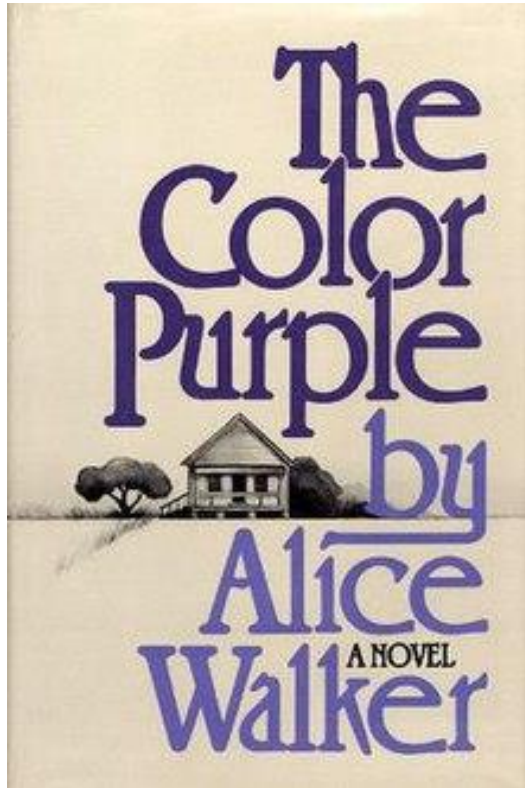
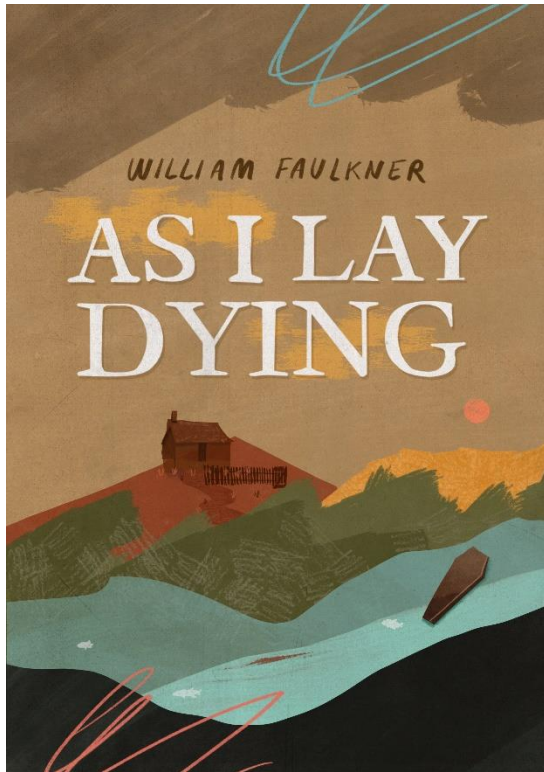


What is **tone** in literature?



“Everything you read has a tone. Blog posts will have an engaging and conversational tone; textbooks often have an informative, matter-of-fact tone. A piece of satire might have a humorous or ironic tone. Tone in literature encompasses the wide variety of moods, thoughts, and feelings that authors imbue their work with.”—[www.writers.com](http://www.writers.com)

A reader can recognize the tone by analyzing an author’s word choice and descriptions.



“Tone in literature refers to the author’s attitude toward a certain topic. Through specific word choice, the author reveals their feelings and opinions to the reader, conveying the author’s intentions behind the text.

The tone of a story is always described using an **adjective**.”—

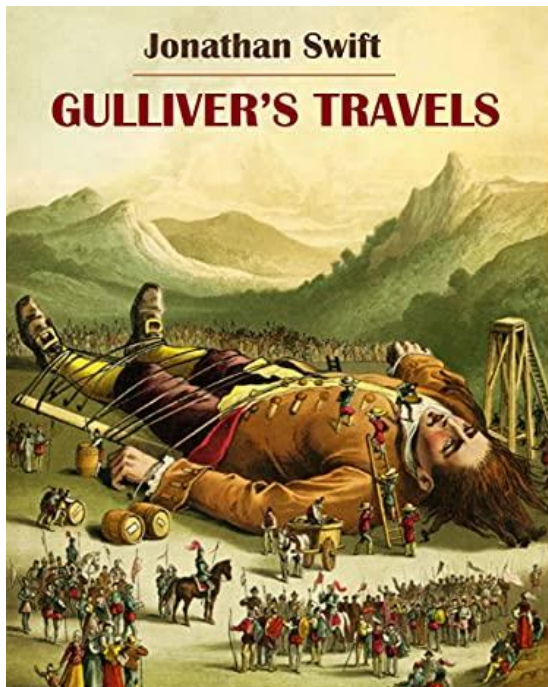
[www.writers.com](http://www.writers.com)

Tone Words: <https://www.chompingatthelit.com/tone-and-mood-examples/>

What are some adjectives that can describe the tone for each scenario?

