

Poetry Lesson: Metaphor Madness

Grade Level: 4th

Time Frame: 45 minutes

Objective: Students will learn about metaphors and similes through reading the works of others and writing their own.

Prior Knowledge and Skills: Will help a lot if classroom teacher has had prior conversations on metaphor.

Required Materials: white board and markers, lined and unlined papers, colored pencils, Jack Collom's *Poetry Everywhere*

Sequence of Activities:

Read a poem and discuss (10 min)

Greet the class, and start right away talking about metaphor. What is a metaphor? Metaphors draw comparisons between two different objects. What are some examples? The moon is a cookie. The paper is a field of snow. Others?

Read the below poem (give each student their own copy) and ask them to highlight any metaphors they find.

Words are Birds

BY FRANCISCO X. ALARCÓN

words
are birds
that arrive
with books
and spring

they
love
clouds
the wind
and trees

some words
are messengers
that come
from far away
from distant lands

for them
there are
no borders
only stars
moon and sun

some words
are familiar
like canaries
others are exotic
like the quetzal bird

some can stand
the cold
others migrate
with the sun
to the south

some words
die
caged—
they're difficult
to translate

and others
build nests
have chicks
warm them
feed them

teach them
how to fly
and one day
they go away
in flocks

the letters
on this page
are the prints
they leave
by the sea

Francisco X. Alarcon, "Words are Birds" from *Laughing Tomatoes and Other Spring Poems*. Copyright © 1997 by Francisco X. Alarcon. Reprinted by permission of Lee & Low Books.

Source: *Laughing Tomatoes and Other Spring Poems* (Lee & Low Books, 1997)

Ask them what they notice about this poem. Facilitate a conversation guided by the following questions. What parts do they like and why? What metaphors did they find?

What do metaphors do? They draw comparisons between two different objects. In the poem, Alarcón says words are birds—what does that make you imagine? How are words like birds?

Some metaphors are cliché, meaning they get used too much so they aren't very interesting any more. Here are cliché metaphors and similes: black as night, clouds like cotton balls, strong as an ox. Can they add others? When we write, let's stay away from these old clichés that get used way too much! We want to come up with our own. Search for weird and unusual metaphors.

Brainstorming (10 min)

Make a list of one line metaphors together. If they need help, point out a starter object and say “_____ is a _____” (i.e., This pencil is a _____. The window is a _____.”

Pick one of these metaphors and make a two-column chart. In the first column, brainstorm a list of qualities associated with the first object in the sentence. Then ask, “How many of these qualities could also describe the second object?” Put an asterisk next to those qualities. Finally, put those qualities into a freestyle poem. You can help a lot, since this is the example.

Make your own metaphor poems (15-20 min)

Ask students to pull out a piece of paper. Ask them to think of strange or unusual comparisons. They can start by using objects in the classroom or outside the window. The teaching artist can also provide a few pictures for inspiration at each of the tables. Ask them to write a freestyle poem about that comparison like the example we just read.

If more examples are needed, the teaching artist can read the following out loud or individually share with children who feel “stuck.” Most are student poems from *Poetry Everywhere* (pgs. 126-127), unless otherwise noted. Note that their first line can be “_____ is a _____” and the lines that follow expand upon that metaphor, drawing out the image.

1.

Night is a bear
Roaring and going around in circles
Chasing ants to gobble them
Up.

2.

A tiger is a flashing light, fur, madness, strong glare,
A flashing bullet, all in one body.

A tiger is a flashing light, fur, madness, strong glare,
A flashing bullet, all in one body.

3.

Night is a black stallion
Running between us and the sun
Casting a shadow on the earth
Snorting thunder
Casting sparks when steel hits a star
Pounding hooves
Destroying some
Saving others.

4.

My dad’s laugh is
a train coming down
the tracks,
whistling and chugging
from the pit of his

stomach,
soft at first, then
full blast.

5.

From Tula [“Books are door-shaped”]

BY MARGARITA ENGLE

Books are door-shaped
portals
carrying me
across oceans
and centuries,
helping me feel
less alone.

Drawing

If time permits, ask them to illustrate their poem. They can doodle right on the paper, in the margins, on the back, at the top, at the bottom.

Sharing

If time permits, read poems aloud.