Identifying Implied Metaphors

Purpose: Upon completion of this activity, students will understand what an implied metaphor is and will be able to identify implied metaphors in a poem. This DLA should take approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete.

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 say 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.

Explicit metaphors are metaphorical comparisons in which the literal term and the figurative term are both named without using "like" as" or "resembles."

Example: His eyes were rapidly dulling sapphires beneath their lids.

Implied metaphors, on the other hand, are metaphorical comparisons implied within a description. They can take one of three forms: the literal term is named and the figurative term implied; the literal term is implied and the figurative term is named; or, both the literal and figurative terms are implied.

Example: His heavy eyelids drooped sleepily over the rapidly dulling sapphires beneath them.

Notice below 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 the tent. The other comparisons are extensions of that metaphor and are implied rather than explicitly stated.

Activity: Explaining or unpacking implied metaphors

Directions: Underline each of seven implied metaphors in Robert Frost’s “The Silken Tent.” The first one is done for you. Note that the explicit metaphor is the comparison of the woman to the tent. The other comparisons are extensions of that metaphor and are implied rather than explicitly stated.

The Silken Tent
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,

(over)
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 every thing 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 and have that person sign and date below.

**Attach a confirmation sheet or get a signature below:**

Instructor Signature: ___________________________ Date: ________________________