

Metaphor

Definition of Metaphor

Metaphor is a [figure of speech](#) that makes an implicit, implied, or hidden [comparison](#) between two things that are unrelated, but which share some common characteristics. In other words, a resemblance of two contradictory or different objects is made based on a single or some common characteristics.

In simple English, when you portray a person, place, thing, or an action as *being* something else, even though it is not *actually* that “something else,” you are speaking metaphorically. For example, the phrase, “My brother is the black sheep of the family,” is a metaphor because he is not a sheep, nor is he black. However, we can use this comparison to describe an association of a black sheep with that person. A black sheep is an unusual animal, which typically stays away from the herd, and the person being described shares similar characteristics.

Furthermore, a metaphor develops a comparison that is different from a [simile](#), in that we do not use “like” or “as” to develop a comparison in a metaphor. It actually makes an implicit or hidden comparison and not an explicit one.

Common Speech Examples of Metaphors

Most of us think of a metaphor as a device used in songs or poems only, and that it has nothing to do with our everyday life. In fact, all of us in our routine life speak, write, and think in metaphors. We cannot avoid them. Metaphors are sometimes constructed through our common language, and they are called “conventional metaphors.”

For instance, calling a person a “night owl,” or an “early bird,” or saying “life is a journey,” are common examples of metaphors heard and

understood by most of us. Below are some more conventional metaphors we often hear in our daily lives:

My brother was **boiling mad**. (This implies he was too angry.)

The assignment was a **breeze**. (This implies that the assignment was not difficult.)

It is going to be **clear skies** from now on. (This implies that clear skies are not a threat and life is going to be without hardships)

The skies of his future began to **darken**. (Darkness is a threat; therefore, this implies that the coming times are going to be hard for him.)

Her [voice](#) is **music to his ears**. (This implies that her voice makes him feel happy)

He saw the **soul of dust** when passing through the dust storm.

Chaos is **the breeding ground of order**.

War is the **mother of all battles**.

Her dance is **a great poem**.

A new **road to freedom** passes through this **valley of death**.

My conscience is my barometer.

His white face shows his concern.

His kisses are like roses.

He married her to have a trophy wife.

Laughter is the best medicine.

Words are daggers when spoken in anger.

His words are pearls of wisdom.

Metaphor Examples in Literature

Metaphors are used in all types of literature, but not often to the degree they are used in poetry. This is because poems are meant to communicate complex images and feelings to readers, and metaphors often state the comparisons most emotively. Here are some examples of metaphor from famous poems.

Example #1: *The Sun Rising* (By John Donne)

“She’s all states, and all princes, I ...”

John Donne, a metaphysical poet, was well-known for his abundant use of metaphors throughout his poetical works. In his well-known work, *The Sun*

the most evocative metaphors in literature, he explains “She is all states, and all princes, I.” This line demonstrates the speaker’s belief that he and his beloved are richer than all states, kingdoms, and rulers in the entire world because of the love that they share.

Example #2: *Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer’s Day* (By William Shakespeare)

“But thy eternal summer shall not fade ...”

William Shakespeare was the best exponent of metaphors, having made wide-ranging use of them throughout his works. [*Sonnet 18*](#), also known as *Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer’s Day*, is an [extended metaphor](#) between the love of the speaker and the fairness of the summer season. He writes that “thy eternal summer,” here taken to mean the love of the subject, “shall not fade.”

Example #3: *When I Have Fears* (By John Keats)

“Before high-pil’d books, in charact’ry
Hold like rich garnerers the full-ripened grain;”

The great Romantic poet John Keats suffered great losses in his life — the death of his father in an accident, and the deaths of his mother and brother through tuberculosis. When Keats himself began displaying signs of tuberculosis at the age of 22, he wrote *When I Have Fears*, a poem rich with metaphors concerning life and death. In the lines above, he employs a double-metaphor. Writing poetry is implicitly compared with reaping and sowing, and both these acts represent the emptiness of a life unfulfilled creatively.

Example #4: *Vestiges* (By Van Jordan)

“... and jump in the sea and say, *follow me*,

and it's deep, too, I'd joke,

standing at the edge of the boat's bow.
A wind breathes across the sea,
joining gently the edges of time."

Just spot different metaphors in these six lines by Van Jordan. This is the "sea" of time. This is an extended metaphor that is further expanded to its feature of coldness, depth, and then edges and voyage through it.

Example #5: *The Sun Rising* (By John Donne)

"Busy old fool, unruly sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains call on us?"

This is another example of a good metaphor where sun is being called a *fool* by John Done, who is famous for his use of weird metaphors.

Example #6: *Paradise Lost, Book 1* (By John Milton)

"Invoke thy aid to my adventurous Song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' Aonian Mount"

This is a good metaphor by Milton, from his epic *Paradise Lost*. Here, Milton has compared his poetry to a dove.

Example #7: *i carry your heart with me* (By E. E. Cummings)

"...and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant
and whatever a sun will always sing is you ..."

Here E. E. Cummings has compared his beloved to moon, as well as to the sun. This is another good metaphor by a modern poet.

Example #8: *The Storm* (By Kate Chopin)

“Her mouth was a fountain of delight. And when he possessed her, they seemed to swoon together at the very borderland of life’s mystery.”

Just check the excellence of using a metaphor in just one sentence. The second one is its extension.

Example #9: *The Call of Cthulhu* (By H.P. Lovecraft)

“We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.””

Lovecraft has beautifully used metaphors to describe the situation in this paragraph. Just read the underlined phrases to see this metaphorical beauty.

Function of Metaphor

From the above arguments, explanations, and examples, we can easily infer the function of metaphors; both in our daily lives and in a piece of literature. Using appropriate metaphors appeals directly to the senses of listeners or readers, sharpening their imaginations to comprehend what is being communicated to them. Moreover, it gives a life-like quality to our conversations, and to the characters of the [fiction](#) or poetry. Metaphors are also ways of thinking, offering the listeners and the readers fresh ways of examining ideas and viewing the world.

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[Brevity is the Soul of Wit](#)
[There is a Tide in the Affairs of Men](#)
[A Thing of Beauty is a Joy For Ever](#)
[The Winter of Our Discontent](#)
[Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow](#)
[Silence is Golden](#)
[Every Cloud has a Silver Lining](#)
[Raining Cats and Dogs](#)
[You Are What You Eat](#)
[The Quality of Mercy is Not Strain'd](#)
[Star-crossed Lovers](#)
[Heavy is The Head That Wears The Crown](#)
[The Fault, Dear Brutus](#)
[A Rose by any Other Name](#)
[Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night](#)
[Miles to Go Before I Sleep](#)
[All the World's a Stage](#)
[To Be Great is to Be Misunderstood](#)
[To Sleep, Perchance to Dream](#)
[All That Glitters is Not Gold](#)
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