

Similes Made of Rock, Shell, and Bone

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Grade level: Elementary (1st-4th grade)

Time frame: 50 minutes-1 hour

Objective: Teach students to use simile by engaging their senses

Required materials: Pencils, paper, and natural objects including shells, rocks, seedpods, bones*

*For this exercise you will need to bring an assortment of textured natural objects for students to touch, smell, look closely at, and hold. During Spring 2022, with distanced WTC facilitation ongoing, I coordinated in advance with classroom teachers so they could arrange small bounties of seashells, rocks, seedpods, and animal bones for students to explore in their classroom.

Sequence of Activities:

Step 1: Sensory Warm-up

I like to start this activity through immediate sensory immersion. I ask students to pick an object from their table and describe what they see. First, holding a quartz crystal up to my left eye, I might give them a few examples (ie. “I see fairy dust and a purple snow-cone.”). Then I let students free associate aloud. If students give vague responses, I draw them out a little, offering a small preview of the lesson to come. For example, if a student says, “I see lines,” I might respond, “Are they straight or curvy, rough or soft, what do those lines remind you of in the world?”

Step 2: Mini-lesson on Simile

To teach students about how to use similes, I take them through a small exercise:

“If I say I saw a rock, what do you picture? It might be a boulder taller than me that’s covered in green and orange lichen, or it might be a tiny blue pebble softened by ocean waves. How do I make sure you know what I have seen?

By comparing the weed to something else I can get more specific, I can start to give you enough detail so you can experience that thing along with me.”

Then I model a formula for using similes with their objects by free-associating out-loud with my crystal:

“This crystal looks like a floating castle.
It is clear as glass and cold as winter.”

After a few of my examples, students should be ready to jump right in and share some of their similes aloud.

Example of Similes from Student Brainstorming:

“Turtle shell is empty as a bowl”

“Shell is rough as bark”

“The coral is sharp as a pencil”

“The starfish is pointy like a thorn”

Step 3: Poem Writing Time

Next, I give students quiet time to meditate with their objects and write their own poems. I give them instructions to sit with their object for a long time, to look at it very carefully, examining its shape, its colors, its form. “What else do you see? What patterns do you notice? What strange thing does it remind you of?” I ask them all these questions. I tell them to close their eyes, touch it all over and think what it feels like, how it is to shake it, to smell it. Then I ask them to write about the object using comparisons and similes as much as possible. I remind them that I want to experience the object just as they do, I want to be able to sense it with my own eyes and nose.

I usually give students around 10 minutes to write before we come back together to share their poems aloud at the end of our session. While students are working, I offer brainstorming assistance if they get stuck or want help thinking in simile together.

Examples of student poems from a 1st-3rd grade mixed age class:

“Brain coral sounds like a fan blowing around

brain coral tastes like noodles

brain coral bumpy as a road

brain coral looks like a brain!

brain coral dusty like mud.”

“Pinecone spikey like a ball

pinecone woody like an egg

pinecone sounds like knocking on a door

Pinecone as dark as a dark brown door

pinecone smells as good as a cupcake”