

Teaching Objective

Scripture writers used styles of language to add beauty, power, and life to their messages.

Themes

1. There is value and purpose for literary forms in scripture.
2. There are various types of literary forms in scripture.

Teaching Ideas

1. There is value and purpose for literary forms in scripture.

■ Scripture writers used many literary forms in their construction of scripture. Figures of speech are literary forms frequently used. Figures of speech are the uses of language to achieve special effects or meanings. In seeking to understand the scriptures, it is important to recognize figures of speech.

Scripture writers often used figures of speech to add beauty, power, and life to their messages. Some used these devices to veil the meaning from the reader; still others saw the figures as a means of exaggeration or comparison. Explain to students why figures of speech were used.

■ Point out to students why there are so many literary styles in the scriptures. Explain that scripture writers were left to express the inspiration and revelation they received in the best language and with the best skill they had. Therefore, there is a wide variety of literary styles in scripture.

2. There are various types of literary forms in scripture.

■ Explain and demonstrate that the scriptures contain many different kinds of literary forms and language usage, some of which are described below.

■ *Prose*. Most of the standard works are written in prose. Prose, in its broadest sense, is applied to all forms of written or spoken expression that do not have a regular rhythmic pattern. Prose has logical order, and its ideas are connected rather than merely listed. Prose style varies from one writer to another. It has a variety of expressions through diction and sentence structure.

Prose can be demonstrated with a reading from Genesis 1:1–5. Notice the logical order of ideas and the manner in which they are connected. One thought builds upon another.

■ *Poetry*. Poetry is a rhythmic expression of words. It comes in many forms and can be found throughout each of the standard works. In the scriptures, however, poetry is not set in poetic format and is, therefore, not always easy to recognize. “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger” (Proverbs 15:1) might not seem poetic to the reader, but it is a form of poetry, called parallelism. There are a number of forms of poetry found in the scriptures, but the most common form is parallelism.

Parallelism is a form of poetry without metric rhyme or rhythm. Parallelism is more concerned with the rhythm of thoughts than with rhyme of sounds or words. While there are various types of parallelism, the most common are those that *repeat* the same thoughts but in different words, those that show *contrast*, and those that *amplify* the original thought.

1. Repeat

- a. “Awake, ye drunkards, and weep; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine” (Joel 1:5; italics added).
- b. “Wo unto him that *spurneth* at the *doings* of the Lord; yea, wo unto him that shall *deny* the Christ and his *works!*” (3 Nephi 29:5; italics added).
- c. “And then shall they *weep* because of their *iniquities*; then shall they *lament* because they *persecuted* their king” (D&C 45:53; italics added).

2. Contrast

- a. “A *soft answer* turneth away *wrath*: but *grievous words* stir up *anger*” (Proverbs 15:1; italics added).
- b. “A time to be *born*, and a time to *die*; a time to *plant*, and a time to *pluck up* that which is planted” (Ecclesiastes 3:2; italics added).

3. Amplify

- a. “Behold, the Lord maketh the *earth empty*, and maketh *it waste*, and turneth *it upside down*, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof” (Isaiah 24:1; italics added).
- b. “For, said he, I have *repented of my sins*, and have been *redeemed of the Lord*; behold I am *born of the Spirit*” (Mosiah 27:24; italics added).
- c. “The *earth has travailed* and brought forth her strength; And *truth is established in her bowels*; And the *heavens have smiled upon her*; And she is clothed with the *glory of her God*; For he stands in

the midst of his people” (D&C 84:101; italics added).

When we understand that there is a relationship (repetition, contrast, or amplification) of thoughts between lines of scripture in a passage, we can view the passage as one thought and thereby better discern the intended meaning of the passage.

▪ *Simile*. A simile is a comparison between two things, usually introduced by the words *as* or *like*. For example, “For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven” (Malachi 4:1). The purpose of a simile is to liken attributes between two dissimilar things. One important value of a simile is the economy of language. It communicates much in few words. (Similes could be taught in detail here or in lesson 13.)

Similes are very common throughout scripture. Some examples are found in Psalm 1:3; 1 Peter 2:25; Luke 13:21. Have the students mark the similes and identify the comparisons. Ask students what they learned from each comparison.

▪ *Metaphor*. A metaphor is an implied comparison of two things. For example, “Ye are the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13). The purpose of a metaphor is to be emphatic, brief, and interesting. (Metaphors could be taught in detail here or in lesson 13.)

Examples of metaphors in the scriptures are found in Deuteronomy 32:4; John 10:11; 15:1; 2 Nephi 9:41; Doctrine and Covenants 76:85. Have students identify the metaphors. Ask them what the implied meaning of each metaphor is.

