

The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963

Literature Focus: Figurative Language

Figurative language communicates ideas beyond their literal meaning to create an image in the reader's mind. Some common types of figurative language, also called figures of speech, are **similes** and **metaphors**.

- A **simile** compares two unlike things using the words "like" or "as." For example, "It was one of those super-duper-cold Saturdays. One of those days that when you breathed out your breath kind of hung frozen in the air like a hunk of smoke and you could walk along and look exactly like a train blowing out big, fat, white puffs of smoke." (p. 1) *Breath is compared to smoke coming from a train.*
- A **metaphor** compares two unlike things *without* using the words "like" or "as." For example, "I went over to the Brown Bomber's passenger side and started hacking away at the scab of ice that was all over the windows. (p. 7) *Ice is compared to a scab, a healing wound on a knee or elbow, thick and crusty.*

Directions: Read each quote from the novel. Identify the type of figurative language that has been underlined, and explain how it creates an image in the reader's mind to further the author's point. An example has been done for you.

Ex. My legs started wobbling like my knees were made out of Jell-O, my eyes started leaking water, my nose started running. (p.94)

- a. Figure of Speech: simile
 - b. Explanation: The simile compares his knees to Jell-O to show how nervous and shaky he felt.
-
1. "They said that the top-dog wolf is always getting challenged by jive little wolves. They said the top-dog wolf can't show no weakness at all, that if he do, if he gets hurt or something, if he steps on a broke bottle and starts limping or something, all the little jive wolves in the pack start trying to overthrow him." (p.92)
 - a. Figure of Speech: _____
 - b. Explanation: _____

Name _____ Period _____

2. “Well, Bozo,” she said flicking a piece of By’s hair out over his left ear and then another piece out over his right one, “maybe you were planning on joining the circus, ‘cause you sure do look like an honest-to-God clown now.” (p.88)

- a. Figure of Speech: _____
- b. Explanation: _____

3. I thought the Brown Bomber must look like a bug lying on its back with four skinny brown legs kicking and twitching to try to put it back on its feet. (p.148)

- a. Figure of Speech: _____
- b. Explanation: _____

4. “We’re so high and the air is so perfect that do you know what I think we’re doing?” Dad asked. . . “I think we’ve got our fingers in God’s beard and as we drive along we’re tickling him.” (p.147)

- a. Figure of Speech: _____
- b. Explanation: _____

5. Up close to us in the rest stop all we could see was the pump. It looked like a deformed, evil, one-armed space robot. (p.145)

- a. Figure of Speech: _____
- b. Explanation: _____

6. There was going to be a battle something like if Godzilla met King Kong, or if Frankenstein met Dracula, or like when champion wrestler Bobo Brazil meets the Sheik! (p.158)

- a. Figure of Speech: _____
- b. Explanation: _____

Name _____ Period _____

7. I remember a couple of years ago how Momma had cried and cried when someone called from Alabama and told us that Grandma Sands had had a little stroke, so I knew she walked with a cane now. I'd imagined the cane would be as big as a tree trunk with crows and owls and lizards living in it. (p.156)

a. Figure of Speech: _____

b. Explanation: _____

8. "I started buzzin' like a Hoover vacuum and you guys dropped off in reverse seniority!" (p.154)

a. Figure of Speech: _____

b. Explanation: _____

9. "When we first hit Alabama and had a bunch of miles to go and you kids were popping up like prairie dogs and crying and saying, 'How much longer?' and 'Mommy, make him stop!' and 'Is that Birmingham over there?' all I did was use that vacuum trick." (p.154)

a. Figure of Speech: _____

b. Explanation: _____

10. "Eighteen hours in a car can age a kid forty years. Yeah, I swear I've been looking in the rear-view mirror and wondering where my babies were and where these three bad-dispositioned, sour-faced, middle-age midgets came from." (p.153)

a. Figure of Speech: _____

b. Explanation: _____

Name _____

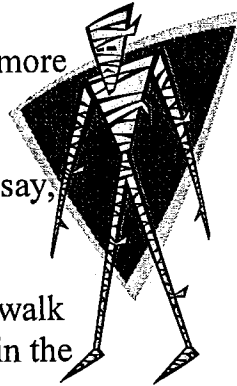
Allusion

An **allusion** is a reference to someone or something from literature, history, religion, mythology, or another field. Many of the allusions in *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* come from "popular culture," such as movies, songs, and television programs.

