



VISUALISE METAPHOR

*Concepts clarified, connected and considered
for English teachers*

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What is this guide for?

Develop subject knowledge

'Subject knowledge' in English is huge. You don't need to know it all, but hopefully this is a way to develop this area of your knowledge without wading through lots of text.

Prompt discussion

This was designed with department meetings in mind. Using this resource as a basis for discussion - what would you agree or disagree with? Are there powerful images in your curriculum which you might look at differently? How could this support your *writing* curriculum?

In the classroom

There are examples, definitions, explanations and questions throughout which can support teachers in planning, and the visuals are designed to convey complex and abstract ideas with simplicity and clarity.

Support reading and analysis

How are metaphors constructed? What are the building blocks? How might word choice, symbolism, context and the relationship between the tenor and vehicle create meaning?

Support writing and crafting

What are our options when we write? How can we vary our choices and play with language to create different effects?

Avoid misconceptions

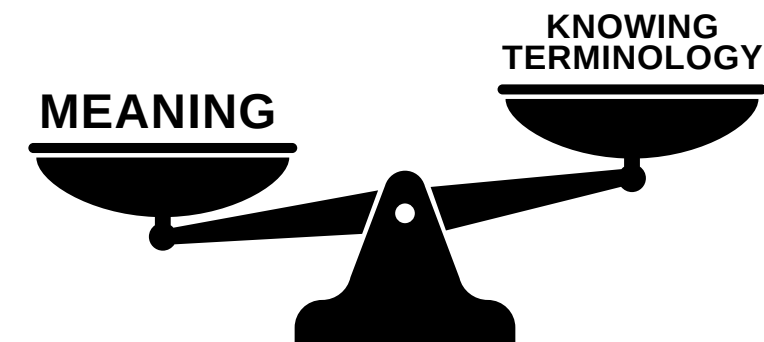
Throughout, the guide includes prompts and notes about common misconceptions and areas of terminology overlap which often occur.

Warning: knowledge

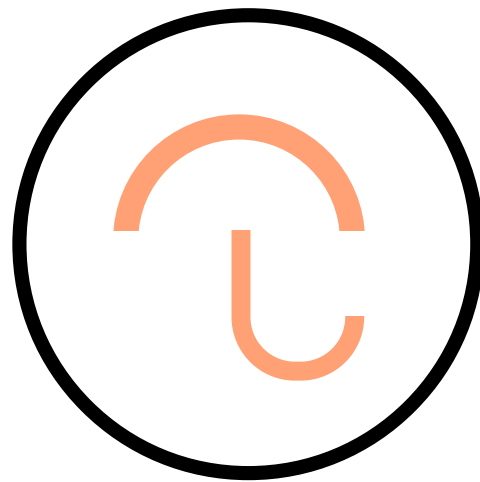
Knowledge is powerful and beautiful. When we know what is possible with language, we are empowered to appreciate art and create our own.

Being able to list complex terminology is not the same as having knowledge of how language works.

Meaning and function are far more important than knowing the names of things. I love the specificity which terminology can bring, but it is secondary to effect. This guide will hopefully support knowledge by prompting questions about *how* language is constructed and *why* writers might make choices.



What is *metaphor*?



Metaphor is an umbrella term for any device which creates meaning by *relating* one idea to another for effect.

These are all *types of metaphor*.

