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Free Lesson of the Month July, 2009

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Please feel free to share this lesson with all your colleagues. We hope that they find these classroom-proven lessons to be as useful as you do.

This month’s Free Lesson was written by Douglas Grudzina, former teacher and author of [Rhetorical Devices: A Handbook and Activities for Student Writers](#). This introduction to rhetorical devices includes allusion, anaphora, antithesis, asyndeton and polysyndeton, conduplicatio, epithet, hyperbaton, metaphor, parallelism, simile, synecdoche and metonymy, and zeugma.

Included in the exercise is:

- Definitions and examples for each of these stylistic devices
- Three complete passages with underlined devices for students to identify
- A teacher answer key

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Rhetorical Devices: Stylistic Devices

Intended grade levels for this activity: 10 – 12
Flesh-Kincaide level: 10.8

Rhetorical devices are language tools that skillful writers and speakers use to add clarity and interest to their work. Below are a few of the more common devices that writers use to improve their style. Learn their names and how they're used. Then, make it a point to notice them in your reading (or when listening to a public speaker), and be aware of how using them might make your own speaking and writing more interesting.

- An **allusion** is a reference to some fairly well-known event, place, or person. Unlike a detailed comparison or reference, an allusion is short and usually not formally introduced. Allusions can be used to help your reader see a broader picture, to evoke a positive feeling, or to add credibility to your writing.

*These tribes survive and even thrive, in spite of the fact that, **like the lilies in the field, they toil not.*** (An allusion to the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 6, verse 28: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin.")

- **Anaphora** is a device in which the writer repeats a word or phrase at the beginning of multiple clauses.

***I do not like** green eggs and ham. **I do not like** them, Sam I am.*—Dr. Seuss, Green Eggs and Ham

- **Antithesis** makes use of a contrast in language to bring out a contrast in ideas.

*That's **one small step** for [a] man; **one giant leap** for mankind.*—Neil Armstrong, July 20, 1969

*I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will **not be judged by** the color of their skin **but by** the content of their character.*—Martin Luther King, Jr., August 28, 1963

- **Asyndeton** and **polysyndeton** are two forms that add stylistic force to your writing by handling conjunctions in non-standard ways. **Asyndeton** leaves out conjunctions in a list or between clauses, while **polysyndeton** puts a conjunction between every item.

*They all sat under one roof and ate from one table—**princes, dukes, barons, earls, kings, merchants, beggars.***

*The banquet table was a riot of beef **and** pork **and** lamb **and** fish **and** fresh vegetables **and** candied fruits **and** all sorts of wonderful dainties.*

- **Conduplicatio** takes a key word from one phrase or sentence and repeats it at the beginning of the next phrase or sentence.

*The federal government has often been compared to a **ship**, and that **ship** is captained by the President.*

- **Epithet** is a common device that can be dangerously overused. It involves simply attaching an adjective to a noun. The most successful **epithets** combine unusual adjectives with nouns for a stronger effect.

*The **redemptive clouds** drew ever closer to the parched farmland.*

- **Hyperbaton** uses an unexpected or unusual word order to startle a reader or listener.

Dark was the night, dark and silent.

To his queen did the knight pledge his allegiance.

- A **metaphor** is a close comparison of two unlike objects or ideas that speaks of one as if it actually were the other.

*The financial report that was released yesterday, **is a beacon of hope** in these troubled times.*

*Let my advice **be your lighthouse** as you navigate the perilous channels of life.*

- **Parallelism** is the matching of tone, form, and word order in successive phrases, clauses, or sentences in order to create a sense of natural writing. **Chiasmus** involves an inversion of the expected, almost a reverse form of parallelism.

*It would seem that this defensive tactic—although **highly graceful and elegant in form, rapid and effective in style, and safe and easy to learn**—would never catch on in the martial arts community.*

*We **walked briskly** along the seawall to catch the sunset, and **quickly realized** that we were too late.*

- The **simile** is one of the more commonly used rhetorical devices. It is a device in which the writer compares two objects or ideas that are already somewhat related. The most effect similes are usually meant to provide new insight into the main object of the comparison.

*Grinning **like a puppy waiting for a treat**, the senator stepped into the lobbyist's office.*

- **Synecdoche** and **metonymy** are two very closely related devices. They deal with using a part of one thing, or something closely related to it, to refer to a larger whole. In common discussion, the terms are often confused with one another and used interchangeably.

*The editor of the city's largest newspaper was hesitant to lend **his voice** in support of either side in the labor dispute.*

*Some people believe that **the press** has too much power in shaping public sentiment rather than merely reporting on it.*

- **Zeugma** is a device in which a number of items in a sentence are linked together by a shared word. Zeugma can encompass subjects linked together by a verb, pronouns by nouns, direct objects by verbs, or adjectival phrases by verbs. Probably the most common and stylistic use is to eliminate the repetition of a verb.

