

Exercise on Unit Four: metaphors

This is an exercise to help anyone who struggles to identify and analyse metaphors.

In a metaphor, a word or expression which means one thing in a literal or real sense is applied to another thing in a figurative or unreal sense. For example: when something is called wooden in a literal or real sense, it means that it is made out of a tree. But when one says ‘he had a wooden face’, it means that the person being referred to has a stiff and inexpressive face. The face is being compared to wood because it is hard and unmoving, like wood.

When you analyse a metaphor’s meaning, you should explain what two things are being compared and what is similar about them. See the examples below for clarification.

Example One:

She was fairly certain that life was a fashion show.

Analysis: In this metaphor, life is being compared to a fashion show. This implies that life is about looking impressive to other people. Like a model, one must work hard to be thin, attractive and interesting in order to keep other people’s attention.

Example Two:

What storms then shook the ocean of my sleep.

Analysis: In this metaphor, a storm at sea is compared to a poor night’s sleep. A rough ocean storm makes it difficult for a ship to sail smoothly, tosses a ship around on the waves, and can cause seasickness and fear. Similarly, when having a bad night one does not sleep peacefully, and might ‘toss and turn’ in one’s bed. Similarly, one might feel ill after a bad night.

More complex examples:

Example One:

Men court not death when there are sweets still left in life to taste.

Analysis:

In this metaphor, sweets are compared to pleasant aspects of life. Thus, it is stated that men do not want to die if they have not yet enjoyed all the pleasant aspects of life.

Example Two:

Example:

This job is the cancer of my dreams and aspirations.

Analysis:

In this metaphor, a bad job is being compared to a cancer. Cancer slowly takes over and kills the body. Similarly, a job which is not enjoyable can slowly take over one's life and 'kill' one's dreams by making it impossible for one to live them out.

Exercises:

Now, try to analyse the following metaphors yourself:

1. The children were roses grown in concrete gardens, beautiful and forlorn.
2. Kisses are the flowers of love in bloom.
3. His cotton candy words did not appeal to her taste.
4. Her eyes were fireflies.
5. John's answer to the problem was just a plaster, not a solution.
6. Cameron always had a taste for the fruit of knowledge.

More complex examples:

1. Thy tones are silver melted into sound.
2. Love is a guest that comes, unbidden, / But, having come, asserts his right.
3. My House of Life is weather-stained with years.
4. See the sun, far off, a shrivelled orange in a sky gone black.
5. Life: a lighted window and a closed door.
6. Some days my thoughts are just cocoons hanging from dripping branches in the grey woods of my mind.

(Taken from <http://www.ereadingworksheets.com/figurative-language/figurative-language-examples/metaphor-examples/>)