allusion

simile

personification

symbolism

conceit

zoomorphism

synaesthesia

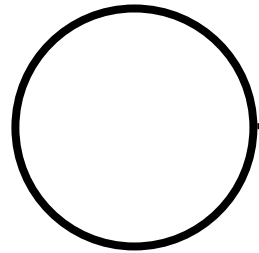
allegory

pathetic fallacy

anthropomorphism

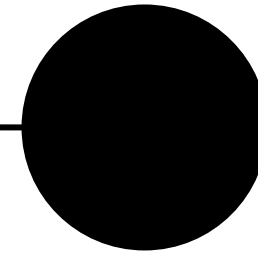
The parts of a metaphor

TENOR



The thing being described

VEHICLE



The thing being related to the tenor

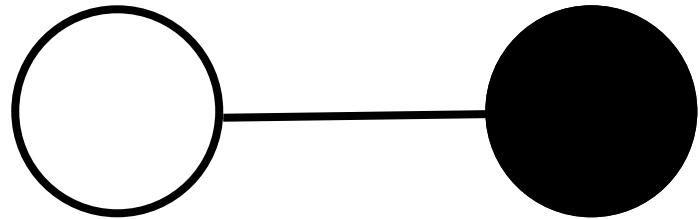
RELATIONSHIP

The way the VEHICLE and TENOR are connected to each other



*The **boy** was a **monster**.*

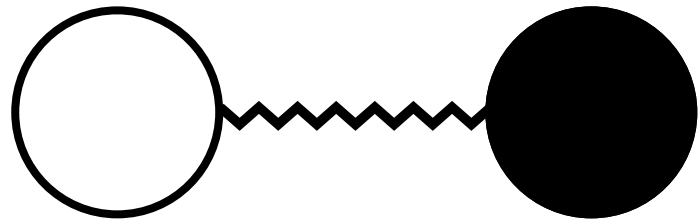
Natural relationship between vehicle and tenor:



*The **boy** was a **monster**.*

This **vehicle** carries meaning which is commonly related to this **tenor**. Young children are often likened to monsters. This is a typical, unsurprising metaphor.

Unnatural relationship between vehicle and tenor



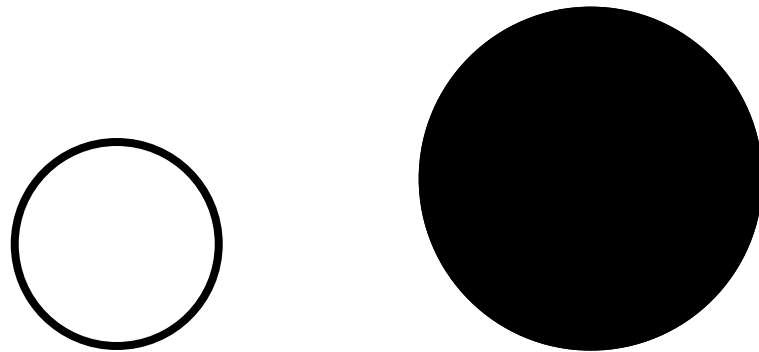
*The **boy** was a **cigarette**.*

This **vehicle** is *not* commonly related to this **tenor**. Possible effects:

It strikes the reader image because of its uniqueness

It is ambiguous - we know how a little boy might be like a monster. It is harder to understand immediately how he might be like a cigarette - is it visual? Symbolic? This vehicle might create ambiguity.

Loaded vehicle



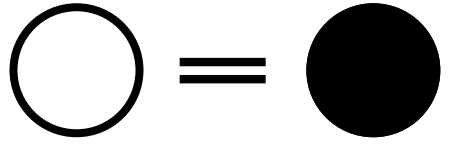
*The **boy** was a **cigarette**.*

This **vehicle** is loaded with meaning. Writers select meaningful vehicles to convey lots of information in a single image.

e.g. the vehicle here might suggest that the boy is:

- unhealthy, diseased, dying
- addictive, bad for you (a bad choice for a relationship, perhaps)
- a pariah, outcast
- disposable, dirty, unclean

Tenor and vehicle of equal value


*His **anger** was **fire**.*

In this example, the **tenor** is *defined* by the **vehicle**. They are related to each other in meaning, and are equal:

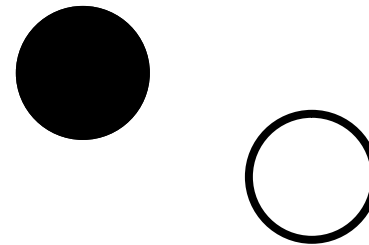
THING 1 was/ is/ will be **THING 2**

Foregrounded vehicle

Are the tenor and vehicle equal
to each other?



