribute to a general feeling of unease and foreshadow the way in which the world appears more chilling as the novel goes on.

**Example #4: Smell**

In the period of which we speak, there reigned in the cities a stench barely conceivable to us modern men and women. The streets stank of manure, the courtyards of urine, the stairwells stank of moldering wood and rat droppings, the kitchens of spoiled cabbage and mutton fat; the unaired parlors stank of stale dust, the bedrooms of greasy sheets, damp featherbeds, and the pungently sweet aroma of chamber pots. The stench of sulfur rose from the chimneys, the stench of caustic lyes from the tanneries, and from the slaughterhouses came the stench of congealed blood. People stank of sweat and unwashed clothes; from their mouths came the stench of rotting teeth, from their bellies that of onions, and from their bodies, if they were no longer very young, came the stench of rancid cheese and sour milk and tumorous disease.

(*Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* by Patrick Suskind)

Patrick Suskind’s novel *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* focuses on a character who has a very acute sense of smell. The novel, therefore, has numerous examples of imagery using descriptions of smell. This excerpt comes from the beginning of the novel where Suskind sets up the general palate of smells in eighteenth-century Paris. Using these smells as a backdrop, the reader is better able to understand the importance of the main character’s skill as a perfumer. The reader is forced to imagine the range of smells in this novel’s era and setting that no longer assault us on a daily basis.

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**Test Your Knowledge of Imagery**

**1. Choose the best imagery definition:**

**A.** A technique using descriptive details from the five senses.  
**B.** A way of seeing things in a new light.  
**C.** A way to describe a character’s emotions.

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| Answer to Question #1 | [Show](http://www.literarydevices.com/imagery/) |
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**2. What effect does the imagery produce in this opening passage from George Orwell’s novel *1984*?**

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him. The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats.

**A.** Since the opening line is in April, this passage sets up expectations for Winston Smith to better his situation throughout the spring.  
**B.** The contradictory details of Winston’s building being named Victory Mansions and it smelling of boiled cabbage and old rag mats creates a feeling of unease in the reader.  
**C.** The fact that most of these details are unpleasant—the vile wind, the gritty dust, and old rag mats—makes the reader understand that Winston is a pessimistic man.

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**3. Which of the following lines from Robert Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” contains imagery?**

**A.** The woods are lovely, dark and deep  
**B.** But I have promises to keep  
**C.** And miles to go before I sleep

# Imagery in Literature: Tools for Imagination

APRIL 30, 2014 BY [KIRI ROWAN](https://blog.udemy.com/author/kiri_rowan/)

**[](https://udemyblog.wpengine.com/kindle-publishing-course/?tc=blog.imageryinliterature&couponCode=half-off-for-blog)**Imagine the last book you read that you just couldn’t put down. Were you lost in another world? Did the author describe the characters and the scene so vividly that you felt as though you were a part of the story? This is all due to imagery, words, and phrases used to help the reader develop a mental image of the story throughout the novel. Imagery in literature is what helps draw readers in. Without descriptive phrases that allow you to picture a scene, how could you ever be engrossed in a story?

If you’re interested in learning more about successful literary devices and [**how to write your own novel**](https://udemyblog.wpengine.com/young-adult-fiction-writing-workshop/?tc=blog.imageryinliterature&couponCode=half-off-for-blog), we’ve got all the tools you need for imagery in literature!

Aim high. Start your journey to [**become a best-selling author today!**](https://udemyblog.wpengine.com/kindle-publishing-course/?tc=blog.imageryinliterature&couponCode=half-off-for-blog)

## Types of Imagery

There are seven distinct types of imagery: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, kinesthetic and organic. Many of these deal with the five senses, which all work together to help us create mental images of whatever we are reading.

**Visual**

Visual imagery appeals to the sense of sight, and plays the largest role in imagery in literature. It describes what a scene or character looks like. If an author writes something such as, “The deep blue hues of twilight were reflected in the still water; the slight glint of moonlight peeked through the clouds just enough to make out the silhouette of a passing ship”, the reader can imagine a still, ocean scene at twilight as if they were standing on the edge of the water themselves.

