

Synecdoche

Describing part of something to represent the whole thing, or describing the whole thing to represent one part.

Maybe you've heard the sailing command "All hands on deck!" before.

This isn't meant to be taken literally.

You're not going to see a group of hands scuttling on to the deck of a ship.

'Hands' actually refers to the whole crew of the ship, but the synecdoche reduces the sailors to just the parts of their bodies that are to be put to work.

Synecdoche can also describe all of something, when it's actually just representing one part.

"In that moment, the whole world was against him"

The whole world can't be against you, but using synecdoche here expresses how formidable life was in that moment.

In Norman MacCaig's poem, *Visiting Hour*, he uses synecdoche to describe himself as he visits his wife in hospital:

"The hospital smell combs my nostrils as they go bobbing along"

MacCaig seems to be detaching himself from the situation, by describing himself only as his nostrils.

It's like he's taking in sensations without really letting himself think or respond.

The synecdoche also draws attention to his nose. Focusing on his sense of smell, emphasises how the overpowering smells of the hospital have blocked out his other senses.

Synecdoche is just a part of writing - but using it can make the whole thing stand out!