

Irony Explained

Each in assignment sheet s/he has provided are

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Situational Irony: Involves a discrepancy between expectation and reality and derives primarily from events or situations themselves, whether or not the characters understand the situation as ironic.

Example: In O. Henry's short story, "Gift of the Magi," both husband and wife sell their most prized possessions to give their spouse a gift to complement the other's most prized possession. The woman sells her beautiful long hair to buy a platinum chain for the man's pocket watch; the man sells his watch to buy the woman tortoiseshell combs to hold up her hair.

Dramatic Irony: Dramatic irony involves a discrepancy between a character's perception and what the reader or audience knows to be true. Lacking material information that the audience possesses, the character creates discord by his or her responses to plot events. Thus, dramatic irony can be revealed by inappropriate statements, expectations, or actions.

Example: Sophocles' Oedipus Rex is the most widely known example. Oedipus, King of Thebes, vows to find the murderer of the previous king, only to find out what the audience has known all along: he is the guilty party.

Recognizing Irony

Irony is not sarcasm. Sarcasm is intentional ridicule that usually involves an obvious, even exaggerated form of verbal irony and is generally directed at a specific person with a hurtful aim. Irony is more restrained and is often directed toward a situation rather than a person, and it generally lacks hurtful intent.

Example: "I never forget a face—but in your case I'll be glad to make an exception."
This is sarcastic because there are clear identifiers that the statement is meant to be malicious, and it is directed to a specific person.

Irony is not satire. Satire is a literary genre in which irony, wit, and sometimes sarcasm