



STUDY GUIDE

Authorial Choices and Stylistic Techniques

The Essays and Speeches of Toni Morrison

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Stylistic Techniques

Stylistic techniques are also known as literary devices or figurative language. These techniques are more specific (rather than broad) and can be found when reading literature carefully and closely.

- **Allusions:** Morrison often engaged in the use of allusions referencing other literary works, historical events, or cultural aspects within her writing. This created layers of meaning and connections between her stories and the broader cultural and literary context, enriching the reading experience.
- **Anecdotes** are brief stories or narrative, usually in the beginning providing a glimpse rather than comprehensive detail; may contain intimate, first-hand experience
- **Flashback:** refers to a literary or narrative technique she employs to revisit past events, memories, or experiences. Morrison often uses flashbacks to provide deeper insight into a character's background, historical context, or emotional landscape. By doing so, she reveals how past events continue to influence the present, highlighting themes of memory, identity, and the enduring impact of history on individuals and communities.
- **Foreshadowing** is a literary device where the author gives hints or clues about events that will happen later in the story. 🙌 *Example:* In *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo says he'd rather die than live without Juliet — this foreshadows their tragic ending.
- **Imagery:** refers to vivid sensory details and descriptions that evoke sights, sounds, smells, textures, and more.
 - Art often engages multiple senses, and Morrison's writing achieved a similar effect. Her descriptions were so vivid and sensory-rich that readers could almost taste, smell, and feel the scenes she painted with words.
- **Juxtaposition:** placing two **contrasting** or dissimilar things side-by-side in order to compare, highlight differences, reveal unexpected connections, or generate tension and irony.
 - Morrison's narratives juxtapose moments of **beauty and humanism** with depictions of **violence and cruelty**. She also juxtaposes **minority experiences and voices** with **dominant cultural narratives** to critique power imbalances.

- **Symbolism** is a literary device where an object, person, or event represents a deeper meaning or idea beyond its literal sense. Birds often symbolize **freedom, transformation, or warning**. For example, Morrison's short story *Sweetness* mentions a **bird flying away**, symbolizing escape from judgment and confinement.
- **Simile/Metaphor:**
 - **Similes** clarify meaning via explicit comparison using "like" or "as."
 - **Metaphors** directly equate different things to creatively fuse meanings and invite readers to discover surprising connections between dissimilar concepts.
- **Personification:** human traits, abilities, or emotions are attributed to non-human entities. Example: Language itself becoming a "living thing" that can be nurtured or damaged; other examples include: Giving emotions like grief, hope, or courage human-like voices and agency, portraying societal issues like poverty, racism, or injustice as characters exerting force on people's lives
- **Rhetorical questions:** questions that are asked not to elicit an actual reply, but to assert or deny something or to convey emotion. They are posed for dramatic or persuasive effect, rather than to get answers. Often they have obvious answers that don't need to be stated. For example, "Do you really think I would do that?" In speeches, they engage the audience and invite listeners to consider a perspective.

Rhetorical Appeals

Kairos (Exigence/Current Moment): Kairos involves recognizing the right moment and context to convey a message. Toni Morrison adeptly seizes timely cultural and societal moments to address crucial issues. Her speeches often reflect and respond to the cultural zeitgeist, engaging with contemporary social and political concerns. By addressing urgent themes such as racial injustice and historical trauma, Morrison uses her writing to contribute meaningfully to ongoing conversations and societal shifts, demonstrating her awareness of the opportune timing for her messages.

Ethos (Credibility and Character): Ethos is about establishing the writer's credibility and character to gain the trust of the audience. Toni Morrison's ethos is evident in her deep understanding of African American history, culture, and personal experiences. Her authority comes from both her scholarly background and her lived experiences, which infuse her writing with authenticity and depth. Morrison's personal narrative and professional achievements—such as winning the Nobel Prize in Literature—enhance her credibility. She conveys her knowledge and passion through meticulous research and poignant storytelling, which allows readers to trust her perspectives and insights.

