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## What is an epic simile

Ever wonder what makes creative writing, well, creative? A big part of creative writing is coming up with a compelling way to express something. And similes and metaphors can be especially helpful when trying to do this. But what exactly are similes and metaphors? More importantly, what is the main difference between a simile and metaphor? This comprehensive simile vs metaphor guide answers both these questions and gives you several examples so you can learn how to differentiate between these two key literary devices. This article also includes key tips for using similes and metaphors in your own writing. Simile vs Metaphor: How Do They Differ? Both similes and metaphors are literary devices used by writers to compare two unlike things, ideas, actions, etc. in a non-literal manner. The two things being compared typically have one thing in common but are completely different in all other respects. People use similes and metaphors to make their writing more descriptive, more persuasive, more poetic, and more emphatic. Similes and metaphors are often used in fiction/prose, poetry, and song lyrics. So what is the main difference between a simile and metaphor? Although the two devices are very similar—both serve the exact same purpose of comparing two different things in a figurative (non-literal) way—metaphors and similes are not identical. A simile is a type of metaphor that specifically uses the words "as" or "like" to make a comparison between two things. This usually takes the form of "A is like B" or "A is as (insert adjective) as B." By contrast, metaphors do not use the words "as" or "like." For example, you could write, "A is B" to make your comparison, even though A is not literally the same thing as B. The main takeaway here is that all similes are metaphors but not all metaphors are similes. 6 Real Simile and Metaphor Examples To help you understand the difference between a simile and metaphor, we'll look at six examples of the two. Examples of Metaphors Below are three examples of famous metaphors. As a reminder, metaphors compare two things without using the words "like" or "as." Metaphor Example 1 Eyes are the windows to the soul. Many famous sayings and idiomatic phrases take the form of metaphors in which the meaning is not literal but implied through a comparison. You clearly cannot literally see a person's soul through his or her eyes; the implication here, then, is that one's eyes and expression can reveal that person's true feelings or character. In this sense, eyes are similar to windows because they can reveal information to the observer. Metaphor Example 2 "But thy eternal summer shall not fade" — William Shakespeare, Sonnet 18 This line of poetry comes from one of William Shakespeare's most beloved sonnets, often called "Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?" In this poem, Shakespeare is comparing a young man's beauty to that of a warm summer day. In this particular line, the speaker asserts that the man's "eternal summer" will never end, meaning that the speaker believes the essence of the man will live on through these very words. Shakespeare was a fan of metaphors—and earrings, apparently. Metaphor Example 3 "Cause, baby, you're a firework / Come on, let your colors burst" — Katy Perry, "Firework" In her mega-hit song "Firework," Katy Perry uses a metaphor to compare "you" (the listener) to a firework. Fireworks are bright, captivating, and attention-grabbing, and so the implication here is that "you," too, are important and need to be confident in the value you bring. Examples of Similes Next up, here are some examples of famous similes. Remember that although similes perform the same function as metaphors in that they make a comparison between two different things, similes always use the words "as" or "like" to make the comparison, whereas metaphors do not. Simile Example 1 My dad always wears glasses. Without them, he's as blind as a bat. The above simile ("as] blind as a bat" is a particularly well-known saying that compares a person's inability to see to the (alleged) blindness of bats, which hunt for prey primarily using echolocation instead of sight. Basically, this simile means that someone's ability to see is quite poor. (Note that this saying isn't normally used to describe someone who is actually blind—it's purposefully hyperbolic!) In this example, although the dad is evidently not blind—he just wears glasses to see—this simile implies that his ability to see things clearly without glasses is shockingly (and even laughably) low, comparable to a bat's inability to see clearly. Simile Example 2 "I wandered lonely as a Cloud / That floats on high o'er Vales and Hills" — William Wordsworth, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" You've possibly already read this famous poem in English class. These two lines, the first of which contains the simile "lonely as a Cloud," come from William Wordsworth's renowned 1807 poem, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud." The simile here draws a unique and compelling comparison between the loneliness of the speaker, who wanders around without accompaniment, and the "loneliness" of a cloud that floats around in the sky all by itself. Note: This simile uses another literary device called personification, wherein an inanimate object is given human-like qualities. In this case, the cloud "wanders" just as a human does. Simile Example 3 "My momma always said life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get." — Tom Hanks in Forrest Gump Even if you're not a die-hard Tom Hanks fan, you've probably heard this