*His **anger** was **fire**.*

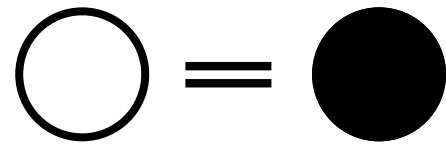


***Fire:** his **anger** raced through his heart.*

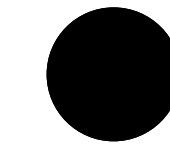
In this example, the vehicle is foregrounded. It is the image which opens the sentence and is therefore the thing which is most prominent.

Invisible tenor

Are the tenor and vehicle equal to each other?



*His **anger** was **fire**.*



*A **fire** raced through his heart.*

In this example, the vehicle is foregrounded and the tenor has disappeared.

Extended metaphor

Is the vehicle part of a pattern or trend in the wider text?



*His **anger** swept through the room like a **wildfire** (...) nothing she could say would calm the **flames** - she had to let it **burn** itself out.*

This is an **extended metaphor**; the vehicle of fire is used multiple times across the text.

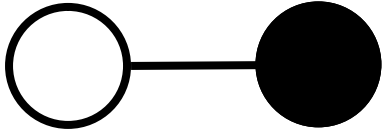

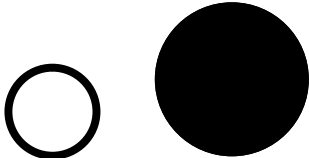
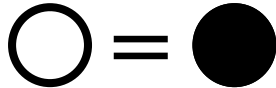
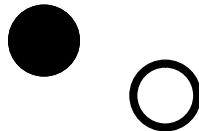
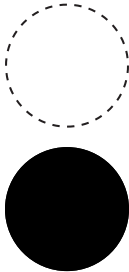

Misconception check:

This example also contains a **simile**. Remember, a simile is a type of metaphor.

See more about simile on pages 15-16

Compare Metaphor Constructs

What are the potential effects of different types of metaphor? What are the questions we could ask?

 <p>Natural tenor-vehicle relationship <i>Does it help to create a comfortable or coherent image? Is it a cliché?</i></p>	 <p>Unnatural tenor-vehicle relationship <i>Is it striking for the reader? Does it prompt us to connect unusual ideas together? Does it create ambiguity?</i></p>	 <p>Loaded vehicle <i>Does the vehicle introduce complex or profound meaning? Does it affect the way we read the rest of the text?</i></p>
<div><div><p>Equal tenor-vehicle</p></div><div><p>Foregrounded vehicle</p></div></div> <p><i>Are the tenor and vehicle of equal value?</i></p> <p><i>If the vehicle is foregrounded, what effect does that have on meaning?</i></p>	 <p>Invisible tenor <i>Is it obvious what the tenor is or has this created ambiguity for the reader?</i></p>	 <p>Extended metaphor <i>What is the vehicle choice? Is the metaphor used throughout, or is it just in a shorter section? Does the metaphor build or decrease in intensity over time? Or develop in some other way?</i></p>

Classic Simile

The tenor is described by being compared to the vehicle.



*His **anger** was sudden, like a **forest fire**...*

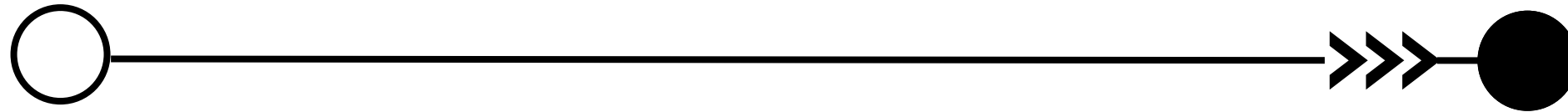
This simile draws multiple connections between the **tenor** and the **vehicle**.

e.g. the man's anger is like a forest fire because it is: sudden, fast-moving, unexpected, dangerous, deadly, all-consuming, etc.

