**Figurative Language**

Figurative language is any language that is *not used* in a literal (meaning exactly what is says) way.

**Examine the figurative language in the following excerpts:**

1. I was seven, I lay in the car

Watching palm trees swirl a sickening pattern past the glass.

My stomach was a melon split wide inside my skin.

--Naomi Shihab Nye, “Making a Fist”

1. What is the metaphor in this poem? What is the literal term? What is the figurative term? What does the metaphor mean?
2. How would the meaning and impact of these lines change if Nye said simply, *My stomach really hurt?*

Task: Rewrite the figurative term in Nye’s metaphor. Try to express feelings of anxiety and pain – both physical and emotional – with your metaphor.

Ex. My stomach was \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

2. The Tangerine Times printed a special pullout section on the Lake Windsor Middle School sinkhole. The photos were spectacular. They had one huge shot of the splintered walkways sticking up in all directions, like Godzilla had just trampled through there.

--Edward Bloor, "Tangerine"

1. Is the phrase *the splintered walkways sticking up in all direction*s literal or figurative? Explain.
2. …like Godzilla had just trampled there is a simile. Why is it a simile and not a metaphor? What are the literal and figurative terms?

Task: Write one sentence which describes a park. First describe it literally (how the park really is), then support your description with a simile. Use this pattern for your sentence.

Ex. The park …, like …

3. Frantic, Cole struggled to fly, but he could escape the nest. All he could do was open his beak wide and raise it upward toward the sky, the action a simple admission that he was powerless. There were no conditions, no vices, no lies, no deceit, no manipulation. Only submission and a simple desire to live. He wanted to live, but for that he needed help; otherwise his life would end in the nest.

--Ben Mikaelsen, "Touching Spirit Bear"

1. This paragraph contains an extended metaphor, a metaphor that continues over several sentences and is developed in several ways. The literal term of this metaphor is Cole, the name of the boy who struggles to survive. What is the figurative term? How do you know? What evidence can you find in the paragraph that supports your understanding?
2. The figurative term in this metaphor is never directly stated. How would the impact of the paragraph change if Mikaelson had written it like this?

Task: Write an extended, implied metaphor like Mikaelsen’s. Picture a man eating with very poor manners at a party. Your literal term should be the man’s name (make up a name). Your figurative terms is shark. However, don’t state that your person eats like a shark. Instead, compare the man to a shark by giving him the actions of a shark, implying that he eats like shark. Write at least two sentences to extend the metaphor.

4. He gossips like my grandmother, this man

with my face, and I could stand

amused all afternoon

in the Hon Kee Grocery,

amid hanging meats he

chops…

--Li-Young Lee, “The Cleaving”

1. Look at the first line. Is like my grandmother a simile? Explain.
2. Is this man/with my face figurative? If so, is it a metaphor or a simile? Explain.

Task: Write a poem in which you compare yourself to a family member or a friend. Your poem should be a least four lines long and contain at least one metaphor.

5. The ruddy brick floor smiled up at the smoky ceiling; the oaken settles\*, shiny with long wear, exchanged cheerful glances with each other; plates on the dresser grinned at pots on the shelf, and the merry firelight flickered and played over everything without distinction.

-Kenneth Grahame, "The Wind in the Willows"

*\*long wooden benches with high backs that usually have storage space in the seat*

1. Remember personification is a kind of metaphor, an implied comparison that always has a human being as its figurative term. Identify examples of personification in the passage.
2. How does the use of personification help the reader visualize and connect to the passage? What kind of feeling is created by the personification?

Task: Write a short paragraph describing a friend’s room. In your description use personification at least one time. Use Grahame’s paragraph as a model.

6. Eusebio talks in a hoarse whisper that smells of tobacco, one hand on Mama’s shoulder, one hand grasping my T-shirt. He’s like a sheepdog, and we are the sheep. He makes us go in little groups, watching the road, listening.

--Frances Temple, "Grab Hands and Run"

1. Find one simile and one metaphor in the passage. Identify the literal and figurative terms.
2. How is the meaning of the passage deepened by the simile and the metaphor?

Task: Write a sentence like Temple’s second sentence. Write the sentence about one your teachers and his/her students. Your sentence should contain a simile and a metaphor. First decide what you want to compare the teacher and the students to, and then write the sentence.

7. He could shoot bumblebees in the eye at sixty paces, and he was a man who was not afraid to shake hands with lightning.

--Harold W. Felton, "Pecos Bill and the Mustang"

1. This is example of hyperbole. Of course, Pecos Bill couldn’t literally do these things. What, then, is the purpose of saying that he could?
2. Compare Felton’s sentence with this one:

*He could shoot very well, and he was not afraid of anything.*

Which sentence better helps the reader understand what Pecos Bill is like? Why?

Task: Write a sentence about a great basketball player, using hyperbole.

8. Flowers and other things have been laid against the wall. There are little flags, an old teddy bear, and letters, weighted with stones so they won’t blow away. Someone has left a rose with a droopy head.

--Eve Bunting, "The Wall"

1. This passage is from a book about the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, DC. Identify the symbols and explain what they mean.
2. Look at the last sentence about the rose. Remember that it is a rose, but it’s also something else. What does the rose usually symbolize. Why does it have a droopy head here? What does the droopy head add to our understanding of the symbol and the feeling of the passage.

Task: Think of as many traditional symbols as you can and include what the symbols stand for. Share your answers with a partner.

9. Oh, and there’s a thrilling shot of one of the kids being sick on a small fishing boat off the coast of Florida and we are hovering over him offering him salami and mayonnaise sandwiches. That one really breaks us up.

--Erma Bombeck, "At Wit’s End"

1. Bombeck describes a picture from a family vacation as thrilling? Is it ironic? Is it sarcastic?
2. Look at the following re-write of the passage

*We have a picture of one of the kids being sick on a small fishing boat off the coast of Florida. In the picture, we’re making fun of him, and offering him salami and mayonnaise sandwiches. We know it’s wrong, but it’s kind of funny.*

Which version is funnier? Why? How does the use of irony help shape your understanding of the author’s attitude toward vacation pictures?

Task: Write a few sentences describing a family outing you didn’t enjoy. Include at least one example of verbal irony (sarcastic or not).

10. All this last day Frodo had not spoken, but had walked half-bowed, often stumbling, as if his eyes no longer saw the way before his feet. Sam guessed that among all their pains he bore the worst, the growing weight of the Ring, a burden on the body and a torment to his mind.

--J.R.R. Tolkien, "The Return of the King"

1. The ring in this book, is in fact, a ring; however, it also symbolizes something else. What do rings usually symbolize? Why would Tolkien use a ring as a symbol?
2. How does the use of a symbol help you understand the passage?

Task: A rainbow is often used as a traditional symbol of hope. Write a paragraph describing a scene of misfortune and miser. In your description, use the rainbow to symbolize hope for better times ahead.