

“Still Crying” inspired by Mark Levine’s poem “Work Song”

SONG BY ESSENCE

SONG WRITER’S STATEMENT

The images in “Work Song” flooded me with emotion, transporting me to another place and time. I read and reread the poem, finding myself spontaneously spilling onto a blank page the detail and images of my own story, using the form of Levine’s poem—an unleashed memory exposed in three dimensions.

LYRICS

My name is Henri. Listen. It’s morning.
I pull me head from my scissors, I pull
The light bulb from my mouth – Boss comes at me
While I’m still blinking.
Pastes the pink slip on my collar bone.
It’s O.K., I say, I was a lazy worker, and I stole.
I wipe my feet on his skullcap on the way out.

I am Henri, mouth full of soda crackers.
I live in Toulouse, which is a piece of cardboard.
Summers the mayors paint it blue, we fish in it.
Winters we skate on it. Children are always
Drowning or falling in the cracks. Parents are distraught
But get over it. It’s easy to replace a child.
Like my parents’ child, Henri.

I stuff my hands into my shoes
And I crawl through the snow on all fours.
Animals fear me. I smell so good.
I have two sets of footprints, I confuse the police.
When I reach the highway I unzip my head.

I am a zipper. A paper cut.
I fed myself so many times
through the shredder I am confetti,
I am a ticker-tape parade, I am an astronaut
Waving from my convertible at Henri.

MUSIC

Henri from Toulouse, is that you?
Why the unhappy face? I should shoot you
For spoiling my parade. Come on, man,
Glue yourself together! You want so much to die
That you don't want to die.

My name is Henri. I am Toulouse. I am scraps
Of bleached parchment, I am the standing militia,
I am a quill, the Red Cross, I am the feather
in my cap, the Hebrew Testament, I am the World Court.
An electric fan blows
Beneath my black robe. I am dignity itself.

I am an ice machine.
I am an alp.
I stuff myself in the refrigertator
Wrapped in newsprint. With salt in my heart
I stay good for days.

Listen for the single-note metaphor that starts at the top of this song. It's just two notes, and can be played with one finger, perhaps suggesting a child's hand, a child's sensibility. Essence has chosen contrasting sounds for this song, to build in the tension that she needs to support her lyric. She's a child inside an adult world, pulled by the forces that are bigger than her and bigger than even her parents. Violins beckon in the background, contrasting the electric guitar riffs that demand attention up-front. Her voice carries most of the melody into the chorus, leaving the verses driven primarily by the lyrics. The chorus pops because of this, like a declaration or a release. The eighth note shaker rhythm throughout the song keeps it tight and simple enough to support all of its vulnerable exclamations.

Lesson Plan “Still Crying”

SIMILE AND METAPHOR • BY JOHN DARTER

LEVEL

This lesson is designed for adult literacy learners performing at a beginning to advanced Adult Basic Education level. It may also be adapted for high school students.

PARTICIPANTS

Volunteer tutor with a single, pair, or small group of learners.

LENGTH

2 weeks or 4 sessions

MATERIALS

CD player and SIBL Chapter One CD
Individual copies of “Work Song” by Mark Levine
Individual copies of lyrics to Still Crying by Essence
Computer with internet access
Chart or binder paper
Pen/pencil

OBJECTIVES

Learners will:

- understand the meanings of metaphor and simile
- define a metaphor and simile
- write a metaphor and simile
- create and publish (via the web) an original poem

VOCABULARY

Review the following definitions and examples of metaphors and similes with learners:

Difference between a metaphor and a simile: The statement, “that man is a fox,” is a metaphor; but “that man is like a fox,” is a simile, similitude, or comparison.

metaphor: A figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison, as in “a sea of troubles” or “All the world's a stage” (Shakespeare).

Simile: A figure of speech in which two essentially unlike things are compared, often in a phrase introduced by like or as, as in “I think you are acting like a baby” or “So are you to my thoughts as food to life” (Shakespeare).

SIMILES AND METAPHORS

Similes

1. As bold as brass.
2. As hard as nails.
3. As bright as a button.
4. As daft as a brush.
5. As dry as a bone.
6. As proud as a peacock.
7. "The desires of the heart are as crooked as corkscrews." (W. H. Auden.)
8. "...as happy as the grass was green." (Dylan Thomas, "Fernhill.")
9. "...love is like a ghost." (Coventry Patmore.)
10. "motherhood peels me bare
like a willow wand
some small child scrapes in the road
or throws in the pond." (Glenda Beagan.)

Metaphors

1. "Property is theft." (Proudhon.)
2. Computers are the vehicles of tomorrow.
3. "All the world's a stage." (Shakespeare.)
4. It's a dog's life.
5. "The parks are the lungs of London." (William Pitt.)
6. "I'm deep in a goldfish bowl." (Stereophonics, "goldfish bowl.")
7. Life's a bitch.
8. God is love.
9. "Man is Nature's sole mistake." (W. S. Gilbert.)
10. "Home is the girl's prison and the woman's work house." (G. B. Shaw.)
11. "My heart is a lonely hunter that hunts on a lonely hill." (Fiona McLeod.)

This worksheet by Chantel Mathias was found free at www.englishresources.co.uk

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Have learners write down the definitions in their notebooks. Have the learners pick three of their favorite metaphors and similes and copy those into their notebooks as well. Help them underline the key words that make a simile and metaphor: As and like for similes, and comparisons for metaphors.

