

Explain the Hyperbole



A hyperbole is an extreme exaggeration. An example of this is the sentence “My books weigh a ton.” The books could not weigh a ton, but the exaggeration makes a more interesting sentence than merely saying “My books were heavy.”

Identify and explain the meaning of each hyperbole in the sentences below.

Part I. Simple Sentences

- 1) The puppy had ears a mile long. _____

- 2) I want to sleep a hundred years. _____

- 3) The monsoon seemed as if the floodgates of the heavens had opened. _____

- 4) That knife couldn't cut hot butter. _____

Part II. In literature

Read the following passage from “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” by Washington Irving. Find three examples of hyperbole and explain what each means.

He was tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves, feet that might have served for shovels, and his whole frame most loosely hung together. His head was small, and flat at top, with huge ears, large green glassy eyes, and a long snipe nose, so that it looked like a weather-cock perched upon his spindle neck to tell which way the wind blew. To see him striding along the profile of a hill on a windy day, with his clothes bagging and fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for the genius of famine descending upon the earth, or some scarecrow eloped from a cornfield.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

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Part I. Simple Sentences

Student answers will vary.

Examples of correct answers:

- 1) The puppy had ears a mile long. The hyperbole is that the puppy could not have ears as long as a mile. It means that the puppy has very long ears.
- 2) I want to sleep a hundred years. The hyperbole is that no one can sleep a hundred years. It means that the author is very tired and sleepy.
- 3) The monsoon seemed as if the floodgates of the heavens had opened. The hyperbole is that there is no floodgate in the heavens. It means it rained very hard.
- 4) That knife couldn't cut hot butter. Hot butter would be liquid, or melted. Any knife could “cut” through a liquid. The hyperbole is that the knife was unable to, when, in fact, it should be able to. It means the knife is dull.

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Student's choice. The hyperboles in the passage are underlined.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____