**Auditory**

Auditory imagery describes specific sounds that are happening within the story. This can be something like, “The rooster crowed at early dawn, a sign that it was time to start the day. John woke up, listening to the quiet murmurs of his children in the kitchen below; the clang of pots and pans signaled that breakfast was almost ready”. Can you hear the rooster? Are you imagining the clanging of pots and pans? How does this auditory imagery assist in your overall mental image of the scene? Even though the imagery here describes particular sounds, I’m imagining a man waking up in a quaint room in a log house and a rooster crowing at sunrise over a bright green field.

Auditory imagery could also appear in the form of [**onomatopoeia**](https://blog.udemy.com/literary-devices-in-poetry/). Words such as “bang!” “achoo!” “cacaw!” all work to describe sounds that most people are familiar with.

**Olfactory**

Olfactory imagery describes a particular scent. Let’s say you’re about to bite into a warm, steaming plate of maple smoked bacon. How would that smell? An author may describe it as, “The sweet scent of maple wafted through the room, causing Stephanie to stop what she was doing and sniff the air. A second waft of scent carried the underlying smoky scent of bacon; a scent only bacon straight off the grill could have”. Is your mouth watering yet? Are you itching to get off of the computer and go cook up some bacon? Authors want you to be able to almost *smell*the scent coming off the pages. Describing the scent of a particular food can also help readers imagine how that food tastes, which brings us to the next type of imagery.

**Gustatory**

Gustatory imagery pertains to the sense of taste. Let’s say a fictional Jason is about to bite into a delicious cupcake, smothered in chocolate frosting. This experience may be described as, “Jason took one look at the cupcake in front of him and couldn’t wait another second – he stuffed it right into his mouth. The rich, sweet, sugary taste of chocolate ran over his taste buds as he chewed and swallowed the whole dessert in less than ten seconds”. I don’t know about you, but I’m really craving some chocolate now.

**Tactile**

Tactile imagery appeals to the sense of touch. The feeling of a nice fuzzy blanket on a cold night, the smooth underside of a snake, the rough texture of tree bark. Anything you can touch can be described through imagery. The description of a bare hand on a mound of snow could be described as, “Sarah placed her bare hand on the cold snow. It was wet at first, then the frigid cold set in like a thousand needles, all pricking her palm at once”.

**Kinesthetic**

These last two types of imagery extend beyond the five senses. Kinesthetic imagery deals with the movement or action of objects or people. An example of kinesthetic imagery could be, “The birds flapped their wings in excitement, the promise of food so close. They sprung out of the tree, one by one, soaring through the branches and swooping down low to the pile of berries beneath the tree”. The flapping of the wings and the description of the way the birds fly down towards the ground helps the reader create an accurate visual image of the scene.

**Organic**

Organic imagery is the most difficult form of imagery to write, because it deals with creating a specific feeling or emotion within the reader. Phrases that make the reader feel sad, fearful, nostalgic, elated, even lost are all extremely effective organic imagery. Have you ever read a book that made you question your entire existence? [**Some authors have such a way with words**](https://udemyblog.wpengine.com/blockbuster-overcoming-writers-block/?tc=blog.imageryinliterature&couponCode=half-off-for-blog) that one simple sentence can resonate with you for years. A quote from Haruki Murakami has stuck with me for quite a while:

*You might think you made a new world or a new self, but your old self is always gonna be there, just below the surface, and if something happens, it’ll stick its head out and say ‘Hi.’*

*– Haruki Murakami,*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle

The organic imagery in this quote is almost an indescribable feeling of your own sense of self. While organic imagery can certainly be simpler than this, it can be even more complex as well.

## Creating the Story

A story simply cannot be told without imagery. How could you tell a story without evoking a particular emotion, setting the scene or describing a character? [**Every great author**](https://udemyblog.wpengine.com/creative-writing-turn-your-idea-into-pages/?tc=blog.imageryinliterature) has known exactly what to say to help readers create visual images in their mind throughout the entire novel. Without the help of this literary device, readers would not find themselves immersed in another world; they would be left simply staring at words on a page.