Complement or distraction?

A simile brings a new idea into a narrative which we have to compare to the thing we are picturing.

Sometimes the vehicle fits naturally with the tenor and the tone and atmosphere of the text.



*They skirted past the craters in their path, dodged the searchlights and disappeared, **like** ghosts, into the gloom.*

Sometimes the vehicle seems like a departure from the rest of the text.



*They skirted past the craters in their path, dodged the searchlights and disappeared, **like** cheetahs, into the gloom.*

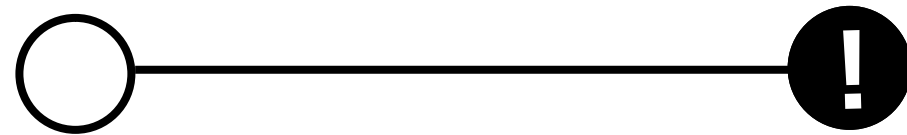
See also:

P.5-7
Natural/ unnatural
relationship between
vehicle & tenor

Conceit

Where the vehicle and tenor are two vastly contrasting things, and the effect is surprising, unlikely and complex.

The effect is often that the resulting image is intellectually creative or imaginative.



*'Macbeth does murder **sleep**', the innocent **sleep**,
Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast.'*



Shakespeare describes sleep as:

- knitting
- death
- a bath
- a second course in a meal

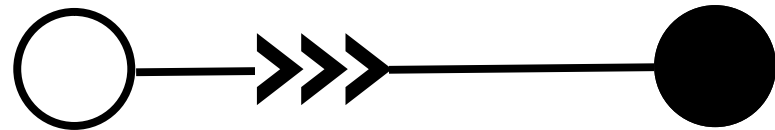
*Macbeth by William Shakespeare

Misconception check:

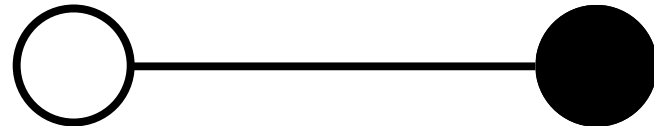
The definition of **conceit** is very similar to what we said about **loaded vehicle** or **unnatural relationships** between vehicle and tenor. It doesn't really matter what we decide to call it, as long as the discussion is about the way that metaphor shapes meaning.

Allusion

A reference to something outside the text or from elsewhere in the text. This is often embedded in a classic metaphor or simile.



*His anger was like the **6th circle of hell**.*



*His rage swelled: **gift of Prometheus**.*

The thing being alluded to carries a specific meaning linked to another area of knowledge. Allusions can be **universal** or more **obscure**.

UNIVERSAL: Most people would link the allusion to 'hell' with heat. Many would know that the '6th circle' is a reference to Dante's Inferno.

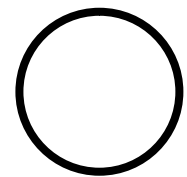
This is a far more **OBSCURE** reference. In Greek mythology; Prometheus the Titan stole fire from the Gods and gave it to humanity.

Misconception check:

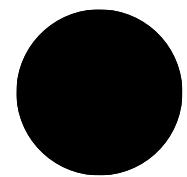
This example contains a simile. It is a simile which uses allusion - it explicitly refers to Dante's Inferno. We can use both the 'simile' and 'allusion' labels when we talk about it or just choose the one which is most useful for the point we are making.

Allegory

A narrative in which the characters, places, objects and events have a symbolic meaning. Allegories often use simple stories to express truths or generalisations about the human experience.



The story of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the early years of the Soviet Union.



*A story about animals on a farm yard who rise up against the human farmers and establish a new community where all animals are supposed to be equal.**

Misconception check:

You might describe a whole text as 'an allegory' or as 'allegorical', or there might be a particular moment, even of character which is allegorical.

