

## Images and Imagery

The terms **image** and **imagery** have many connotations and meanings.

1. **Image:** is a sense experience created in the mind of the reader as he/she assimilates the language of the author. An image does not necessarily mean a mental picture. Many images (but by no means all) are conveyed by figurative language, as in metaphor, simile, synecdoche, onomatopoeia, metonymy, symbols and personifications or through detailed descriptions. An image may be visual (pertaining to the eye), olfactory (smell), tactile (touch), auditory (hearing), gustatory (taste), abstract (in which case it will appeal to what may be described as the intellect) and kinaesthetic (pertaining to the sense of movement and bodily effort), or organic (pertaining to internal sensations like hunger, fear, or disgust). It is often the case that an image is not exclusively one thing or another; they overlap and intermingle and thus combine. Thus, the kinaesthetic may also be visual.
2. **Imagery:** is the use of vivid description, usually rich in sensory words, to primarily create pictures, or images, in the reader's mind, and to also represent objects, actions, feelings, thoughts, ideas, states of mind and any sensory or extra-sensory experience. Poets, authors, and playwrights alike often try to use language to reach all senses and, in turn, enable the reader to experience the "duplicate world" created by poetic language. Imagery, in a literary text occurs when an author, through language, uses the representation of an object that is not really there, in order to create a comparison between one that is, usually evoking a more meaningful sense experience for the reader. It allows the writer to show what he/she means instead of just telling.

Although most of the image-making words in any language appeal to the sense of sight (visual images), there are different kinds of it that has been used by writers over the ages. There are also images of touch (tactile), sound (auditory), taste (gustatory), smell (olfactory), movement (kinaesthetic), and internal sensations (organic). A good writer does not use imagery merely to decorate a piece of writing (be it a poem, fiction, or drama). He/she asks himself/herself, “How can I make my subject appear to the reader exactly as it appears to me?”. Imagery helps him/her solve this problem, for it enables him/her to present his/her subject as it is: as it looks, smells, tastes, feels and sounds. To the reader, imagery is equally important: it provides his/her imagination with something palpable to seize upon.

Imagery, as a literary device, is most exploited in descriptive literature (whether poetry, prose, or drama) where the poet/author/playwright has the scope to use ornate adjectives, lofty language and an exquisitely elaborate canvas to give wings to his/her imagination. Of course, this scope is primarily offered by the dynamic nature of a descriptive piece of literary writing. Example: In Samuel Coleridge's deft description the gardens in Xanadu in his poem “Kubla Khan: or, A Vision in a Dream” is an appropriate instance of imagery usage. So twice five miles of fertile ground With walls and towers were girdled round: And here were gardens bright with sinuous rills, Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree; And here were forests ancient as the hills, Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

### **Types of Imagery:**

Writers utilize imagery either to create or to remind the reader of a familiar sensation. Different types of imagery correspond to different human senses. Essentially, there are five types of imagery, each corresponding to one of our senses: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory and gustatory. In

addition to the obvious five there is organic imagery (pertaining to internal sensations like loathing or love).

- **Visual imagery:** visual descriptions so vivid they seem to come to life in the reader's mind's when they are read, as in the description of a very old fish in Elizabeth Bishop's poem titled "The Fish": 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
- **Auditory imagery:** descriptions of sound so vivid the reader seems almost to hear them while reading the poem. For example, Alexander Pope contrasts the gentle sounds of a whispering wind and a soft-running stream with the harsher sound of waves crashing on the shore in "Sound and Sense": 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. (365-69)
- **Olfactory imagery:** descriptions of smells so vivid they seem almost to stimulate the reader's own sense of smell while reading, as in the poem, "Root Cellar" by Theodore Roethke: 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. (5-11)
- **Tactile or 'Physical' imagery:** descriptions conveying a strong, vivid sense of touch or physical sensation that the reader can almost feel himself or herself while reading, as in Robert Frost's description of standing on a ladder in "After Apple Picking": "My instep arch not only keeps the ache, / It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round. / I feel the ladder

sway as the boughs bend" (21-23). Or in the sensation of touch (and possibly taste) in the fourth stanza of Helen Chasin's poem, "The Word Plum": The word plum is delicious pout and push, luxury of self-love, and savoring murmur full in the mouth and falling like fruit taut skin pierced, bitten, provoked into juice, and tart flesh. (1-8).

- **Gustatory imagery:** descriptions of taste so vivid they seem almost to stimulate the reader's own sense of taste while reading. This type of imagery pertains to the memory of a reader's taste buds.
- **Kinesthetic imagery:** the descriptions can be accurate to the point they recreate a feeling of physical action or natural bodily function (like a pulse, a heartbeat, or breathing).
- **Organic imagery:** descriptions of which can stimulate a reader's once felt internal sensation: hunger, thirst, fatigue, fear.