Identifying Similes and Metaphors

Similes
Writers use similes to compare two unlike things. Similes usually use the words "like," "as" or "resembles" within the comparison.

Examples: His eyes are as blue as sapphires.
His eyes resemble sapphires.
His eyes are like sapphires.

You can remember the word "simile" by remembering that it contains the root word simil- just like the word "similar" does. Similes point to similarities between two unlike things. 
Warning: Don't be fooled! Just because a comparison includes the words "like" or "as," it isn't necessarily a simile. Remember, a simile compares two unlike things. Therefore, the sentence, "His eyes are blue like mine" is not a simile but a literal comparison.

Metaphors
A metaphor is a figure of speech that compares two unlike things without using a word of comparison such as "like," "as," or "resembles." Instead, the terms of comparison are linked with a form of the verb "to be," such as as, is, are, was, were or am. Example: His eyes are sapphires. (Note that the writer does not say his eyes are "like" sapphires or that they are "as blue as" sapphires. She states that his eyes are sapphires.

Implied metaphors, on the other hand, are metaphorical comparisons that are implied within a description. Example: His heavy eyelids drooped sleepily over the rapidly dulling sapphires beneath. Note that the word "eyes" is implied and not directly stated.

Practice: Indicate whether the following sentences contain a simile, a metaphor, or an implied metaphor.

1. Entering her classroom is like entering the Twilight Zone. _________________
2. Joe is a man of integrity: His word is as ironclad as steel. _________________
3. A wave of visitors flooded the museum upon its opening. _________________
4. Her words were daggers to his heart. _________________
5. She sliced through traffic in order to get to school on time. _________________

STOP
If you have questions, stop here and check your work with a tutor or instructor before completing the exercises on the back of this page.

SLO: English 57; English 1B
CAHSEE Literary Response
Activity: Identifying metaphors and similes.

Directions: Underline the similes and circle the metaphors in each of the following passages.

Note: The passages may include similes only, metaphors only (including implied metaphors), or both similes and metaphors.

1. Someone is always at my elbow reminding me that I am the granddaughter of slaves. It fails to register depression with me. Slavery is sixty years in the past. The operation was successful and the patient is doing well, thank you. The terrible struggle that made me an American out of a potential slave said "On the line!" The Reconstruction said "Get set!" and the generation before said "Go!" I am off to a flying start and I must not halt in the stretch to look behind and weep. Slavery is the price I paid for civilization, and the choice was not with me. It is a bully adventure and worth all that I have paid through my ancestors for it. No one on earth ever had a greater chance for glory. The world to be won and nothing to be lost. It is thrilling to think--to know that for any act of mine, I shall get twice as much praise or twice as much blame. It is quite exciting to hold the center of the national stage, with the spectators not knowing whether to laugh or to weep. ("How It Feels to Be Colored Me," Zora Neale Hurston [1928])

2. Fill in: Number of similes _________  Number of metaphors _________

3. Suddenly the whole room broke into a sea of shouting, as they saw me rise. Waves of rejoicing swept the place. Women leaped in the air. My aunt threw her arms around me. The minister took me by the hand and led me to the platform.

   "Salvation," Langston Hughes [1940])

4. Fill in: Number of similes _________  Number of metaphors _________

Review your answers with an instructor or tutor in the WRC. Have that person sign and date this sheet.

___________________________  ________________________
Instructor/Tutor signature    Date

Return this completed, signed sheet to your instructor.