ACTIVITIES PRE-WRITING

1. Ask the learners if they have ever read a poem that had a metaphor or simile. Why are there so many examples of metaphor and simile in poetry?
2. Pass out and read to the learners the lyrics to *Still Crying* by Essence. Be sure to model the mood of the poem by using enunciation and feeling.
3. Partner-read the lyrics again, taking turns reading each stanza with enunciation and feeling.
4. Play the song *Still Crying* by Essence from the SIBL CD Chapter One. Ask the learners the following questions:
 - How did the song make you feel?
 - Is the song's feeling similar or different than you imagined it would be?
 - Do you think the song portrays the feeling well? Why or why not?
5. Explain to the learner/s that the song is based on a poem by Mark Levine called *Work Song*. The songwriter used a method of substitution to create the song. She took lines of the poem and substituted some of her own words for the words of the poet.
6. Have the learner/s read the poem again looking for any similes and metaphors and underlining them: Here are some examples from the song:

Simile

 - "I live in Tucson/Which is like pee in a swimming pool"
 - "like a child in a mother's eyes"
 - "like my mother's child Isis"

Metaphor

 - "I am a sore throat" (compares the artist (a person) with a sore throat)
 - "I am the door slammed" (compares the artist (a person) with a door slammed)
 - "I am the kiss goodnight" (compares the artist (a person) with a kiss goodnight)
7. Ask the learner/s the following questions:
 - What do you see in your mind's eye when you read these similes and metaphors?
 - What feelings do they express? Happiness, sadness?
 - Why do you think the songwriter used the words she did to compare herself to a "sore throat," a "door slammed" and a "kiss goodnight?" Are these examples of metaphors or similes? Give evidence for your answer, which reinforces the definition of what a metaphor is. Metaphors are often more difficult to understand than similes.

WRITING

Let the learner/s know that they are going to write and publish it on the World Wide Web. They can use any form of poetry they wish, but the exercise will use the same method that the songwriter used: Substitution. They can use the copy of *Still Crying* as a model for their poem.

2. Before they begin, go to the following websites and have learner/s review metaphors and similes. You can go to the website yourself and print out the exercises if you do not have access to the internet during your tutoring session.

- Simile website and examples:
<http://www.rhlschool.com/eng3n25.htm>
- Metaphor website and examples:
<http://www.rhlschool.com/eng3n26.htm>
- Worksheet for similes:
<http://www.abcteach.com/Writing/similes.htm>
- Worksheet for metaphors:
<http://www.abcteach.com/Writing/metaphor.htm>

3. Once the learner/s have read the examples and done the work sheets, ask if they have any questions about metaphors and similes. Check for understanding by writing a simile and metaphor on a piece of paper. Have the learner/s point to the metaphor and simile when you ask them which is which. For example: Which is an example of a simile? Learner should be able to correctly point to the example of the simile. If not, re view the difference again.

4. Model for the learner/s the substitution method. Tell them that they have to use at least two metaphors and similes. Here is an example:

my name is Apollo/see the sun rise/
feet on the ground/reigns in my hands/
I ride across the horizon/my father looks down
upon me/his face is grim/
his task for me is endless/like the rising and
setting of the sun/I am his instrument/
the strings under his thumb

5. If the learner/s are having difficulty coming up with vocabulary, create a word bank from which they can draw from. It also may be helpful not to focus on spelling for the first draft. Just have them get their meaning across, and go back to revise spelling. See *Don't Let Me Fall* on the Artists For Literacy Web Site for examples of revision writing.

ACTIVITIES POST-WRITING

EXTENSION

ASSESSMENT

6. Go to the following web site and register, so you can publish the poem:

<http://www.wildpoetryforum.com/webring/>

“Wild Poetry is an interactive online community of poets and writers in all genres. The Wild Poetry Web ring is an extension of Wild Poetry Forum. We offer a friendly atmosphere in which to post your own works and the ability to receive and give responses to others. This ring is currently open to all web sites that house and encourage creative writing. All pages must carry at least a PG-13 rating to be included.” (from the Web Site)

1. Go on a field trip! Go to a coffee shop, order some goodies, and have a poetry reading with yourself and your learner/s. Explain to the learner/s that many poets go to such places in order to read their poems in public. If learners are interested in reading publicly, go to your local library and find out about local poetry readings.
2. Have learner/s review their own poems for metaphors and similes.

1. Read some other poems by Mark Levine. The book Enola Gay is the example you will find on the Artists for Literacy web site. Continue to have learner/s look for similes and metaphors.
2. Encourage your learner to keep a journal of poetry. They can either share it with you, or keep it to themselves.
3. Look at other forms of poetry. The following website has a good list:
<http://members.cox.net/berniehpoetry/shape.html>
You can also look on the Artists for Literacy website for other lesson plans about various types of poetry and song.
4. Look at other forms of writing that are often found in poetry. For example, personification and analogy. Work with the learner/s to help them understand how good writers are able to utilize the five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch.

1. Go to the following web site and either have the learner do the work sheet online or print it out for them:
 - <http://teachers.net/lessons/posts/989.html>
 - <http://volweb.utk.edu/Schools/bedford/harrisms/1poe.htm>To show mastery of the concept of metaphor and simile, the learner should be able to get at least 75% of the answers correct.
2. Did the learner/s publish their work online? If so, encourage them to continue the process. If not, why? Is there something you, as a tutor, can do to help them fulfill this objective?