

Figurative Speech in English Literature

Lesson Plan

Learning Objectives:

- To develop the ability to understand and recognize the use of figurative language within a text
- To be able to appreciate the power of descriptive literary techniques
- To be able to critically engage with texts, allowing for the evaluation and discussion of techniques/themes/ideas within

Description:

I have modeled this lesson plan in accordance with the learning outcomes of GCSE level English Literature, for use when students are first introduced to the figurative aspects of the English language within the curriculum. My hope is that, through engaging students with hip-hop-derived texts, I can attain the class's interest in literary devices so they can better engage with and understand more 'classic' literature. There will be a principal focus on similes and metaphors, as both are abundant in hip-hop lyrics.

I would like to draw from Marc Lamont Hill's ideas on 'Classroom Configuration' in that the desks in the room are arranged into circle so as to encourage a more communal atmosphere amongst the students.¹

¹ Marc Lamont Hill, 'Spaces and Places We Fly', *Beats, Rhymes and Classroom Life* (Columbia: Teachers College Press, 2009), 13-29; here, 23.

Similes

What is a simile?

*A figure of speech that expresses the resemblance of one thing to another of a different category, usually introduced by **as** or **like**...*

- Collins English Dictionary

Activity 1:

Read out the definition to the class, and then explain it in layman's terms, aided by a few easy (mundane) examples: 'as cold as ice', 'hot as the sun', 'thick as two planks', etc. Make the point that these structures can get very creative, then ask the students to read through the examples given on the worksheet (see next page). Go round the circle and ask each student to read out his or her chosen example.

Activity 2:

Referring to the second page of the worksheet, ask the students to come up with some of their own similes using the templates given (use of a template is not mandatory). Encourage creativity and specificity by referring to some of the examples on page 1 of the worksheet. After 5 or so minutes, go round the circle and ask students to read out one or two of their ideas.

Similes (Worksheet)

Have a read of this list of similes used by various hip-hop artists. Pick one or two that stick out to you and be ready to read them out:

"The truth is traveling with the word as they're flying through the air like a javelin"

Talib Kweli, *2000 Seasons*

"Call me the rap assassinator, rhymes rugged and built like Schwarzenegger"

Wu-Tang Clan (Raekwon), *Protect Ya Neck*

"He never makes it rain, like Southern California"

Fat Joe, *Make It Rain*

"I'm hella straight, like 9:15"

Unknown

"I take my time, ya'll be Russian like the Soviet Union"

Papoose, *Black Democrat*

"I'll be at your neck like a bowtie"

Lady Leshurr, *Queen's Speech Ep. 2*

"My supersonics leave you mute like Maggie Simpson"

Company Flow (El-P), *Bad Touch Example*

"Sick with a shank like Shakespeare was with a pen"

Scorcher, *Do Me A Favour*

"Transmit personal problems like headlice in bandanas"

Non Prophets, *That Ain't Right*

"Stun like stun guns"

Afu-Ra, *Defeat*

"I leave you full of clips like the moon blocking the sun"

Immortal Technique, *Industrial Revolution*

"I flow like blood on a murder scene"

GZA, *Liquid Swords*

"Enter in and up under your skin like a splinter"

Eminem, *Without Me*

"I drop greats like clumsy waiters drop plates"

Reflectio Eternal, *Fortified Live*

"Talk sharp like a razor blade"

The Roots (Black Thought), *Web*

"Developing pictures in your brain like a darkroom"

Kool G Rap, *Men At Work*

"Get torn the fuck up like confetti"

Main Source (Akinyele), *Live At The Barbeque*

"I ran like a cheetah with thoughts of an assassin"

Nas, *N.Y. State of Mind*

"Like short sleeves, I bear arms"

Jay Z, *Brooklyn's Finest*

"Medicine will get me revving like a 747 jet engine"

Eminem, *Anyman*

"On the mic like Moses"

Inspectah Deck, *Above The Clouds*

"I'll endanger your species like an Ostrich"

Busta Rhymes, *Do My Thing*

"Bitches on me like I'm welfare"

Big L, *Ten Crack Commandments Freestyle*

Activity:

Try to make your own similes using the templates below (or start from scratch). The more detailed/imaginative, the better!