Pathos (Emotional Impact) Pathos involves creating an emotional connection with readers. Toni Morrison's writing is renowned for its powerful emotional impact. She captures the full spectrum of human emotions—joy, sorrow, anger, and hope—through her rich and evocative prose. Her stories

often explore themes of identity, trauma, and resilience, deeply resonating with readers and stirring profound emotional responses. Morrison's ability to evoke empathy and convey the inner lives of her characters demonstrates her skill in harnessing the emotional power of literature to engage and move her audience.

Logos (Logical Appeal): Logos focuses on using reason and evidence to make a compelling argument. Toni Morrison integrates historical and cultural context into her narratives to provide a logical framework for understanding her themes. Her writing often draws on historical facts, cultural references, and well-developed characters to support her broader arguments about society and race.

Authorial Choices

Authorial choices refer to the deliberate decisions that an author uses when writing literature; these choices are more broad in scope; therefore, the text in its entirety should be considered.

- **Social Commentary:** When a speaker addresses pressing issues such as censorship, neglect of artistic expression, racism, gender inequality, and the impact of history on contemporary society, and injustice, and discrimination.
- **Political Commentary:** When a speaker addresses and questions oppressive power structures that have been politically undermined or suppressed marginalized groups.
- **Tone** Tone describes the **writer's feelings** toward the subject, characters, audience, or work itself. Tone is established through word choice, phrasing, imagery, and other stylistic elements that reveal the writer's emotions and perspectives. Morrison's tone can be described as passionate, reflective, instructive, critical..
- **Mood** describes the overall **feeling a reader experiences** reading a text, rather than the specific emotions of characters; it refers to the **emotional atmosphere or landscape** that pervades a written work based on details, setting, imagery, and language. Mood can be thought of as the emotional weather of the text . Mood can be overcast, stormy, bright, melancholy, tense, optimistic etc.
- **Extended Metaphor:** refers to a metaphor that an author develops throughout a work to make a comparison between two unlike things.
 - The "dancing mind" as a metaphor for creative thinking in the essay "The Dancing Mind." She extends this dance comparison throughout.
 - The recurring metaphor of language as a bird in the hand in her Nobel Lecture, suggesting power and fragility in how we use words.

STUDY GUIDE: Irony and Repetition

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Types of Irony

1. Situational Irony

- Definition: When the opposite of what you expect happens.
- Effect: Surprises the reader; makes them question assumptions or notice unfairness.
- Example: A student spends years studying but can't sit alone to read, while a persecuted writer risks everything just to write.

2. Verbal Irony

- Definition: When someone says one thing but means the opposite (like sarcasm or understatement).
- Effect: Adds humor, criticism, or sharpness; makes readers think deeper about meaning.
- Example: Saying "What a relaxing day" after running around stressed for hours.

3. Dramatic Irony

- Definition: When the audience/reader knows something the character does not.
- Effect: Creates tension, suspense, or sympathy.
- Example: In a horror movie, we know the villain is hiding in the closet, but the character does not.

Types of Repetition

1. Anaphora

- Definition: Repeating the same word(s) at the **beginning** of successive clauses or sentences.
Effect: Creates emphasis, rhythm, and a sense of urgency.
- Example: "It is the language... It is the language..."

2. Epistrophe

- Definition: Repeating the same word(s) **at the end** of successive clauses or sentences.
- Effect: Sticks the idea in the reader's mind, creates a powerful closing echo.
- Example: "...to protect freedom, to defend freedom, to honor freedom."

3. Anadiplosis

- Definition: Repeating the last word of one clause at the beginning of the next.
- Effect: Links ideas tightly together, shows cause/effect or continuity.
- Example: "Freedom is **power**. **Power** must be shared."

4. Mesodiplosis

- Definition: Repeating the same word(s) in the middle of successive clauses.
- Effect: Draws attention to a key word, creates rhythm inside the sentence.
- Example: "We will fight for justice, we will hope for justice, we will live for justice."

5. Epizeuxis

- Definition: Repeating the same word immediately in a row. (continuously)
- Effect: Adds emotion, drama, or emphasis.
- Example: "Never, never, never give up."