1. A mother and her children were stranded on a deserted highway with a flat tire.
2. You won a million dollars for a writing contest.
3. The woman's boyfriend publicly proposed to her at the beach.
4. The girl's grandmother is sick at the hospital.
5. You earned a five on the AP Literature and Composition Exam.

Let's analyze some examples of tone in the following sentences.



**Activity (whole class):** Your teacher will give you a sentence. With your learning partner (s), determine the writer's tone. Be prepared to share your answers with the class.



His adorable new puppy explored the backyard with glee, and yes, it wiggled around on its back like it was making snow angels in July, and yes, it was a perfectly precious thing which anyone's hearts would have been opened just to see, and he was

very very lucky to have the new puppy all to himself.

**Dour**

He got a puppy. What on earth would he want a puppy for? The wretched things pee everywhere, damage the furniture, and always manage to wake their owners up in the middle of pleasant dreams.

**Curious**

He got a puppy, which was mostly confusing for people, since he openly disliked dogs. What would he want with a pet?

## Hopeful

Maybe this new puppy would open his heart toward the world—both such bruised and tender things that, perhaps, will heal with love.

## Condescending

He got a puppy, isn't that adorable? Who does that anymore? So cute, so American, like a rich but terrible father trying to win his child's love before a custody battle.

## Agitated

He got a puppy, but there's no need to talk about it, because it's no more exciting than

someone getting a new car horn or a bigger stereo system, except both of those things are probably much quieter than a new puppy is, so just don't bring it up.

## **Educational**

He got a puppy, but he made a lot of mistakes along the way. First, he never confirmed that the puppy was potty trained; second, he realized he didn't own the leash he thought he owned; and third, he ran out of paper towel trying to clean up the puppy's mess.

## **Accusatory**

He got a puppy, like everyone knew he would, because he was hellbent on creating the worst living situation imaginable for everyone around him.

## **Unsure**

Well, he did just buy a puppy, but he might have a bad habit of putting his dogs up for adoption once they get too big.



**Ironic**

He did what any normal, rational, totally sane, completely “in his mind” man would do, and bought a puppy.

**Despondent**

Why did he have to get a puppy? There goes my healthy sleep schedule.

**Contemplative**

He got a puppy which, if you think about it, was the best way for him to find motivation and love his life again.

**Nervous**

He got a puppy. A Rough Collie, in fact. A puppy with lots of germs, really sharp teeth, perhaps an inclination for blood. Nothing to worry about, right?

**Relieved**

There was no need to worry about him after he bought a puppy.

**Apathetic**

Eh, he got a puppy. I think it was brown.

## “WHAT TONE ISN’T

Before we continue, it’s important to note here what tone *isn’t*. Tone in writing *does not* refer to the following:

- . A specific character’s attitude toward something.
- . The attitude of the narrator—including the attitudes of first person fictional narrators.
- . The mood or moods evoked by the piece.

Tone *solely* refers to the author’s attitude toward the subject of a specific piece of writing. It does not reflect the attitudes of characters, it only suggests the attitude of the author at that specific moment of the text.”—

[www.writers.com](http://www.writers.com)

## Examples of Tone in Literature

An example of the tone of the opening paragraph to Neil Gaiman's, short story, "We Can Get Them For You Wholesale" (1984).

"Peter Pinter had never heard of Aristippus of the Cyrenaics, a lesser-known follower of Socrates who maintained that the avoidance of trouble was the highest attainable good; however, he had lived his uneventful life according to this precept. In all respects except one (an inability to pass up a bargain, and which of us is entirely free from that?), he was a very moderate man. He did not go to extremes. His speech was proper and reserved; he rarely overate; he drank enough to be sociable and no more; he was far from rich and in no wise poor. He liked people and people liked him. Bearing all that in mind, would you expect to find him in a lowlife pub on the seamier side of London's East End, taking out what is colloquially known as a "contract" on someone he hardly knew? You would not. You would not even expect to find him in the pub."

The author's tone in this passage is certainly ironic. Peter Pinter encompasses a very humorous duality: despite being an immeasurably moderate man, he's suddenly engaging in suspicious activity in a suspicious part of town.

The author's description of Peter Pinter underscores this irony. Peter is described as being like Aristippus of the Cyrenaics, whom you will probably never hear of unless you study Ancient Greek philosophers. The author also includes Peter's penchant for bargains, his "proper" behavior, and his properly middle-class existence.

These items, when juxtaposed against Peter's suddenly seedy surroundings, betray a playful sense of irony from the author. Not only is Peter's story rife with situational irony, but the details that Gaiman focuses on reinforces this irony, creating an exposition that's both humorous and perplexing. The fact that "you would not" expect Peter Pinter to be in this situation reveals the author's ironic attitude, as well as the attitude one might expect from Peter's close relations.

## References:

<https://www.chompingatthelit.com/tone-and-mood-examples/>

<https://writers.com/what-is-tone-in-literature>