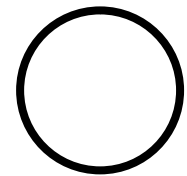
Students sometimes confuse inspiration with allegory. For instance, a character being inspired by a real person isn't necessarily allegorical.

**Animal Farm* by George Orwell

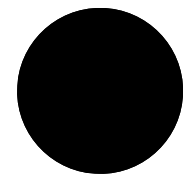
Allegory: specific or generic?

Some allegories are very specific to a particular event or situation. Some are far more generic and relate to a broader set of ideas.

SPECIFIC



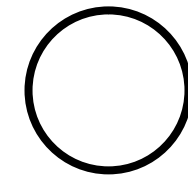
*Russian Revolution 1917
& Soviet Union*



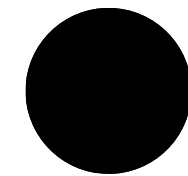
*Animal Farm**

Details from the **vehicle** can be directly mapped onto the **tenor**. e.g. individual characters in this novel represent key people in the Russian Revolution.

GENERIC



Man's relationship with the divine.



*Life of Pi***

The **tenor** is relatively abstract and general. e.g. the details of this novel, the **vehicle**, are broad and open to interpretation.

**Animal Farm by
George Orwell*

***Life of Pi by
Yann Martel*

Personification



The **tree** stood over them, **angry and cold**.



The **tree** was like a **nurturing mother**.

Where the tenor is an inanimate object and it is described using generic human-like emotions or intentions.

Anger, and the emotional implications of 'cold', lend human emotions to the tree.

The implication here is that the tree has a conscious intention to nurture and protect them in the way that a human mother might.

Misconception check:

Students often get confused by personification, anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, because they all rely on human/ animal/ non-human relationships. Remember, the terminology is not as important as the *meaning* which is created. More notes on those devices in the following pages.

Personification and pathetic fallacy are often confused with each other. This is because pathetic fallacy very often (though not always) involves the personification of the natural world. Read more on p.24.

What's the difference between **personification** and **anthropomorphism**?

anthropos (Greek) = human

anthropomorphism = having human form

Some would suggest that personification is a more abstract attribution of human traits, whereas anthropomorphism makes very specific, precise use of human form and behaviours.

(Hint: they are, essentially, the same thing.)

Personification is a kind of anthropomorphic metaphor.

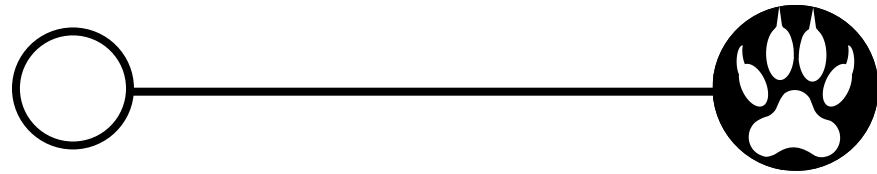
e.g. The pigs in Animal Farm walk on two legs, speak, and wear human clothing.*



This is a more explicit form of personification because the non-human becomes human in more than just emotion or intention. Anthropomorphism is often used in fairytales, fables and fantasy stories.

