

Understanding Irony

Irony is a literary device in which words are used to express a contradiction between appearance and reality—in irony, reality is usually the opposite of what it seems. In literature, there are three types of irony:

- **Verbal** irony is when a speaker or writer says one thing but actually means the opposite. For example, when your mom walks into your filthy bedroom and says, “I see you’ve cleaned your room!” Sarcasm is one type of verbal irony.
 - ✓ To find the verbal irony, ask yourself, what is *really* being said? If what the person actually says is not exactly what the person really means, you likely have verbal irony.
- **Situational** irony is when the outcome of a situation is inconsistent with what we expect would logically or normally occur. It is the reverse of what we expect will be or happen. An example of situational irony would be if a thief’s house was broken into at the same time he was robbing someone’s house.
 - ✓ To find the situational irony, ask yourself *what were you expecting would happen* or *what did you expect it to be*? If the situation is something different than what we expect would happen or is the opposite of what you might expect someone would say or do, then it is likely situational irony.
- **Dramatic** irony is when the audience or the reader is aware of something that a character does not know. For example, when Romeo believes Juliet is dead, but the audience knows that she has only been given a potion to sleep.
 - ✓ To identify dramatic irony, ask yourself *what did you already know happened* or *was going to happen*?

Directions: To practice identifying and labeling the different types of irony, complete the following activity.

1. If you have a phobia of long words, you must tell people that you are *Hippopotomonstrosesquipedaliophobic*.
 - a. Type of Irony: _____
 - b. Explain your choice: _____

2. A rat infestation at the Department of Sanitation
 - a. Type of Irony: _____
 - b. Explain your choice: _____

Name _____ Per. _____

3. Mother: "I see you ironed your shirt."

Boy: "But I just dug it out of the bottom of the hamper."

a. Type of Irony: _____

b. Explain your choice: _____

4. A person Tweets about how Twitter is a waste of time and energy.

a. Type of Irony: _____

b. Explain your choice: _____

5. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Hamlet stabs through a curtain thinking his traitorous, murdering uncle is there, only to learn that he actually stabbed and killed the father of the woman he loves, and a man for whom he had the utmost respect and admiration.

a. Type of Irony: _____

b. Explain your choice: _____

6. You comment on the beautiful weather you've been having just five minutes before a tornado rips through your house.

a. Type of Irony: _____

b. Explain your choice: _____

7. In Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, Elizabeth Proctor lies and tells the investigator that her husband never had an affair (in fact, he had), right before John Proctor publicly declared that his wife never had—and never would—lie.

a. Type of Irony: _____

b. Explain your choice: _____

Extension: In order to fully understand the power of irony, be sure read the short stories *The Gift of the Magi* by O. Henry or *The Necklace* by Guy De Maupassant!