Identifying Metaphors

A metaphor is a figure of speech that compares two unlike things; a metaphor states that one thing is another thing.
Example: His eyes are sapphires. (Note that the writer does not state that his eyes are “like” sapphires or that they are “as blue as” sapphires. She states that his eyes are sapphires.)

A metaphor compares two unlike things without using a word of comparison such as “like,” “as,” or “resembles.” (Similes use these comparative words. See DLA 1B_B.6 for more on the differences between similes and metaphors.)

Implied Metaphors, on the other hand, are metaphorical comparisons that are implied within a description, because only one term of comparison is directly stated, while the other is implied within a description.
Example: His heavy eyelids drooped sleepily over the rapidly dulling sapphires beneath.

Notice how skillfully poet Robert Frost develops an extended metaphor, comparing a woman with a rather unusual object of comparison—a silken tent. Note that the explicit metaphor is the comparison of the woman to a silken tent. The other comparisons are extensions of that metaphor and are implied rather than explicitly stated.

Activity: Explaining (“unpacking”) Implied Metaphors, Part I

Directions: Underline each of the seven implied metaphors in Robert Frost’s “The Silken Tent.” The first one is identified for you.

• Note that the explicit metaphor is the comparison of the woman to a silken tent. The other comparisons are extensions of that metaphor and are implied rather than explicitly stated.

The Silken Tent
Robert Frost (1874-1963)

She is as in a field a silken tent
At midday when the sunny summer breeze
Has dried the dew and all its ropes relent,
So that in guys it gently sways at ease,
And its supporting central cedar pole,
That is its pinnacle to heavenward
And signifies the sureness of the soul,
Seems to owe naught to any single cord,
But strictly held by none, is loosely bound
By countless silken ties of love and thought
To everything on earth the compass round,
And only by one’s going slightly taut
In the capriciousness of summer air
Is of the slightest bondage made aware.

When you have finished, review your work with a tutor or instructor.

Tutor / Instructor Signature

Date