If you’re interested in [**creating a successful novel of your own**](https://udemyblog.wpengine.com/novelwriting/?tc=blog.imageryinliterature&couponCode=half-off-for-blog), Udemy has great courses that will help you develop every aspect of your story to its greatest potential.

1. Directions: Read the following sentences/phrases below and identify to what imagery is used. 1. Here and there his brown skin hung in strips like ancient wall-paper, and its pattern of darker brown was like wall-paper: shapes like full-blown roses strained and lost through age. 2. The sound must seem an echo to the sense: Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently bows, And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flow; But when the loud surges lash the sounding shore, The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar. 3. And what a congress of stinks!— Roots ripe as old bait, Pulpy stems, rank, silo-rich, Leaf-mold, manure, lime, piled against slippery planks. Nothing would give up life: Even the dirt kept breathing a small breath. 4. The Lush green grass formed a living frame for a single white blossom” 5. His eyes moved from the golden registration number at the top of the handle, right down to the perfectly smooth, streamlined birch twigs that made up the tail and he could feel it vibrating into his skin. Varied Responses
2. [5.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/lessonplan-lozada-imagery-170417121138/95/lesson-planimagery-5-638.jpg?cb=1511411315)Task 4-Imagery, My Imagery Work within the group. The following sentences/lines are taken from the Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare. Identify each of them to what kind of imagery is used. 1. If I profane with my unworthiest Hand This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this: My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand, To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss. 2. Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much, Which mannerly devotion shows in this; For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch, And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss. 3. Patience perforce with wilful choler meeting Makes my flesh tremble in their different greeting. I will withdraw: but this intrusion shall Now seeming sweet convert to bitter gall. 4. Sin from thy lips? O trespass sweetly urged! Give me my sin again. 5. Go to, go to; You are a saucy boy: is't so, indeed? This trick may chance to scathe you, I know what: You must contrary me! marry, 'tis time. Well said, my hearts! You are a princox; go: Be quiet, or--More light, more light! For shame! I'll make you quiet. What, cheerly, my hearts! 6. Show a fair presence and put off these frowns, And ill-beseeming semblance for a feast. 7. O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright! It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope's ear; Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear! So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows, 8. Away with the joint-stools, remove the court-cupboard, look to the plate. Good thou, save me a piece of marchpane; and, as thou lovest me, let the porter let in Susan Grindstone and Nell. Antony, and Potpan! 9. When good manners shall lie all in one or two men's hands and they unwashed too, 'tis a foul thing. 10. This, by his voice, should be a Montague, Fetch me my rapier, boy. What dares the slave, Come hither, cover'd with an antic face, To fleer and scorn at our solemnity?
3. [6.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/lessonplan-lozada-imagery-170417121138/95/lesson-planimagery-6-638.jpg?cb=1511411315)4. Assessment ( Individual Activity Directions: On a ½ Crosswise, explain in 2 sentences each of the following imagery with your own words. a. visual imagery b. olfactory imagery c. auditory imagery d. tactile imagery e. gustatory imagery IV- Assignment: Research on Literary devices and its examples. Write it in ½ crosswise.
4. [7.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/lessonplan-lozada-imagery-170417121138/95/lesson-planimagery-7-638.jpg?cb=1511411315)In the following gerund phrase examples, the gerund is highlighted in bold and the entire gerund phrase is underlined. A brief explanation of the function of the gerund phrase follows each example. • Blowing bubbles on a windy day is a fun activity for children. Blowing bubbles on a windy day is the subject of the verb is. • Piling too much laundry into a washing machine will cause it to malfunction. Piling too much laundry into a washing machine is the subject of the verb will cause. • Ethan narrowly avoided driving off the cliff. Driving off the cliff is the direct object of the verb avoided. • Eating ice cream on a hot day can be a good way to cool off. Eating ice cream on a hot day is the subject of the verb can be. • Jessica really enjoys bothering the neighbors with loud music. Bothering the neighbors with loud music is the direct object of the verb enjoys. A gerund phrase always follows these rules: • Gerund phrases always start with gerunds • Gerund phrases always include modifiers and often include other objects • A gerund phrase always functions as a noun • Gerund phrases are always subjects, objects, or subject complements in sentences.