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Metaphor and Simile

Definitions

Metaphor: A comparison that uses no connecting words. An *extended metaphor* carries the comparison throughout an entire work or section of a work.

Simile: A comparison between two seemingly unrelated things, using connecting words such as *like*, *as*, or *seems* in the comparison.

Examples from Literature

Li Po uses similes in these lines from “Taking Leave of a Friend”:

Mind like a floating wide cloud,
Sunset like the parting of old acquaintances.

Carl Sandburg uses similes and metaphors to compare the sounds of a jazz band to winds moaning, cars speeding, and foes fighting in a stairwell in this passage from “Jazz Fantasia”:

Moan like an autumn wind high in the lonesome treetops...cry like a racing car slipping away from a motorcycle cop, bang-bang! you jazzmen, bang altogether drums, traps, banjos, horns, tin cans—make two people fight on top of a stairway and scratch each other’s eyes in a clinch tumbling down the stairs.

Emily Dickinson’s comparison of the setting sun to a housewife extends throughout the poem “She Sweeps with Many-Colored Brooms,” which begins:

She sweeps with many-colored brooms,
And leaves the shreds behind;
Oh, housewife in the evening west,
Come back, and dust the pond.

Locating Metaphors and Similes

Decide which two unlike things are being compared in the metaphors and similes below. Record your responses on the lines provided.

1. The groves were God's first temple.

—William Cullen Bryant, "A Forest Hymn"

_____ is compared to _____

2. O our Mother the Earth, O our Father the Sky.

—Tewa Indian traditional poem, "Song of the Sky Loom"

_____ is compared to _____

_____ is compared to _____

3. I would not drop a single link / Of Memory's golden chain.

—Sarah Josepha Hale, "Thirty-Five"

_____ is/are compared to _____

4. ...the long Minnesota winter shut down like the white lid of a box...the wind blew cold as misery.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Winter Dreams"

_____ is/are compared to _____

_____ is/are compared to _____

5. The movements of a rabbit are compared to what three things in this passage from D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*?

And suddenly the rabbit, which had been crouching as if it were a flower, so still and soft, suddenly burst into life. Round and round the court it went, as if shot from a gun, round and round like a furry meteorite, in a tense hard circle that seemed to bind their brains.

Using Similes and Metaphors

A. Complete the following similes and metaphors. Decide whether each is a simile or a metaphor, and circle your decision.

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|------------------------------------|--------|----------|
| 1. Life is like _____ | simile | metaphor |
| 2. A dense forest seems like _____ | simile | metaphor |
| 3. Memories act as _____ | simile | metaphor |
| 4. Love is _____ | simile | metaphor |
| 5. School is _____ | simile | metaphor |
| 6. Pets are _____ | simile | metaphor |

B. Compare one of the topics from List One with one of the topics from List Two in an extended metaphor in a poem of your own.

List One

life
learning
poetry
growing up
a dream
family
accomplishing a goal

List Two

sailing
nature
hiking
a movie
singing
a house
playing sports

Writing Tip

Avoid *dead similes* and *metaphors*, which are those so overused they no longer contain much “punch” (e.g., “It cuts like a knife.”).

