



## Meaning in Music: Poetic Devices

**Alliteration** - repeated consonant sounds at the beginning of words

Example: Starry starry night, flaming flowers that brightly blaze (Vincent, Don McLean)

**Allusion** - reference to an historical, religious, political event or a literary work

Example: I watched with glee while your kings and queens (Sympathy for the Devil, the Rolling Stones)  
Fought for ten decades for the gods they made.

**Assonance** - repeated vowel sounds

Examples: And the vision that was planted in my brain, still remains (The Sound of Silence, Simon and Garfunkel)

Baby this town rips the bones from your back (Born to Run, Bruce Springsteen)  
It's a death trap, a suicide rap  
We gotta get out while we're young  
'cause tramps like us baby we were born to run

**Contrast** - closely arranging things with strikingly different characteristics

Example: She was black as the night (Brother Louie, Stories)  
Louie was whiter than white

**Hyperbole** - exaggeration used for effect

Example: I feel the weight of the world on my shoulder (Where is the Love, Black Eyed Peas)

**Metaphor** - a direct comparison

Example: Wearing the face that she keeps in a jar by the door (Eleanor Rigby, the Beatles)

**Metonymy** - substituting one word or phrase for another that is closely related.

Example: Don't care what the governments say (Be the Rain, Neil Young)  
They're all bought  
and paid for anyway.

Explanation: in the example above, "governments" can't say anything, however people in governments can. The word governments was substituted for individuals.

**Onomatopoeia** - words that sound like their meanings

Example: Clang, clang, clang, went the trolley (The Trolley Song, Judy Garland)

**Paradox** - a seeming contradiction

Example: Just as every cop is a criminal (Sympathy for the Devil, the Rolling Stones)  
And all the sinners saints

**Personification** - treating a non-human thing with human characteristics

Examples: Hello darkness, my old friend (The Sound of Silence, Simon and Garfunkel)

Silently the senses abandon their defenses (Music of the Night, Andrew Lloyd Webber)

**Repetition** - the recurrence of words and phrases for effect

Example: Ah, look at all the lonely people  
Ah, look at all the lonely people

(*Eleanor Rigby*, the Beatles)

Note: the word "lonely" appears in this song ten times!

**Rhyme** - word endings that sound alike including at least the final vowel sound

Example: Pleased to meet you, hope you've guessed my name  
But what's puzzling you, is the nature of my game

(*Sympathy for the Devil*, the Rolling Stones)

**Rhythm** - a regular pattern of accented syllables

Example: How does it feel, to be on your own,  
like a complete unknown,  
like a rolling stone.

(*Like a Rolling Stone*, Bob Dylan)

**Simile** - a comparison using "like" or "as"

Example: Her eyes like windows, trickling' rain

(*Sad Lisa*, Cat Stevens)

**Symbol** - an object that represents something else

Example: Blackbird singing in the dead of night  
Take these broken wings and learn to fly

(*Blackbird*, The Beatles)

Explanation: The blackbird is a symbol for black people, broken wings are a symbol of incapacitation.

**Synecdoche** - a part represents the whole.

Example: Remember Charlie  
Remember Baker  
They left their childhood  
On every acre

(*Goodnight Saigon*, Billy Joel)

Explanation: Charlie and Baker are not individuals but represent the soldiers who were either killed or experienced horrific events in the fields of Vietnam.