

IMAGE (IMAGERY)

1. Introduction

Imagine reading these lines: "*The moon floated silently above the sleeping lake.*"
Immediately, your mind creates a picture.

Now consider: "*The leaves whispered in the cool autumn wind.*"
This time, you not only see the leaves but also hear them.

These mental experiences are created through images. Imagery is one of the most powerful devices in literature because it transforms abstract language into concrete sensory experience. Through images, writers make readers see, hear, touch, smell, taste, and even feel movement. An image is not limited to visual description; it includes any verbal representation that appeals to the senses.

2. Etymology

The word image comes from the Latin *imaginem*, meaning likeness, picture, representation, imitation. Originally it referred to a physical picture or portrait. In literature, however, an image is created not by paint or sculpture but by words.

3. Definition

An image is a word or group of words that represents a sensory experience or evokes a mental picture. Literary images appeal to one or more of the five senses and are therefore much broader than merely visual pictures.

4. What is Imagery?

The term imagery has two related meanings.

A. Individual Images

A single descriptive expression.

Example: "*Golden daffodils*"

This is one image.

B. Collective Imagery

The complete network or pattern of images used throughout a literary work.

For example, T. S. Eliot's ***The Waste Land*** repeatedly uses dryness, stones, deserts, dust. Together these create a larger image pattern. Image refers to one instance. Imagery refers to the total system of images.

5. Why Writers Use Images

Images perform many important functions.

A. They Make Literature Concrete

Instead of saying "The room was beautiful," the writer says "Sunlight poured through stained-glass windows onto polished oak floors." The second description allows readers to experience beauty directly.

B. They Appeal to Emotion

Readers remember images more easily than abstract ideas.

Compare:

Abstract language: "*Life is uncertain.*"

Use of Image: "*Life is a candle flickering in the wind.*"

The image produces a stronger emotional impact.

C. They Stimulate Imagination

Images encourage readers to participate actively by creating mental pictures.

6. Types of Images According to the Senses

A. Visual Imagery (Sight)

Visual imagery is a description that stimulates the eyes. Specifically, your mind's eye: when you can visualize the colors, shapes, forms, and aesthetics of something that's described to you, the writer is employing visual imagery.

Example: "*A crimson sunset spread across the western sky.*"

B. Auditory Imagery (Sound)

Auditory imagery is a description that stimulates the ears. When you can hear the sounds of nature, machinery, or someone's voice, it's because of the description employed in the author's auditory imagery.

Example: *"The church bells echoed through the valley."*

C. Tactile Imagery (Touch)

Tactile imagery is a description that stimulates your sense of touch. Sensations like itching, stickiness, and the warmth of sunlight all count as tactile imagery, which appeals to the way your skin might feel in that moment.

Example: *"The rough bark scraped his hands."*

D. Olfactory Imagery (Smell)

Olfactory imagery is a description that stimulates the nose. By describing the peculiarities of a scent—its richness, pungence, weight, distinctness, or physical effect—the author transports the reader through the use of olfactory imagery.

Example: *"The fragrance of jasmine filled the garden."*

E. Gustatory Imagery (Taste)

Gustatory imagery is a description that stimulates the tongue. Gustatory imagery captures a flavor's richness, acidity, earthiness, sweetness, bitterness, harshness, etc.

Example: *"The bitter medicine lingered on his tongue."*

F. Kinesthetic Imagery (Movement)

Kinesthetic imagery, also called kinesthesia, refers to descriptions of motion. The sensations one feels when on the move, like running against the wind or swimming through brisk waters, are examples of kinesthetic imagery.

Example: *"The horse galloped across the plain."*

G. Organic Imagery

Organic imagery refers to descriptions of internal sensation. When the writer uses concrete description to show an internal landscape of feelings, pains, emotions, and desires, they're using organic imagery. Organic imagery can be physical, like stomach pain or a headache, but it can also be emotional: the feeling of your heart dropping into your gut, or the burn of jealousy in your temples.

Example: *"A wave of exhaustion swept over him."*