**Animal Farm by George Orwell*

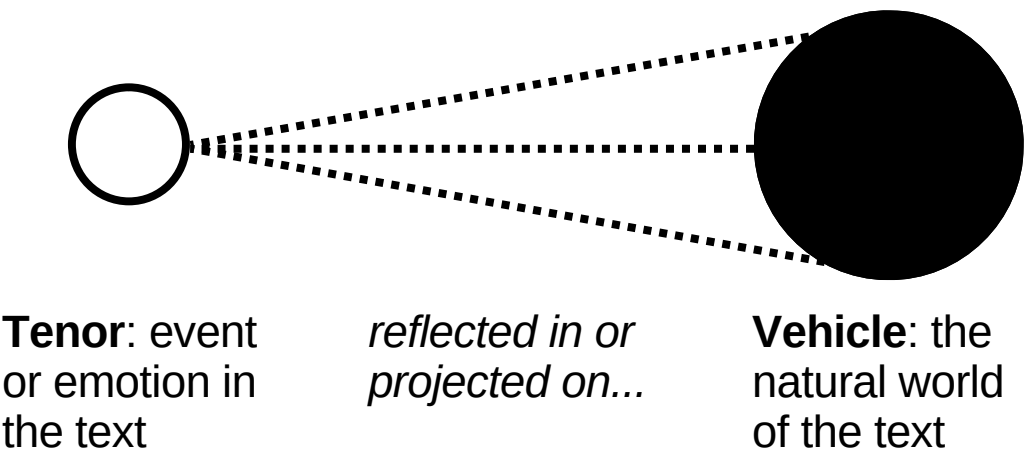
Zoomorphism



The **river roared** downstream, **wild** and **untamed**.

The **tenor** is non-animal, but is described using animalistic traits. The **vehicle** might be linked to the behaviour or appearance of a specific animal, or animal or 'wild' behaviour more generally.

Pathetic Fallacy



The **earth** was **feverous** and did **shake**.*

Elements of the natural world are used as a vehicle to reflect emotions or events in the text.

In this example, the murder of a king and the resulting inevitable social chaos, is reflected in a storm.

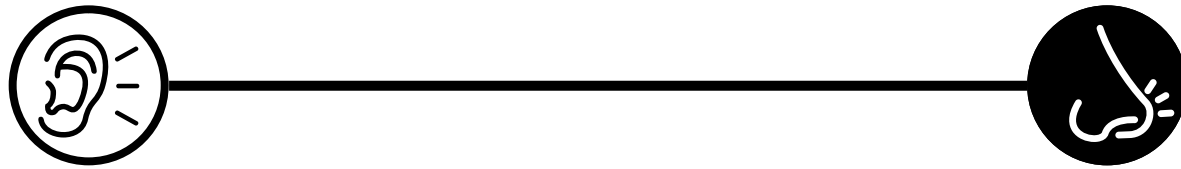
Misconception check:

Pathetic fallacy and personification are often confused with one another, because pathetic fallacy very often involves the personification of the natural world. The example on this page does this by suggesting that the earth is 'feverous'. Ultimately, the label you use isn't important. Discussion of meaning and effect is key.

**Macbeth* by William Shakespeare

Synaesthesia

The use of one sense as a **vehicle** to describe another sense (the **tenor**).



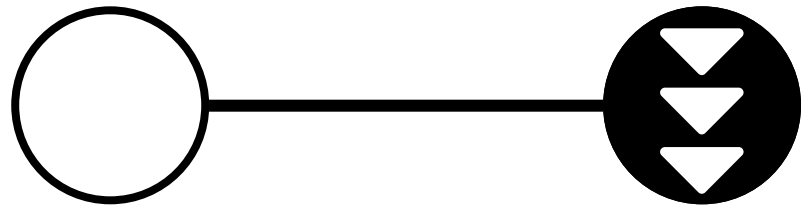
*Thy **voice** was a censer that scattered strange **perfumes**.**

Because synaesthesia uses one sense to describe another, it is an unusual type of imagery which can be particularly striking.

**Salome* by Oscar Wilde

Symbolism

The **vehicle** (or **symbol**) is an object, person, place, idea, thing or event which represents something else (the **tenor**) such as an emotion or abstract concept.



*My **love** is like a red red **rose**.**

*Robert Burns

Symbolic depth

Symbols are *deeper* than ordinary metaphors. They can lend the tenor meaning on many different levels.



*My **love** is like a red red **rose**.**

Like a rose, the poet's beloved is...



