

Module 4: Drama in American Literature

Topic 3 Content: Irony

Introduction

Irony


Verbal Irony

Situational Irony

Dramatic Irony

Introduction

Click on each of the tabs to examine three different types of irony.



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Verbal Irony

The diagram is titled "Irony" in a dark header. Below the header, there is a large light gray box. On the left side of this box, there are three red rectangular buttons stacked vertically, labeled "Situational Irony", "Dramatic Irony", and "Verbal Irony". To the right of these buttons, within the same light gray box, is a section titled "Verbal Irony" with a definition: "Verbal irony is saying one thing but meaning something else entirely different. For instance, a character might say, 'That is a brilliant idea,' but the reader, audience, and other characters understand she means just the opposite. This use of verbal irony tells the audience something of the personality of the character speaking. Depending on the circumstance and setting of this particular scene, the character using verbal irony could be portrayed as cynical, domineering, patronizing, etc."

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Situational Irony

Irony

Verbal Irony

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Dramatic Irony

Situational Irony

Situational irony, also called irony of circumstance, occurs when there is a discrepancy between what the character thinks or believes is happening (or will happen) and what actually is happening (or does happen). For instance, in *The Crucible*, you see an occurrence of situational irony with the characters. Giles Corey and John Proctor do not think favorably of Reverend Parris. They are dissatisfied with his constant preaching of hell and damnation and feel he is overstepping his compensation by demanding the deed to his house and more money. The irony of this situation comes from the fact that they are Puritans and therefore should not covet worldly possessions. Yet many of the characters in the play are overly concerned with just such possessions like land and money. Again, this use of irony reveals important characteristics and traits to the audience. At this point, the word *hypocritical* may come to mind as a personality trait for several characters.

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Dramatic Irony

The diagram is titled "Irony" and is contained within a grey border. It features three red boxes on the left side, each containing a type of irony: "Verbal Irony", "Situational Irony", and "Dramatic Irony". To the right of these boxes is a large white box with a grey border containing a detailed definition of "Dramatic Irony".

Irony

Verbal Irony

Situational Irony

Dramatic Irony

Dramatic Irony

Dramatic irony is derived from the audience knowing things that are unknown to one or more characters on the stage. A playwright will often let the audience know things the characters do not because it increases the pleasure and suspense. When will the character learn the truth? What will it take to reveal the truth to all the characters? Indeed, how long it takes a character to learn the truth reveals more characterization details. A lengthy delay could highlight a deficit of intelligence or a wealth of innocence in a character.

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