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Tool 11

The Mega Metaphor

WHAT IS POETRY MADE OF?
CONTENT
Figurative Language

PURPOSE

To keep expanding your ability to use Figurative Language well in your own work, both poetry and prose, and to practice the art of metaphor by writing a poem that is an *extended metaphor*.

BACKGROUND

Remember, a metaphor shows us what is alike about two unlike things. An extended metaphor continues on with such a comparison throughout multiple sentences or paragraphs of prose/lines or stanzas of a poem, using a number of attributes of the vehicle (the concrete thing used to describe the abstract subject) to express the tenor (abstract subject you're describing). Often, an extended metaphor will be carried through an entire poem. Dickinson's poem "[Hope Is the Thing with Feathers](#)" is an example of an extended metaphor. Richard Nordquist shares [more examples](#) on about.com.

WHAT TO DO

Create an extended metaphor poem by writing about an abstraction—something that can't be seen, heard, touched, tasted, or smelled—using the attributes of a

concrete thing. One way to create your Mega Metaphor is to use a simple chart. List the attributes of your vehicle in the left column. In the right column, explore which of these attributes could be used in describing your tenor, and how. Then shape your poem. On the left is an example, using the images and ideas in "Hope is the Thing with Feathers."

VEHICLE: BIRD	TENOR: HOPE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flies • Has feathers • Perches on branches • Sings tune without words • Sings through storms • Sings without expecting any payment • Eats crumbs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires optimism, an uplifting of spirit that could be a kind of flight • "Perches" in the soul • Is a kind of singing without words • Gets us through storms • Can exist anywhere and everywhere • Gives without asking anything of us, not even a crumb

EXAMPLE

Here is an extended metaphor poem I wrote, inspired by my dog Lucy's unflagging enthusiasm. Note the doggy attributes desire shares:

VEHICLE: DOG	TENOR: DESIRE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thumps tail; perks ears • Begs to be fed • Lunges at squirrels • Runs headlong toward what it wants • Never depressed or weary of simple pleasures • Has muddy paws • Makes messes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full of enthusiasm • Has a large "appetite" • Insists on being fulfilled • Doesn't always consider consequences and results • Makes messes :)

Desire

Your tail thumps at the sound
of my voice. Your ears perk
when I walk across the room.
Am I coming to feed you?

They warned me you'd be trouble,
you and your endless cravings,
yes, and your needs—food, water,
trips outside where you still

spring at every squirrel you see.
I tell you you'll never catch one.
Give it up, will you? You won't.
Discouragement isn't in your language

of longing, lunging, lunging. You can't stop
believing fulfillment is right around the
next tree. Then again, now that I think of it,
it's the running headlong toward

what you want that you love, thrusting
each ounce of flesh and fur into
the chase, joy bristling, leaping across yards.
The brisk satisfaction with which

you trot at the end of your leash!
Are you never weary of the world?
How many times has your nose nudged
me from the cocoon of my bed, where

I lie steeped in the latest loss or failure,
out into the sun? You make no apologies
for your appetite. You're not too proud
to beg. There's no need, your open mouth

tells me, to feel any shame. Oh, Desire,
I don't care what they say
about your dirty paws, the mess you left
on the carpet, you're a good dog.

REFLECTION

How did playing with The Mega Metaphor impact your perspective on the subject you chose as your tenor? In what ways has its meaning or value changed for you?

HONE YOUR CRAFT

Collect poems that are examples of Extended Metaphor.

Here's a great one to get you started.

"Thesaurus" by Billy Collins:

It's pure delight to see that, indeed, a thesaurus "could be the name of a prehistoric beast" and also *is* like "a big park where hundreds of family reunions are always being held, /*house, home, abode, dwelling, lodgings, and digs,* /all sharing the same picnic basket and thermos; /*hairy, hirsute, woolly, furry, fleecy, and shaggy* /all running a sack race or throwing horseshoes, /*inert, static, motionless, fixed and immobile* /standing and kneeling in rows for a group photograph."

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