

## Honors Literature and Short Stories

### Week 8

#### Irony

Irony in literature is defined as something happening that goes against what you expect to happen. It is an important element in many stories because it brings the reader closer to the situation.

There are three types of irony:

1. **Verbal irony** - When a character says something but means something else.

*Sarcasm* is one form of verbal irony:

**Example:** The mother runs around the house picking up her son's clothes and books from the floor as he lays back and watches television. Finally, she stops and announces to him, "I hope my maid duties are not interrupting your important work!"

**Example:** While babysitting, the girl talks on the phone and pretty much ignores the children who she is supposed to be watching. The parents come home unexpectedly to see the children watching an inappropriate movie, and the babysitter still on the phone. "My, you certainly have worked hard with the children tonight!"

*Overstatement or Hyperbole* is another form of verbal irony:

**Example:** When my friends caught me playing with my sister's dolls, I almost died. *Obviously you didn't REALLY almost die. This is a hyperbole or overstatement.*

**Example:** My friend is so thin a wind could knock her over. *Obviously the wind really can't knock her over.*

*Understatement* is one more form of verbal irony:

**Example:** My friend was in the hospital after a car accident. I entered his hospital room to visit and was shocked to see him covered in casts. I quickly asked, "So how are you doing?"

He answered, "I've been better."

*This is an example of the understatement. Quite obviously he has been better.*

2. **Situational Irony** - You expect something to happen, but the opposite occurs. It would be ironic for a fire station to burn down. It would be ironic for the police station to be robbed. It would be ironic for a soldier to survive battles and dangers in a war, and then be killed in a car accident when he finally arrived home.

3. **Dramatic Irony** - You - the audience - knew something that a character in the story did not know.

*Example:* We see Mark's family planning a huge surprise party for him. Every time he enters a room, everyone stops speaking. Mark decides everyone is keeping secrets for him, so he decides to take a trip – which turns out to be the same day as the party planned for him. *The irony is that we knew something the character did not know.*

*Example:* We are reading a story and learn all about Mr. Lymon. He is an international jewel thief, trying to plan his next heist. Madame Louis meets him on a trip and asks him to help protect her diamond necklace because she thinks someone is after it. *The irony is that we know who Mr. Lymon really is and Madame Louis does not.*

### Assignments

1. Read the following four short stories.

“Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry

<http://www.classicreader.com/read.php/sid.6/bookid.767/>

“Appointment in Samarra” (very short) – text follows on page 3

“The Necklace” by Guy de Maupassant – A Book of Short Stories 1 page 208 or it is available next to this lesson at the lessons site.

“The Fun They Had” by Isaac Asimov (available next to this lesson at the lessons site)

Create a presentation showing the different types of irony we have discussed - verbal, situational, and dramatic - and examples from the three stories. If you know how to use PowerPoint, I'd like you to create a presentation in PowerPoint. If you do not know how to use PowerPoint, create a presentation by setting up your paper in landscape: File > Page Setup > Paper Size tab > change from Portrait to Landscape. Then, use one page for each part of your presentation. **Due week 9 100 points**

2. **Weekly Shorts:** Use the following idea to write a short short story (a couple paragraphs to a page) clearly showing the irony.

Bill meets up with his old friend Tom after 20 years of not seeing or hearing from him. The only problem is that Bill has just robbed a bank and Tom is the arresting officer.

[*This would make a great story if the problem -- being arrested for robbing the bank -- isn't brought up until the last line or two of the story.*]

**5 points**

3. **Journal:** Using your close reading handout and the explanations of irony, provide specific feedback to two of the stories you have read (you will journal the other two next week). Be sure to include the types of irony and your personal reaction as well. Include commentary on character, setting, mood and plot. **10 points**

**"The Appointment in Samarra"**  
(as retold by W. Somerset Maugham [1933])

The Speaker is Death

There was a merchant in Bagdad who sent his servant to market to buy provisions and in a little while the servant came back, white and trembling, and said, Master, just now when I was in the marketplace I was jostled by a woman in the crowd and when I turned I saw it was Death that jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture, now, lend me your horse, and I will ride away from this city and avoid my fate. I will go to Samarra and there Death will not find me. The merchant lent him his horse, and the servant mounted it, and he dug his spurs in its flanks and as fast as the horse could gallop he went. Then the merchant went down to the marketplace and he saw me standing in the crowd and he came to me and said, Why did you make a threatening gesture to my servant when you saw him this morning? That was not a threatening gesture, I said, it was only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Bagdad, for I had an appointment with him tonight in Samarra.