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Understanding Metaphors...It's a Breeze!

by Amber Hodgson, M.A., CCC-SLP



A *metaphor* is simply a way to compare two things in order to suggest a resemblance, or likeness. Metaphors are one type of figurative language. *Figurative language* helps to make writing or speaking more interesting by making unusual comparisons. These comparisons create pictures in the mind of the reader or listener. The opposite of figurative language is *literal language*, or meaning exactly what a person says. For example, a person uses literal language by saying, "Her news was *difficult to accept*." However, this sentence becomes figurative if it changes to the metaphor, "Her news was *difficult to swallow*." The sentence is now a more creative and interesting way of communicating the literal language of "difficult to accept." Some other examples of metaphors include:

- Our backyard was a *blanket of snow*.
- It's a *refrigerator* in here!
- We *hatched* a great plan.
- My older brother is a *night owl*.
- She had the weight of *the world on her shoulders*.

All of these sentences communicate ideas that cannot *literally* be true. A person could never

actually hold the physical weight of the world, but this metaphor gives a more interesting image of "feeling burdened." A metaphor can also give a better understanding of unknown vocabulary words. For example, if children do not know the word "burden," this metaphor can increase their understanding by helping them to picture the description in their minds.

How to Teach Metaphors

One way to teach metaphors involves choosing one noun or idea to be the subject. If the subject is *love*, for example, have the children think of words to describe love. Love is sweet, happy, kind, beautiful, etc. Then, take one of the descriptive words, like beautiful, and have the children think of things that represent beauty, like flowers, sunsets, mountains, etc. Finally, have the children put love with one of the descriptions of beauty to get a unique, interesting metaphor, like "*Love is a red rose*."

Teaching the difference between metaphors and other kinds of figurative language is also important. For example, many people confuse metaphors with similes. A *simile* is another type of figurative language that also makes a comparison between two unrelated objects, but it is much easier to spot a simile. A simile uses the words "like" or "as" to make comparisons. "His hands were as cold as ice," and "The boy ate *like* a pig!" are examples of similes.

By teaching children how to understand and use metaphors, parents and educators can help children to develop their creativity. Metaphors can also help children understand an idea better than the literal words alone can. Plus, they encourage the readers or listeners to use their imaginations! Overall, knowing metaphors helps children to communicate effectively and interact socially with others at home, at school, and in the community!

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