



Lesson Title: Build a Better Metaphor

Common Core Standards Highlighted:

Introduction & Background Info: A metaphor is a rhetorical tool or figure of speech that compares one thing to another. Actually, it's not so much a comparison as it is a *figurative declaration* that one thing actually *is* another thing, at least in an imaginatively poetic way, because they share many of the same qualities. "She had a flinty stone of a heart." "His eyes were twin lasers." "When I was young, my family was a three-ring circus." These are all metaphorical statements. They're not literally true; they're figuratively true.

Writers often use metaphors and similes, which are a kind of metaphor, when they need to describe abstract nouns—ideas, concepts, or emotions that cannot be perceived with the five senses—or very common concrete nouns that get written about all the time and are therefore at risk of becoming clichés. What they do in these cases is use the metaphor to create a temporary association between the difficult concept and a more common object, something **simple and easy to talk about**. This allows them to write with more clarity and originality. For instance, after I've told you that FALLING IN LOVE is like OWNING A DOG (as I do in the title of one of my poems), I can spend the rest of the poem talking about dogs, but everyone knows that I am also talking about love.

In this exercise, each student will create one new metaphor from two nouns and an adjective offered up by other students. Most of the metaphors will be ridiculous! But one or two might be surprisingly vivid and useful, and all of them will be entertainingly original.

What you'll need: Index cards (three for each student, ideally each of a different color); a chalkboard or white board; paper and pencils for each student.

Minimum time required for this exercise: 30 minutes.

Directions: Pass out one index card of each color to every student. After reviewing what an adjective is and coming up with a few examples on the board (for instance, "RED," "SLIMY, and "SONOROUS"), ask each student to think of one adjective and write it clearly on one color of index card (let's say, the blue one). Go around the room and read over their shoulders to make sure the choices are correct and appropriate. You could certainly have the students work in small groups, but be sure each group comes up with as many adjectives on cards as it has members (ie. three members to a group should ultimately produce three blue cards with a single adjective on each card). Collect them all the blue cards, shuffle them, and leave them in a stack on your desk at the front of the room.

Next, after reviewing what a concrete noun is and coming up with a few examples on the board (for instance, "BUCKET," "ICE PICK," and "STUMP"), ask each student to think of one concrete noun and write it clearly on one color of index card (let's say, the pink one). Go around the

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room and read over their shoulders to make sure the choices are correct and appropriate. Collect them all, shuffle them and leave them in a stack on your desk at the front of the room.

Next, after reviewing what an abstract noun is and coming up with a few examples on the board (for instance, "FRIENDSHIP," "JEALOUSY," and "BEAUTY"), ask each student to think of one abstract noun and write it clearly on one color of index card (let's say, the green one). Go around the room and read over their shoulders to make sure the choices are correct and appropriate. Collect them all, shuffle them and leave them in a stack on your desk at the front of the room.

Now comes the fun part. Have each student come to the front of the room and pick one card from each pile in order and read aloud the resulting new metaphor while you write them on the board. Using our examples, you might get "The red bucket of beauty," or "the slimy ice pick of jealousy." The metaphors can also be read backwards, as in "friendship is a sonorous stump."

After you've written all the metaphors on the board, talk about which ones seem to work in surprising ways and which ones just plain don't. Have the students write poems about one of the metaphors by either explaining how it does or does not work ("People say that beauty is a red slap in the face, but they are wrong because . . ."). Encourage them to come up with their own metaphor for the same abstract noun using new adjectives and concrete nouns.

The result: By building simple metaphors piece by piece, your students will begin to think of the poetic device in a new way. And with any luck they will push themselves further in creating new metaphors.