Explain the following allusions. (The first one is done for you. Sometimes more than one meaning is possible.)

1. **Allusion:** When Kenny and Joey wear their winter clothes, kids at school say, "Here come some of them Weird Watsons doing their Mummy imitations."

This **allusion** suggests that being bundled up in heavy clothes makes them walk stiffly, with their arms out. The movie monster called the Mummy walks in the same way.



2. **Allusion:** As Momma plays with Byron's conked hair, she calls him "Bozo," after the television clown.

This **allusion** suggests that _____



3. **Allusion:** Grandma Sands laughs "just like the Wicked Witch of the West," the villain of the movie *The Wizard of Oz*.

This **allusion** suggests that _____



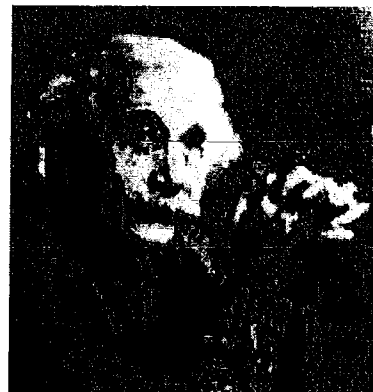
4. **Allusion:** When Byron meets Grandma Sands, "it was like Dracula (the vampire) and a giraffe, and Byron was all neck."

This **allusion** suggests that _____



5. **Allusion:** Toward the end of the novel, Byron brings Kenny along when he goes to play basketball. Kenny comments that "you didn't have to be Albert Einstein (the brilliant scientist) to figure it out" that Byron threatened the big guys into letting Kenny play.

This **allusion** suggests that _____



Name: _____ Class: _____

About Treacher Collins Syndrome

By CommonLit Staff
2016

This informational text gives a brief overview of the causes and effects of Treacher Collins syndrome, the same condition that Auggie, the protagonist of Wonder by R.J. Palacio, has. As you read this text, try to imagine the different ways Treacher Collins might impact a life or shape someone's identity, and identify 2-3 main ideas of the article.

- [1] Treacher Collins syndrome, named for Edward Treacher Collins who first described its symptoms, is a rare congenital¹ disorder that impacts facial features. People with Treacher Collins often have missing cheekbones, downward slanting eyes, hearing loss, atypical² or missing ears, and a smaller jaw. This syndrome is also quite rare and is identified in about one out of every 50,000 births. Some cases of Treacher Collins syndrome are very mild, while other cases could be life-threatening. Nevertheless, Treacher Collins syndrome does not negatively affect a person's cognitive³ ability.



"Wonder by R.J. Palacio" by cuprikorn is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

People with more severe cases of Treacher Collins syndrome may require several medical procedures and many surgeries. To begin, many individuals with Treacher Collins syndrome have trouble breathing or eating easily. These problems exist because there isn't enough space along the throat and jaw to create an adequate⁴ airway. When this happens, a tracheostomy⁵ may be necessary to create this airway. People with Treacher Collins syndrome also often receive cleft palate⁶ surgery around the age of one. Later, many patients also require bone grafts⁷ to help correct for missing cheek or orbital bones.⁸ Shortly after, patients often require ear reconstruction or an external⁹ device to make it easier to hear clearly. Other surgeries are also often required to correct eyelids, noses, or the soft tissue on the face.

1. "Congenital" describes a disorder or condition that exists since, or even before, birth.
2. **Atypical** (*adjective*): not typical; different from what is most common
3. mental abilities such as learning, knowing, or understanding things
4. **Adequate** (*adjective*): good enough
5. A tracheostomy is a surgery that helps people breathe by opening the windpipe and sometimes also inserting a special tube in the neck.
6. A cleft palate is when the roof of the mouth has a hole that connects it to the nose. It can cause problems speaking, eating, or even hearing.

