

# Meanings and **Metaphors**

**Activities to practise figurative language**

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# What is figurative language? TEACHER'S NOTES

## Metaphors and similes

### Suggested level

Lower-intermediate upwards

### Aims

- to introduce and explore the concepts of metaphors and similes
- to raise students' awareness of functions of metaphorical language
- to stimulate vocabulary acquisition, reading and speaking

### Word list

approach, argument, context, diet, dinghy, drain, flavour, helping, ingredients, iron, magnet, oasis, (career) path, thumb-print, to outline, bleak, refreshing, warm (welcome), like a fish out of water

### Preparation

- Photocopy one set of the Student Pages for each student in the class.
- Bring in dictionaries if necessary.
- Bring in newspapers and magazines for 6.

### In class

#### 1a

- Ask students to read the definitions and then discuss the example sentences.

#### 1b

- Ask students to fill in the chart and then check their answers.

#### 1c

- In a monolingual class, you may wish to discuss the concepts of simile and metaphor in the students' mother tongue. When discussing the metaphors and similes, encourage students to talk about the similarities between what is being described and the object with which it is identified. (e.g. a house may be described as a gem, because a gem is beautiful, rare and valuable and the speaker feels the house has these qualities.)
- In a multilingual class, ask students to explain their metaphors or similes in English to the whole class.

#### 2

- Ask students in groups to read all the texts, helping each other with any vocabulary that they do not know. Encourage students to use dictionaries if necessary.
- Explain to students that as Text D comes from a traditional carol the phrase *made moan* is old-fashioned. It means *to make a low unhappy sound because you are miserable or in pain*.
- Do feedback with the whole class.

**i D ii A iii G iv B**  
**v H vi F vii C viii E**

#### 3

- Explain to students that some of the words in Texts A–H have both literal and metaphorical meanings.
- Do an example to show students how to do the activity.
- Instruct students to complete the activity in groups before you do feedback.

**path:** a track, etc.; a set of actions, etc.  
**diet:** the kind of food, etc.; too much, etc.  
**flavour:** the particular taste, etc.; the particular quality, etc.  
**oasis:** a place in a desert, etc.; a pleasant, peaceful place, etc.  
**magnet:** a piece of iron, etc.; a person or place, etc.

#### 4

- Tell the students to do this activity in pairs.
- While doing feedback, point out to students that metaphors and similes can range from the traditional/conventional which are found in dictionaries to the fresh and newly invented, such as those created by poets, advertisers, songwriters and ordinary people enjoying playing with language.

- a** In a dictionary: *helping, ingredients B, map G, magnet E*  
Not in a dictionary: *all the metaphors (the sun is a dinghy, etc.) to which the sun is compared in H*
- b** In a dictionary: *like a fish out of water (I), as it is an idiom*  
Not in a dictionary: *hard as iron, water like a stone D.*
- c** *Because they have been invented by the writer.*

#### 5

- Ask students why they think metaphors and similes are used so much. Brainstorm some ideas on the board, and then ask students to look at 5, and to add their own ideas to the list.
- Ask students in groups to tick the texts in 2, if they fulfil any of the purposes in 5, e.g. texts B and G help us to understand an idea more clearly.

#### Suggested answers:

**Help us to understand an idea more clearly, B, G**  
**Persuade us to do, think or buy something, A, C, E, G**  
**Play with language, to create pleasure and a sense of beauty, D, H**  
**Create an emotional response to something, E, F**  
**Make a message more memorable, A, B, G**  
**Communicate the values of a culture, A, G**

- For *to communicate the values of culture*, explain to students that metaphors and similes often express particular cultural values even if these are not very obvious, e.g. in Text A *career path* suggests that British English speakers think of work as going in a particular direction which leads somewhere. This view of work may not be held in all societies. What cultural values do students feel are expressed in G? (Suggestion: The concept that in written assignments we use the introduction to set out what the rest of the text will be about. Is this way of organising texts the same for students in their own language?)
- Ask students in pairs to write down any metaphors or similes they know in English.
- Ask students to discuss their metaphors or similes in groups first before having a discussion with the whole class.
- If appropriate with a monolingual group, this discussion could take place in the mother tongue.

**Extension activity**  
**Project work page 128**

# What is figurative language?

## Metaphors and similes

1

1a Read these definitions and discuss the example sentences. What do you think they mean?

**metaphor** *n* (C,U) an imaginative way of describing a person, object or idea by referring to something else that you think has similar qualities to the person, object or idea you are trying to describe:  
*My little nephew is a real monkey!*

**simile** *n* (C) an expression that describes something as being similar to something else, using the words 'as' or 'like':  
*The books sold like hot cakes.*

1b Complete the chart below with these sentences:

My little nephew is a real monkey!  
The old woman in the story had hair as white as snow.  
He told her jokingly that she was the sunshine of his life!  
The books sold like hot cakes.  
This beautiful old house is a historic gem.

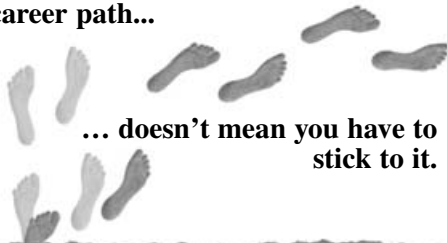
Metaphors	Similes
My little nephew is a real monkey!	The books sold like hot cakes.

1c Think of a metaphor and simile in your own language. What is described in each? How is it described?

2 Read these texts, which all contain metaphors and similes. Where are the texts taken from? Match them with the list of sources, i)–viii).

A

Just because there's an established career path...



... doesn't mean you have to stick to it.

B

Traditionally, the diet of language offered to our students has been **grammar** with a separate helping of **vocabulary** mixed in to give the required flavour. The two were seen as quite separate ingredients: structures on the one hand and a huge list of individual words on the other ...

C

Set in six acres of Royal Parkland, the Regent's Park Flower Show will be a refreshing oasis of colour and beauty – right in the heart of London.



D



*In the bleak midwinter  
Frosty wind made moan  
Earth stood hard as iron  
Water like a stone.*

# What is figurative language?

## Metaphors and similes

E

### Madeira

Madeira is a magnet to lovers of a warm climate, spectacular scenery and traditional hospitality. Explore this beautiful island on the Highlights tour.



F

*I mean, I just felt like a fish out of water at his party. You should have seen what everybody else was wearing!*

G

### Structure

- All written work should include an introduction, where you set the context and outline the 'map' of what is to follow. This map should include what you are going to cover, why you have decided on this particular approach, and how your argument will develop.

H

### What is the Sun?

the Sun is an orange dinghy  
sailing across a calm sea

it is a gold coin dropped  
down a drain in Heaven

the Sun is a yellow beach ball  
kicked high into the summer sky

it is a red thumb-print  
on a sheet of pale blue paper

the Sun is a milk bottle's gold top  
floating in a puddle

*Wes Magee*

- i a Christmas card on which there are the words of a traditional English song for Christmas .....
- ii a newspaper advertisement for a lawyer .....
- iii a book on writing essays .....
- iv a description of a mini-course for teachers of English .....
- v a book of poems .....
- vi a young person talking to a friend .....
- vii a leaflet advertising a flower show .....
- viii a travel brochure .....