**A Brief Guide to Personification**

**Personification** consists in giving the attributes of a human being to an animal, an object, or a concept. It is prevalent in both poetry but also short stories and novels, especially as part of an image the author wishes to convey. Personification is really a subtype of metaphor, an implied comparison in which the figurative term of the comparison is always a human being. For this reason, personification also cannot function literally, only figuratively. In “Meeting at Night,” Robert Browning creates visual imagery as we imagine waves rising in the water alongside the boat in the cove: “And the *startled* little waves that *leap*/In fiery ringlets from their *sleep*” (3-4; *italics* mine). Each of these italicized examples of personification take a different part of speech:

*Startled* (adj.): suggests that the waves are surprised (they are not capable of emotion)

*Leap* (v.): suggests that waves can jump (they don’t have legs or muscles)

*Sleep* (n.): suggests the waves are awakened by the boat (water can’t sleep)

Most students initially believe that only *verbs* can demonstrate personification, but this is not true. A more critical reader can identify personification when words that are nouns and adjectives representing human beings are applied to animals, objects or other concepts.

Function/Purpose: Because the language of personification is to give living qualities to animals or non-human entities, the original image becomes intensified and seems more real. Secondly, personification of an object within relative proximity to a character in a story can draw attention to a larger metaphor or symbol. Laurie Halse Anderson uses both techniques effectively in the novel *Speak*. When it comes to metaphor and personification, these devices can blend together, and it can be difficult to classify a specific example exclusively as metaphor or personification. The important consideration in exploring these devices is not that we classify them definitively but that we see them as significant to discuss or analyze AND discuss their function.