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Name: _____

Date: _____

Figurative Language in Poetry

Part 1

One way to start understanding poetry is to understand the different kinds of language poets use.

One thing that helps distinguish poetry from other forms of writing is its use of language. Often when we hear a word, we think of its dictionary definition. We call that its literal meaning.

Example: Hand me that pen so I can sign Liam's birthday card

In this sentence the speaker is asking for an actual, literal pen, which we use for writing. However, sometimes we mean something slightly different from the literal meaning.

Example: The pen is mightier than the sword.

When people say this, they do not literally mean that in a duel, the person holding a pen would beat the person holding a sword. What they mean is that words are often stronger than acts of violence. When people speak this way, they are using something called figurative language. A word's figurative meaning might be a symbol or representative of something else. The key is that the figurative meaning contains ideas, emotions, or connections that differ from the dictionary definition.

Although all writers may use the tools of figurative language, it appears in poetry more frequently than in other kinds of writing.



NOTE TO STUDENT

The literal meaning of a word is its dictionary definition. The figurative meaning of a word includes all the associations, symbols, and emotions that might be connected to the word.