▪ *Hyperbole*. A hyperbole is a deliberate exaggeration for emphasis. It is an overstatement. For example, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:24).

Read with the class the following hyperboles. Discuss the exaggeration and the intended meaning.

1. “And if thy *right eye offend thee, pluck it out*, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell” (Matthew 5:29; italics added).
2. “Whither shall we go up? our brethren have discouraged our heart, saying, The people is greater and taller than we; *the cities are great and walled up to heaven*; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there” (Deuteronomy 1:28; italics added).

▪ *Idiom*. Idioms are words or phrases that have meaning in their cultural setting but are nonsensical when taken literally.

Idioms can be confusing for someone who is not familiar with a culture or language. “Hit the road,” “knock on wood,” “get the lead out,” and “sleep on it” are just a few of the idioms used in Western culture. Just imagine how senseless these

expressions sound to someone who is not familiar with this culture.

Understanding the intended meaning of an idiom is worthy of study. An excellent source to study is the footnotes. The Latter-day Saint editions of the scriptures offer very useful commentary on most idioms. Also, a careful reading of the idiom in context of the chapter and book will offer additional insight. Another means would be to study the author’s culture.

The following are idioms that the class could read and discuss. It would be a useful exercise to have students rewrite some of these idioms to render a clearer understanding.

1. “My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh, and *I am escaped with the skin of my teeth*” (Job 19:20; italics added).
2. “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to *break bread*, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight” (Acts 20:7; italics added).
3. “And it came to pass that when he had said these words he could say no more, and *he gave up the ghost*” (Jacob 7:20; italics added).

Ask the students for examples of idioms currently in use.

▪ *Personification*. Personification is when ideas, animals, or objects are given human traits. For example, “For Zion must increase in beauty, and in holiness; *her borders must be enlarged; her stakes must be strengthened*” (D&C 82:14; italics added). In this case, Zion is given the female gender.

Using the following scriptural passages, have the students identify what is being personified and how personification increases the understanding:

1. “And he said, What hast thou done? *the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground*” (Genesis 4:10; italics added).
2. “*They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera*” (Judges 5:20; italics added).
3. “But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the *earth keep silence before him*” (Habakkuk 2:20; italics added).

▪ *Parables*. A parable is an illustrative story answering a question or pointing out a moral or lesson. The word *parable* is a Greek word and refers to setting two things side by side for comparison. Parables were often used to veil the meaning of what was being taught. Thus, those who were not ready to live or understand the principle saw the parable only as a nice story.

When Jesus was asked why he spoke in parables, He said that some were prepared and willing to receive the “mysteries of the kingdom” and others were not (see Luke 8:10). The following statement

by Elder Bruce R. McConkie, who was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, is helpful in understanding the use of parables. He said parables “may serve as illustrations of gospel principles; they may dramatize, graphically and persuasively, some gospel truths; but it is not their purpose to reveal doctrine, or, standing alone, to guide men along the course leading to eternal life. Parables can only be understood, in their full and complete meaning, after one knows the doctrines about which they speak” (*Mortal Messiah*, 2:241).

From Elder McConkie’s statement, what guidelines can be used to better understand parables?

Supplementary Study Sources

- “Hebrew Literary Styles,” in *Old Testament: Genesis–2 Samuel* (Rel. 301 student manual), 302–6; various types of parallelism, imagery as figurative language, and use of dualism in Hebrew writings.

Suggested Student Study

- There are many examples of parallelism in the book of Proverbs. Have your students review Proverbs 3 and identify several of them.
- You might want to give students copies of the following lists and have them match each reference with the figure of speech it uses.

Figure of Speech and Definition

- A. *Simile*: A comparison by resemblance—a declaration that one thing is like another.
- B. *Metaphor*: An implied comparison—a declaration where one thing is said to be another because of a likeness or analogous relationship between them.
- C. *Hyperbole*: A deliberate exaggeration used for emphasis.
- D. *Personification*: When nonhuman things are given human attributes, such as when inanimate objects are spoken of as functioning with human intelligence.

Scripture Reference

1. — Deuteronomy 1:28
2. — Matthew 26:26
3. — Matthew 9:36
4. — Isaiah 14:8
5. — 2 Samuel 1:23
6. — Joseph Smith—History 1:32
7. — Matthew 5:13
8. — Psalm 1:4

(Answers)

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| 1. C | 5. C |
| 2. B | 6. A |
| 3. A | 7. B |
| 4. D | 8. A |