Most cases of Treacher Collins syndrome are caused because of mutations¹⁰ in the TCOF1 gene. This specific gene creates proteins, which play an important role in the early development of bones and other tissues in the face. When there is a mutation in the TCOF1 gene, it negatively impacts the production of ribosomal RNA (rRNA).¹¹ This decrease in rRNA results in the destruction of certain cells that are involved in facial bones and tissues.

Sometimes people with Treacher Collins syndrome face other consequences of their condition—social ones. Amie, a physician who has Treacher Collins, writes on treachercollins.org, "Treacher Collins syndrome is a lot more than a pile of statistics and facts. It is about the person below the surface. People tend to give wide berth to the things and people that they perceive as a threat to them – those people who are 'different' or who they don't understand. In some situations, this defense mechanism can be good. In excess, however, it breeds ignorance¹² and heartache and leads society to shun¹³ those that aren't 'normal.' Thus, society does not take the time to see what lies beneath the outer shell of a person and never sees that below the surface these 'different' people are just as 'normal' as anyone else."

- [5] Jono Lancaster, another person with Treacher Collins, was abandoned by his birth parents when they saw his face. According to [an article from the BBC](#), Jono struggled with depression and was bullied in high school, but today he loves his face. People with Treacher Collins syndrome may not look "normal" and they may even face uncommon difficulties with speech or eating, but they can still live fulfilling and complex lives just like anyone else. Amie writes, "Given the chance to live my life over again without Treacher Collins, I would have to politely decline."¹⁴ Jono says, "I'm proud of who I am. And Treacher Collins made me who I am today."

© 2016. About Treacher Collins Syndrome by CommonLit is a derivative of Wikipedia, licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

10. A mutation is when a living thing develops different characteristics as the result of a change in their genes.
11. RNA is a thing in your cells that helps read your DNA to make proteins, which eventually make you look the way your DNA says you should — unless there is an unusual complication or mutation, like with Treacher Collins syndrome.

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best identifies a main idea of this text?
- A. Treacher Collins syndrome is a rare condition that can affect people in a variety of ways.
 - B. It is important to study medicine and science to cure Treacher Collins syndrome.
 - C. Those who are healthy should pity the people who suffer from Treacher Collins syndrome.
 - D. People who require many surgeries cannot be a part of society.

2. PART B: Explain and expand your answer to Part A using evidence from the text.

3. PART A: What does the phrase "to give wide berth to" most closely mean as it is used in paragraph 4?
- A. To stay away from
 - B. To act kindly towards
 - C. To be violent towards
 - D. To go out of one's way to help out
4. PART B: Which phrase from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
- A. "People with more severe versions of Treacher Collins' syndrome may require several medical procedures and many surgeries" (Paragraph 2)
 - B. "It is about the person below the surface." (Paragraph 4)
 - C. "it breeds ignorance and heartache and leads society to shun those that aren't 'normal.'" (Paragraph 4)
 - D. "but they can still live fulfilling and complex lives just like anyone else." (Paragraph 5)

5. Which statement best describes the relationship between paragraph 5 and the text overall?
- A. It disproves the claim in paragraph 4 that people with Treacher Collins are normal.
 - B. It highlights the fulfilling lives people with Treacher Collins can live, while previous paragraphs focus mainly on the difficulties of the syndrome.
 - C. It supplies evidence for the main ideas in paragraph 1, introducing the common effects of Treacher Collins along with some basic facts.
 - D. It switches the focus onto individuals from the previous paragraph that is only about society as a whole.

PLEASE USE BACKS!

6. People with Treacher Collins syndrome may have to undergo a lot of surgeries in their lifetime. What are some effects of these surgeries that might impact other parts of their lives? For example, think about how Auggie was homeschooled at first because of all his surgeries in the book *Wonder*.