*As he walked from the hostile crowd, **the man picked up his hat and his pace.***

*The would-be candidate **spent his life's savings and his wife's patience.***

***The teenage sweethearts, the elderly couple, and the flickering candles all danced** late into the night.*

The following two passages make use of many of these stylistic devices. The device used is underlined, but not identified. For each passage, identify the devices used. Then explain why each device is used, and what it contributes to the overall purpose of the passage.

Passage #1

In 1896, the first Olympic games were held with 200 athletes competing in nine different sports: (1) track and field, cycling, swimming, equestrian, shooting, weightlifting, wrestling, gymnastics, fencing. (2) Fencing, the art of the blade, the sport of war, physical chess, had a long and noble tradition before its inclusion in the Olympic Games, but the new athletic focus and international recognition helped transform it from the purview of duels and soldiers into a modern sport.

Fencing dates back thousands of years, with carvings in Egypt dating from 1200 B.C. showing a bout being fought with masks and protective gear. The Greeks and Romans both had their own brand of fencing as well, though it can seem barbaric and heavy-handed in comparison to modern forms. It wasn't until the 15th century that what we think of as fencing began to truly take form, with silvery blades and catlike grace taking precedence over brute strength. The great fencing masters of the day, from Agrippa to Vigiani to St. Didier, laid out principles of form and footwork still used to this day.

It is often said that (3) fencing is like chess at one-hundred miles an hour, a reference to the combination of athleticism and sophisticated strategy used. (4) Fencing requires profound fitness of body, keenness of intellect, and strength of heart. Modern fencers practice for hours each day, conditioning their bodies to the highest level and studying strategy and theory endlessly. (5) They must be as Sisyphus, plodding endlessly against seemingly impossible odds to achieve greatness.

All (6) Olympians are gods among men. Fencers, it seems however, wear this godhead with a particular grace and poise. Perhaps it is the romanticism of the blade, perhaps the particular blend of form and lightning-fast reflexes they cultivate, perhaps a simple fascination with refined violence. It is difficult to dispute, however, that there is a special sort of thrill to be had from watching (7) the blade streak through the air, and hearing that first report of steel on steel.

For more than 110 years fencing has been an integral part of the Olympic Games, and although the sport has faced its share of hardships—evolving technologies, difficulties in accurate judging, and a sometimes fickle public—it seems likely that fencing will remain at the heart of the Olympics for years to come.

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Passage #2

In the 20th century there were countless examples of greed and power run amok, ruining the lives of innocents throughout the world. Some of the most poignant come from the so-called “banana republics,” and in particular the nation of Honduras. The story of the United Fruit Company and its dealings in Honduras is one of **(1) intrigue, and double-dealing, and vicious murders, and theft** on a grand scale.

Throughout the 1800s the United States and American businessmen held considerable control in Honduras. Controlling railroads, large amounts of land, and mining operations throughout the country, they were able to wield more power than many government officials. At the turn of the 20th century, these companies—and the United Fruit Company in particular—began expanding and centralizing their power. By 1929, the United Fruit Company controlled more than 650,000 acres of the best land in Honduras.

Throughout the 1930s banana-producing regions in Honduras were run like small Dukedoms, with **(2-1) corporate-dukes** ruling over them with an iron fist, exercising complete control. Bananas would eventually come to represent nearly 90% of Honduras’ exports, making the nation entirely dependent on the beneficence of the American **(2-2) corporate-dukes** and their commercial interests. This cartel of businessmen was able to **(3) influence government policy so absolutely** that they became the *de facto* rulers of the nation. The United States government trained the Honduran army and air force, and then placed these forces under the command of US officers. The resulting army existed almost exclusively to protect the interests of the banana companies.

Throughout the 1960s, in spite of returning small bits of land to the government as an overture of reconciliation, the fruit companies continued to dominate the nation. In the aftermath of hurricanes in the 1970s, their production went down drastically, and their strangle-hold on the nation was lessened, further decreasing through the 1980s. As the fruit companies pulled out, however, the US military began to fill the power vacuum, transforming huge parts of the nation into US military bases.

Honduras today remains shaped drastically by its long history of subjugation to US business interests. So it is that the term banana republic—used to perfectly describe this poor nation’s fate—has become the phrase of choice in describing a complete loss of power and dependence on US support.

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Below is the inaugural address of President John F. Kennedy, delivered on January 20, 1961. As a public servant, President Kennedy was famous for his speeches, which were both intellectually challenging and emotionally moving. Thirty incidents of effective rhetorical usage are noted for you. For each, identify the device, and describe its impact.

Inaugural Address of President John F. Kennedy, January 20, 1961

We observe today **(1)** not a victory of party but a celebration of freedom, (2) symbolizing an end as well as a beginning, signifying renewal as well as change. For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three-quarters ago.

