



# But I Live Educational Resources

## Mood And Tone: Literary Devices

**mood:** Mood is the emotional feeling or atmosphere that a work of literature produces in a reader/the audience. All works of literature produce some sort of emotional or psychological effect in the audience. Though readers may respond differently to the same work of literature, a text usually aims to produce a specific mood in the audience. This means that a reader can look for clues in the text, and in their own emotional response to the text, to identify what mood an author is trying to produce.

**tone:** Tone is the attitude or approach that the author takes toward a work's central theme or subject. Works of literature can have many different tones—humorous, solemn, distant, intimate, ironic, arrogant, condescending, sentimental, and so on. Any emotion that humans feel can convey tone in literature.

The following literary devices can be used by authors to convey tone:

**juxtaposition:** A sudden, jolting change in the tone of a work. Example: “Scent of magnolias sweet and fresh / Then the sudden smell of burnin' flesh” —“Strange Fruit,” Billie Holiday

**atmosphere:** A literary technique that is concerned with the feeling readers get from the elements of a narrative. This is another way to refer to the mood of the text.

**connotation:** The suggestions, associations, and implications that a word carries beyond its literal meaning. For instance, the word *supper* carries a more casual meaning than the words *evening meal*, though they may have a similar literal meaning. Different words carry different connotations, allowing a writer to evoke different feelings through their word choices.

**word choice:** The specific words an author chooses to use: word choice produces different effects. For example, consider the difference between using slang words, formal language, or inside jokes.

**figurative language:** Language that does not mean what it literally says. For instance, compare the difference between “The sun is shining” versus “The sun is a golden sunflower” (the sun is not literally a golden sunflower, but through this metaphor we understand something about the sun's appearance). Techniques of figurative language include metaphor, simile, hyperbole, and so on. These techniques can help the reader understand how the speaker feels about something.

**sentence structure:** This can include the length of sentences, whether they are in passive or active voice, and the arrangement of words. Sentence structure influences how the reader thinks/feels about the narrator, and the author, as well as how they think/feel about the subject.

**active voice:** Active voice is written in the form of “A does B.” For example, “Carmen sings the song,” or “The dog bit the boy.” In these sentences, a subject (Carmen) does an action (sings the song). Active voice highlights the subject of a sentence, and a subject's capacity to act.

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**passive voice:** A passive-voice sentence is written in the form of “B is done by A.” For example, “The song is sung by Carmen,” or “The boy was bitten by the dog.” In these sentences, an action (the song is sung) has been completed by a subject (Carmen). Passive voice highlights an event or action, and tends to obscure the doer of the action—in passive voice, we are focused on the boy who has been bitten, not the dog who has bitten him. You can recognize passive-voice expressions because the verb phrase will always include a form of be, such as am, is, was, were, are, or been.

**punctuation:** The use of punctuation including periods, exclamation points, and even a lack of punctuation for specific effect.