Beautiful: perhaps there is an implied suggestion of rosy cheeks or red lips



Natural: perhaps there is a sense of them being a natural, god-given beauty, rather than something which can be comprehended by man



Delicate: vulnerable - perhaps perishable



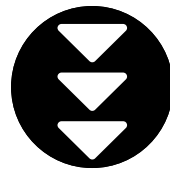
Young: or in the prime of life



Related to **summer** and warm weather - perhaps there is a suggestion that their beauty is transient, like the seasons

*Robert Burns

Symbols: generic or specific?



*Arise fair **sun** and kill the envious **moon**.**



Generic: light in general is a universal **symbol** which often represents goodness, truth or power.



Specific: sunrise is a universal symbol which often represents: the triumph of good over evil; new beginnings or new life.

We might find the same **generic** symbolism in imagery of any kind of light, or more **specific** symbolism associated with each different one.

**Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare*

Symbols: universal or obscure?

*Now spring has clad the
grove in green.**



Universal symbols are things which everyone understands, e.g. **the colour green is a universal symbol for new life and the natural world.**

*Robert Burns

*I'll give the conch to the
next person to speak.***



Some **symbols** have multiple universal meanings,
e.g. **the colour green can also symbolise jealousy.**
You have to decide which is relevant in each case.

***Lord of the Flies* by
William Golding

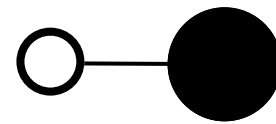
Obscure symbols are understood more narrowly, so their meaning might be limited to the context of that text, writer or genre, e.g. **in *Lord of the Flies*, the conch comes to symbolise authority and order.**

Terminology overlaps

This image *could* be given multiple labels:

*But soft, what light from yonder window breaks? It is the East, and Juliet is the sun!**

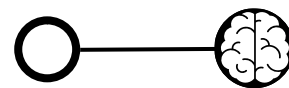
Concepts in English frequently overlap with each other. The line below could be described in many ways. **The label isn't what's important - meaning and effect are key. Choose the label which is the most useful for what you want to say.**



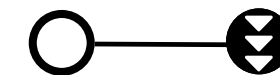
Classic Metaphor with a loaded vehicle



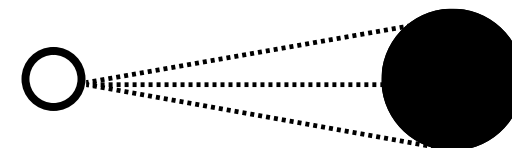
Extended Metaphor: Juliet is represented by the sun throughout this passage



Personification: The sun and moon are non-human, and given human emotion and intention.



Universal Symbol: sunrise



Pathetic Fallacy: the sunrise, a natural element, used to reflect Juliet coming to the window

**Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare*

Classroom questions for exploring metaphor as readers

What is your immediate reaction to the metaphor?

- Does it make you feel any strong emotion or have a strong reaction?
- Does it remind you of anything? An experience you've had, something else you've read, or a different form of art you've encountered?
- Does it force or urge you to think about or picture something?
- Does it feel like it belongs in the text you are reading? Or does it change something about the text?
- If it is extended, do you notice anything change or develop over the course of the text?

Does the basic structure of the metaphor shape meaning?

- Is the **tenor** explicitly mentioned, or is the **vehicle** the only focus?
- Is the metaphor a one-off, or does it **repeat** or **develop** over the course of the text?

Is there more than one potential interpretation of the metaphor?

- Does the **vehicle** have **depth** with **multiple layers** of meaning?
- Does the **vehicle** have multiple meanings which are **distinct** from one another?
- Is the meaning of the **vehicle** **ambiguous** or **obvious**?

Does the metaphor maintain or shift the tone or focus of the text?

- Does the text flow through the metaphor, or does the metaphor provide a **stop**, a **change in direction**, a **re-classification** of what we are reading?
- Is the **tenor-vehicle** pairing a **natural, expected** one? Or one which causes us to stop and think?

How does the choice of vehicle shape meaning?