The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish **(3)** all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe—the belief that the rights of man come **(4)** not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God.

We dare not forget today that we are the heirs of that first revolution. Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the **(5)** torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans—**(6)** born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world. Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that **(7)** we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

This much we pledge—and more. To those old allies whose cultural and spiritual origins we share, we pledge the loyalty of faithful friends. **(8)** United there is little we cannot do in a host of cooperative ventures. Divided there is little we can do for we dare not meet a powerful challenge at odds and split asunder.

To those new states whom we welcome to the ranks of the free, we pledge our word that one form of colonial control shall not have passed away merely to be replaced by a far more iron tyranny. **(9)** We shall not always expect to find them supporting our view. But we shall always hope to find them strongly supporting their own freedom—and to remember that, in the past, those who foolishly sought power by (10) riding the back of the tiger ended up inside. To those people in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts **(11)** to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required—**(12)** not because the communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right.

(13) If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich. To our sister republics south of our border, we offer a special pledge: to convert **(14)** our good words into good deeds in a new alliance for progress, to assist **(15)** free men and free governments in casting off **(16)** the chains of poverty. But this peaceful **(17)** revolution of hope cannot become the prey of hostile powers. Let all our neighbors know that we shall join with them to oppose aggression or subversion anywhere in the Americas.

And let every other power know that this hemisphere intends to remain the **(18)** master of

its own house.

To that world assembly of sovereign states, the United Nations, our last best hope in an age where the **(19)** instruments of war have far outpaced the instruments of peace, we renew our pledge of support—to prevent it from becoming merely a forum for invective, to strengthen its shield of the new and the weak, and to enlarge the area in which its writ may run. Finally, to those nations who would make themselves our adversary, we offer not a pledge but a request: that both sides begin anew the quest for peace—before the dark powers of destruction unleashed by science engulf all humanity in planned or accidental self-destruction. We dare not tempt them with weakness. For only when our arms are **(20)** sufficient beyond doubt can we be certain beyond doubt that they will never be employed. But neither can two great and powerful groups of nations take comfort from our present course—both sides overburdened by the cost of modern weapons, both rightly alarmed by the steady spread of the deadly atom, yet both racing to alter that uncertain balance of terror that stays the hand of mankind's final war. So let us begin anew—remembering on both sides that civility is not a sign of weakness, and sincerity is always subject to proof.

(21) Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate. **(22)** Let both sides explore what problems unite us instead of belaboring those problems which divide us. **(23-1)** Let both sides, for the first time, formulate serious and precise proposals for the inspection and control of arms, and bring the **(24)** absolute power to destroy other nations under the absolute control of all nations. **(23-2)** Let both sides seek to invoke the wonders of science instead of its terrors. Together let us **(25)** explore the stars, conquer the deserts, eradicate disease, tap the ocean depths and encourage the arts and commerce. **(23-3)** Let both sides unite to heed, in all corners of the earth, the command of Isaiah—to “undo the heavy burdens...[and] let the oppressed go free.” And if a **(26)** beachhead of cooperation may push back the jungle of suspicion, let both sides join in creating a new endeavor—not a new balance of power, but a new world of law—**(27)** where the strong are just, and the weak secure, and the peace preserved. **(28)** All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand days; nor in the life of this Administration; nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin. In your hands, my fellow citizens, more than mine, will rest the final success or failure of our course. Since this country was founded, each generation of Americans has been summoned to give testimony to its national loyalty. The graves of young Americans who answered the call to service surround the globe. Now the trumpet summons us again—**(29)** not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need—not as a call to battle, though embattled we are—but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle year in and year out, rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself.

Can we forge against these enemies a grand and global alliance, North and South, East and West, that can assure a more fruitful life for all mankind? Will you join in that historic effort? In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility—I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it. And the glow from that fire can truly light the world. And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world, **(30)** ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.

Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our

only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own.

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Answer Key

Paragraph #1 Answers

1. asyndeton
2. epithet
3. simile
4. zeugma
5. allusion
6. metaphor
7. synecdoche

Paragraph #2 Answers

1. polysyndeton
2. conduplicatio
3. hyperbaton

Answers for "Inaugural Address of President John F. Kennedy, January 20, 1961"

1. antithesis
2. parallelism
3. anaphora
4. antithesis
5. metaphor
6. parallelism
7. parallelism
8. antithesis
9. anaphora
10. metaphor
11. conduplicatio
12. anaphora
13. parallelism
14. conduplicatio
15. conduplicatio
16. metaphor
17. metaphor
18. metaphor
19. conduplicatio
20. parallelism
21. chiasmus
22. antithesis
23. anaphora
24. conduplicatio
25. asyndeton
26. metaphor
27. polysyndeton
28. anaphora
29. parallelism / anaphora
30. chiasmus