

Wacky Similes: A Comparative List Poem About A Personal Obsession

By: Taylor Johnson

Education level: Elementary, Junior High

Genre: Poetry

Time frame: One 60 min class period

Objective: To write a poem that explores a passion, obsession, activity, or object of interest through generating a list of unusual comparisons of things unlike the object of interest.

Prior knowledge and skills: Students need to understand what a simile is, comparing two unlike things using like or as, and they need to be able to choose an object or area of focus about which they could direct their creative, wacky comparisons.

Required materials: Paper, pencil

Literary model: Taylor Johnson's ["The Smell of Toloache" video poem](#) provides a model, as well as [student poems](#) from The International School of Tucson

Sequence of activities:

1. (5-10 min) Introduce the concept of a simile, ensuring that all students know what a comparison is. It's helpful if the two things being compared in our similes do have something in common, the way the moon and a marble are both round, but quite different in that the moon is a huge astrological object and a marble is a small glass toy. Comparing a moon to a planet is less interesting or surprising in poetry because both are astrological objects and are too similar to make for a surprising comparison. For this writing activity, encourage students to make surprising and unusual comparisons that stretch the imagination and think outside the usual box of what two things are similar.

2. (5-10 min) Discuss what it means to be really interested in something. What are some examples of passions, activities and interests that students are obsessed with? Invite them to select a passion and ask some volunteers to share. Explain that we're going to use similes to write poems about our obsessions and passions.

3. (5 min) Share the video poem "The Smell of Toloache" with the class. Explain that the audio track features a poem that makes many comparisons using the simile word "like" to start each line. The comparisons all describe the scent of a strange, night-blooming flower called a Toloache (also known as a Sacred Datura that blooms in Sonoran Desert washes).

4. (5-10 min) Ask students to discuss what the video poem makes them think or feel. What images stood out in the video or in the comparison list that were particularly weird or wacky?

5. (25-35 min) Invite students to write their own list poems about something they are obsessed with (the way the author of the poem is interested in and obsessed with Toloache flowers). Suggest they write about their topic with strange, surprising comparisons, starting each line with "like" to make the comparison. Note: they aren't writing "I like" but instead connecting the title of the poem (the topic they chose) to all their wacky comparisons.

6. (5-10 min) Invite students to share their poems and celebrate their creations! You can share some other students' poems with them for additional inspiration.