- What kind of imagery or idea does the **vehicle** introduce to the text?
- How does the choice of **vehicle** help create **atmosphere** or **tone**?
- What other **vehicles** could the writer have chosen? How would that have been **different**?
- Would some readers experience the metaphor differently to others? Are there elements of it which would be **known** to some and **obscure** to others?

If there is allusion, is it universal or obscure?

- If it's universal, is the writer using it **as expected**? If not, what are they trying to say?
- If it's obscure, does the **writer** want us to think about it? To point out our ignorance? Is it a way for the writer to boast of their own knowledge? Or simply an allusion with private, personal meaning to the writer which isn't meant for us?
- Is the writer alluding to another writer? Their own writing? Writings from a meaningful (religious or philosophical) text? A prominent idea or movement?

Classroom strategies for exploring metaphor as writers

What if...

- 1. Look at a metaphor in a literature text or in students' own work
- 2. Identify how it works
- 3. Ask 'what if...' and see what the same metaphor would look like if it was constructed differently.

*hard and sharp as flint**

This is a simile with two adjectives to modify the subject and provide even more descriptive detail. The tenor is the character, Scrooge. The line describes Scrooge as 'hard' like 'flint', suggesting that he is hard-hearted and cruel.

There are unlimited ways you might get students to change a metaphor they encounter in the wild. Each time, ask: How does it change the meaning? Which one do you prefer? Why?

This works well as a way to shape and craft students' own metaphor use in their writing.

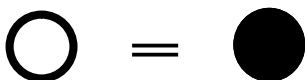
What if we changed the simile by removing the adjectives?

Scrooge was like flint



What if we changed this from a simile to a metaphor with an equal vehicle and tenor?

Scrooge was flint



What if we changed this to a metaphor with a foregrounded vehicle?

Flint was Scrooge



**A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens

Classroom strategies for exploring metaphor as writers

Moments of shift...

Metaphor works by bringing a new related idea into the text. This provides an opportunity for students to introduce a new element, thereby creating a shift in tone or atmosphere.

1. Students write a piece of narrative or description
2. They identify a place where they would like to shift the tone or atmosphere
3. They consider how their choice of vehicle might help them to make that shift.

Do you want the shift to be gradual?

You could use a subtle allusion to begin introducing new ideas by association.

Do you want the shift to create a sudden change in atmosphere? You could use a loaded or symbolic vehicle to force the reader to consider new, powerful ideas.

Do you want the shift to be reflected in the natural world surrounding your characters? You could use pathetic fallacy to show how this new mood is projected onto the natural environment.

Do you want the shift to instigate a sustained change in tone which develops in some way? You could use

an extended metaphor and consider how it might become more or less intense over the course of your writing.

Do you want the shift to indicate a humorous or quirky narrative voice?

You could use a conceit or vehicle which is surreal or surprising to indicate originality and uniqueness in voice.

Classroom strategies for exploring metaphor as writers

Does it actually need a metaphor?

Metaphor is brilliant, but it is possible, and sometimes advisable(!), to write without using one. Consider these questions...

What is the purpose and audience of my text? Is a metaphor appropriate?

What am I trying to say? Would a simple description be more effective than a metaphor?

How many 'literary' devices have I used in this text? Is it too much? Could I strip some of it back and allow the really powerful elements to shine?

Have I used any similes? Are there any situations where a simple verb would be better?

Do any of my metaphors rely on cliché? Can I think of anything more original? If I can't, do I really need a metaphor?

A final plea

Please use this resource in the spirit in which it is intended.

This guide is **not** a lesson plan or a curriculum map. It is not a list of things students or teachers *must* know. It is not an *answer* for an examination or a standard by which to judge practice.

It is not *good* or *bad*. It just *is*. Its effectiveness depends entirely on the teachers who might use it to inform their thinking, prompt questions and develop their practice.

Jennifer Webb (2022)
www.funkypedagogy.com

