# **Examining Language Techniques for Impact on Audience**

# **(Using Metaphors as an Example)**

# **Criteria for judging metaphors and other techniques generally:**

*The effectiveness of a particular metaphor/technique may depend upon many factors, including:*

* how well it fits in with the language and ideas of the text
* how well it fits the cultural background, values and attitudes of the reader.

*Some criteria that readers can use to judge the effectiveness of a metaphor/technique are listed below:*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Sound | The wording of a metaphor may assist the description by suggesting a particular mood or tone. |
| Associations  and connotations | The objects or actions may activate associations that help or hinder the comparison. |
| Visual imagery | The comparison may help readers construct a mental image. |
| Freshness or surprise | Often a comparison will offer a new way of looking at or thinking about the object. |
| Familiarity | Sometimes the value of a metaphor lies in its familiarity. |

**Activities:**

1. In the commentaries below, two students have used these criteria to judge a metaphor.

Read through the commentary that follows each metaphor and see if you agree with it.

**The sun was a fat-fried egg in the clear blue sky.**

I don't think this one works. There's a visual similarity between the sun and the fried egg — both are yellow and round, and sky around the sun is often very pale — almost white, so it almost works as an image. It has the value of being surprising, too. But I think the associations of sun and fried egg are wrong. People usually think of the sun as pure and clean, but frying in fat is unhealthy and smelly. Also, the phrase "clear blue sky" seems out of place. Like the sun, it seems clean and pure. It might work better if the sky was described differently: "The sun was a fat-fried egg i\_n the sizzling air." But this still isn't great. I would try to think of a different comparison.

**The sky was a solid mass of cloud, a blue-white Arctic sea that flowed upside down to the horizon, where the sun shone pale and distant.**

|  |
| --- |
| Comparing a cloudy sky to a sea full of ice and snow is effective, I think. It gave me the impression of coldness, a very slow movement, and a feeling that the cloud stretched on forever. The visual image and the associations are the best points here. I am not sure about the wording. The third and fourth lines seem a bit too wordy. I don't think the phrase  'upside down" is really needed. I think readers could be left to make that connection for themselves. But overall I think this is quite a good metaphor.  — Gemnza |

1. Your turn: Below are listed three common objects or events. They are followed by alternative metaphoric descriptions. Read through them and then do the activities that follow.
   1. A smashed car windscreen.
      1. The cracked glaze of ancient porcelain.
      2. A layer of crystal honeycomb.
      3. Crushed ice spilled onto the road.
   2. Winter fog around city skyscrapers.
      1. A thick blanket of fog settled on the city.
      2. A soft white tide swept in and flowed around the buildings.
      3. A river of mist flowed past skyscraper pylons.
   3. Pigeons roosting on a powerline.
      1. Fluffy notes on a clothesline staff.
      2. Fuzzy knots on cat's cradle wires.
      3. Dull beads threaded on a taut black string.

For your favourite from each group, give a brief explanation for your decision set out as below. (Consider the criteria for judging a metaphor at the top of the page when considering your answer)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Metaphor | Explanation |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

3. Compare your ratings in a class or group discussion.

# **Writing metaphors:**

Writing effective metaphors is a complex but interesting task. It requires you to think about:

— the object you are trying to describe;

— the connotations/associations or connections you want your reader to make.

The three-step approach shown below can be helpful. Start by drawing three columns on your page, then do the following.

1. Think about the object or event you want to describe. Write down a list of qualities of the object that you want to emphasise. Put this information into column 1.
2. In your second column, list objects or ideas that you associate with the items in column 1.
3. In the third column, write down some qualities and associations/connotations for selected items in column 2.

This activity helps to stretch your thinking by creating a chain of associations/connotations. You can see how the process works in the example set out in the table below.

Object: a cloudy sky in winter

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1  Qualities of object | 2  Associations/connotations for column 1 | | 3  Associations/connotations for column 2 |
| cold grey vast dull depressing | cold =  grey =  vast = | ice, winter, Antarctica, penguins, jumper  old, dull, boring, government buildings, battleship, sea  desert, space, cold, distant | Antarctica = snow, glacier, ice floe, empty  government = vast, slow, irresistible, mindless |

# Below is a famous English poem. Your task is to write an Australian version:

# ***The Highwayman***

The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees,

The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,

The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,

And the highwayman came riding —

Riding — riding 

The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn door.

# ***The Kelly Gang***

The sun was a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

The heat was \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

The road was over the red-dust plain,

And the Kelly Gang came riding —

Riding — riding —

## The Kelly Gang came riding, up to the bank again