

## **Lesson Plan: Simile and Metaphor in Poetry**

Laura Hoopes, Oct 26, 2011

Advanced high school level

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Class time: This lesson can be used in one class for forty minutes to an hour, if the students are already familiar with the concepts and just need a quick review, or extended over several class periods if students need more time to become comfortable with these figures of speech. Two additional parts at the end, an advanced exercise and an extension, can be used or left out.

Goals of this lesson:

- Have the students learn or review the definitions of metaphor and simile and be able to recognize these figures of speech.
- Understand how metaphor and simile are used in poetry.
- Optional exercise: Begin to understand choices translators of poetry might make and how they would affect the poems.

### **I. Introduction to metaphor in context of a poem:**

Have a student read aloud “At Mount St. Helens” by James Arthur on page 67 of PI volume 17, which begins:

An eye of the earth,  
open and shut. ...

Ask the class, “Does anyone know about the eruption of Mount St. Helens?” Elicit or tell if necessary about the volcanic eruption of the mountain. Consider using a PowerPoint slide of before and after the explosion if possible, or make a handout to pass around.

Ask the class, “What does James Arthur mean by an eye of the earth?” Do the students think it means the volcano can see out? That it is shaped like an eye? What images does it suggest to them?

### **II. Definitions of metaphor and simile and practice recognizing them**

Give the definition of a metaphor and the definition of a simile (paraphrased from [www.rhlschool.com](http://www.rhlschool.com) English basics on the internet):

A **metaphor** is a comparison that shows how two things that are not alike in most ways are similar in one important way. Writers use metaphors to describe things because they make writing more interesting or entertaining. A metaphor states that something *is* something else.

A **simile** is a comparison of two things with one similarity too, but it uses the word “like” to connect the two ideas being compared.

- Examples:
- A. Andy was a hog for pizza.
  - B. Andy was like a hog for pizza.
  - C. Time is like a freight train.
  - D. She walked quietly like a cat.
  - E. The spaghetti spider web could not be eaten.

Make sure the students are quickly able to decide which are metaphors, which are similes.

Ask the class, “Do you think comparisons are more effective as metaphors or similes? Is one figure of speech more convincing than the other? Why or why not?”

### **III. Using metaphors and similes in poetry, experimenting with changes**

Return the discussion to the poem “At Mount St. Helens.” Ask the class if there are any other metaphors or similes in the poem. Discuss whether they can think of a way to add a metaphor or a simile to the text, or change some of the text to one or the other. Discuss whether the poem is more effective as the poet created it or with the new figure of speech. Talk about the process of creating poetry, how metaphors and similes need to be part of a whole poem and fit with the other features the poet used.

### **IV. Are metaphors or similes inherently more powerful?**

Have the class read the poem “To Gaze Is a Ghost” by Steve Scafidi on p 102 of PI volume 17. Ask the students to find as many metaphors and similes as they can in the poem. Then ask them to identify the ones they found most powerful, most effective in conveying the meaning of the poem. Ask them to consider whether metaphors or similes were used more effectively, based on their suggested most effective figures of speech discussion earlier. (Note: the two discussions in this section and section II may diverge in conclusions; we are trying to get students to think about how these concepts are used in real writing like poetry as opposed to sample sentences, so there are no wrong answers.)

### **V. Use of a controlling metaphor in a poem.**

Have someone read aloud the poem “In the Garden” by Bekah Stout, from p 32 of PI volume 17. In it, the soldiers dig and plant their fallen comrades as if they were bulbs. There is a sense in which the whole poem is a metaphor. Ask the class to find metaphors and when they have finished, ask them if there is one controlling metaphor or not. See if they think it “works” to base an entire poem on one similarity like this?

#### **VI. Optional advanced exercise focused on translation:**

Have the class read the poem “First Madrigal” by Anna Swir on page 48 and find all the similes and metaphors in the poem. Discuss why so many of the figures of speech are similes. Discuss the effect of translation on poetry and ask if they can think of some ways translating poetry can present special difficulties. Have them try switching the similes to metaphors and reading the poem aloud. Why do they think the translator chose as he did?

#### **VII. Additional work if time permits**

If time permits, ask the class to look for more examples of metaphors and similes in the other poems in PI volume 17 and read their examples aloud to the class.