Example:

“Tall **as/like** the Eiffel Tower”

1) Cold like...

2) As fast as...

3) Hot like...

4) As smart as...

5) Running like...

6) Scared like...

7) As smooth as...

8) As ill as...

9) Unused like...

10) Fresh as...

Metaphors

What is a metaphor?

A metaphor is an imaginative way of describing something by referring to something else which is the same in a particular way

- Collins English Dictionary

N.B

Be sure to clarify the difference between a simile and a metaphor, i.e. all similes are metaphors, but not all metaphors are similes. Metaphor is a broader term for a comparative descriptive device, whereas similes **always** make use of connection words such as **like**, or **as**.

Examples:

Each to be shown on an individual PowerPoint slide. Invite an open discussion of what each metaphor symbolises before moving onto the next.

- “I am a beast, feed me rappers, feed me beats”
Lil Wayne, *We Takin’ Over*
- “Yo son we gotta raise up, don’t let them just array us
‘Til we raisins in the sun, so we gotta wake up”
Joey BadA\$\$, *Snakes*
- “The snakes, the grass, too long to see the lawnmower sittin right next to the tree”
DMX, *Who We Be*

Extended Metaphors

Key points to explain:

- A comparison that continues for an extended period of time
- Impressive literary device due to numerous elements/images of both subjects being described that fit together and complement one another

Relevant Text: Common, *I Used To Love Her*

Activity 1:

Read through verse one together as a class (provided on next page), then ask the class to break off into smaller groups of two or three and discuss the thematic material of the text. After a few minutes of discussion, have an open floor for each group to pitch in their ideas on the subject matter.

Activity 2:

Read through verse three together as a class and repeat the exercises used to critically engage with the first verse.

Hopefully the class will have grasped the notion that Common's love interest is an extended metaphor for hip-hop's. If not, clarify (with use of lyrics from the first and third verses).

Additional Activity/Homework

Listen to the following songs featuring extended metaphors. Prepare some notes on what you think the metaphor represents to discuss at the beginning of the next class:

- Nas, *I Gave You Power*
- Lupe Fiasco, *Gotta Eat*

Common

I Used To Love H.E.R.

[Verse One:]

I met this girl, when I was ten years old
And what I loved most she had so much soul
She was old school, when I was just a shorty
Never knew throughout my life she would be there for me
On the regular, not a church girl she was secular
Not about the money, no studs was mic checkin' her
But I respected her, she hit me in the heart
A few New York niggas had did her in the park
But she was there for me, and I was there for her
Pull out a chair for her, turn on the air for her
And just cool out, cool out and listen to her
Sittin on a bone, wishin' that I could do her
Eventually if it was meant to be then it would be
Because we related, physically and mentally
And she was fun then, I'd be geeked when she'd come around
Slim was fresh yo, when she was underground
Original, pure untampered and down sister
Boy I tell ya, I miss her

[Verse Three:]

I might've failed to mention that the shit was creative
But once the man got you well he altered the native
Told her if she got an energetic gimmick
That she could make money, and she did it like a dummy
Now I see her in commercials, she's universal
She used to only swing it with the inner-city circle
Now she be in the burbs lickin' rock and dressin' hip
And on some dumb shit, when she comes to the city
Talking about poppin' glocks servin' rocks and hittin' switches
Now she's a gangsta rollin' with gangsta bitches
Always smokin' blunts and getting' drunk
Tellin' me sad stories, now she only fucks with the funk
Stressin' how hardcore and real she is
She was really the realest, before she got into showbiz
I did her, not just to say that I did it
But I'm committed, but so many niggas hit it
That she's just not the same lettin' all these groupies do her
I see niggas slammin' her, and takin' her to the sewer
But Imma take her back hopin' that the shit stop
Cause who I'm talking bout y'all is hip-hop

Bibliography:

Lamont Hill, Marc, 'Spaces and Places We Fly', in *Beats, Rhymes and Classroom Life* (Columbia: Teachers College Press, 2009), 13-29.

Videography:

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