Identifying Similes and Metaphors

**Purpose:** Upon completion of this activity, students will understand the difference between similes and metaphors and will be able to identify each in a short writing. This DLA should take approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete.

**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 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. __________________________


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 ___________

5. Once you have completed these activities, take this sheet and meet with a tutor or an instructor on duty to discuss your responses and to ask any questions you may still have.

Attach a confirmation sheet or get a signature below:

Instructor Signature: ______________________________ Date: ______________________