memorable line from the 1994 classic Forrest Gump. The phrase "life was like a box of chocolates" is a clear simile in that "life" is being compared to "a box of chocolates" using the word "like" (which once again shows us that this is a simile and not a metaphor). The meaning of this simile is clearly explained in the sentence that follows: "You never know what you're gonna get." In other words, life is random and mysterious in the same exact way a box of chocolates is. You can't predict what kind of chocolate you'll get, just as you can't predict what will happen in your life. As long as it's not that weird, mushy, cherry-filled chocolate, I'm good. Simile vs Metaphor Quiz Here's a short simile vs metaphor quiz to see whether you truly know the difference between the two literary devices. Mark an X under "Metaphor" or "Simile" for each phrase depending on whether you think it has a metaphor or simile. Be aware that a phrase might contain both a metaphor and simile, or neither! Phrase Metaphor Simile 1. "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east, and Juliet is the Sun." — William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet In this classic line from Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, Romeo spots a light coming from Juliet's bedroom, causing him to compare Juliet to a sunrise—an image that evokes a sense of wonder, hope, and happiness. Because Romeo doesn't use the words "like" or "as," this line is a metaphor. 2. Poor thing, your hands are as cold as ice! Here, the speaker is comparing the low temperature of the listener's hands to the (literal) coldness of ice with the phrase "as cold as ice." This saying is commonly used to indicate that a person or an object is extremely cold to the touch (even though the thing being described is likely not literally the same exact temperature of ice). The word "as" is used to make the comparison, so this example is a simile. This bubble is literally as cold as ice. 3. "Elderly American ladies leaning on their canes listed toward me like towers of Pisa." — Vladimir Nabokov, Lolita This beautifully descriptive sentence from Vladimir Nabokov's controversial 1955 novel Lolita compares the image of hunched elderly women to the Leaning Tower of Pisa, a historical Italian building most famous for its noticeable tilt. Because Nabokov uses the word "like" to make the comparison between the women and "towers of Pisa," this sentence is a simile. 4. "Dying is a wild Night and a new Road." — Emily Dickinson Renowned American poet Emily Dickinson wrote this grave, albeit poignant, sentence in a letter penned in 1869. Dickinson compares the act of dying to "a wild Night and a new Road," implying that death is a natural course of action in life. Because the comparison does not use the words "like" or "as," it is a metaphor. 5. The song was an array of bright colors swirling around in the air. Like medicine, it made the boy perk up almost instantly. This image, then, tells us that the speaker is really similar to titanium in that he or she is both strong and resilient. Because neither "like" nor "as" is present here, this lyric is an example of a metaphor. 7. That girl over there looks a lot like my sister. In this simple sentence, the physical appearance of "that girl" is being compared to that of the speaker's sister. Although you might be tempted to say this is a simile because it uses the word "like," you'd be wrong! There is no metaphor or simile at play here. The "like" we see here is still being used to make a comparison, but it is a comparison between two similar things (the two girls). Recall that the basis for any metaphor or simile is that you must be comparing two unlike things. Comparing a duck to another duck won't give you a metaphor but WILL give you a ton of quacking. 8. "Just like a moth drawn to a flame / Oh, you lured me in, I couldn't sense the pain" — Shawn Mendes, "Stitches" This line comes from the 2015 pop hit "Stitches" recorded by Shawn Mendes. The speaker here is describing how mesmerized he is by his lover by comparing his situation to that of "a moth drawn to a flame." Because he uses the word "like" in this particular line, this lyric is an example of a simile. How to Use Similes and Metaphors in Writing: 4 Tips Now that we've gone over the major difference between a simile and metaphor, let's take a look at four tips to keep in mind when you want to use one of these literary tools in your own writing. #1: Avoid Clichés One big tip you'll want to remember when writing anything—whether it's a poem or a story—is to avoid clichéd metaphors and similes as much as possible. Using clichéd metaphors in your writing generally indicates to readers that you don't find it necessary to take time to come up with original comparisons; it's also often interpreted to mean that you lack creativity and are a lazy writer. Clichés include any overused sayings or idiomatic expressions, such as the following: Strong as an ox Sick as a dog Time flies Hot as hell White as snow Scared to death Fish out of water Two peas in a pod Check out this website for a longer list of clichés to avoid. Though you should generally avoid using these types of sayings, if you're writing dialogue for a story, colloquial expressions such as these would be perfectly fine to use, especially if you're trying to capture a more realistic conversation between people. That being said, definitely try to avoid using clichés in descriptions and expository passages. Coming up with your own similes and metaphors will ultimately make your writing more creative, more authentic, and more compelling. #2: Don't Overuse Similes and Metaphors Be careful of overusing similes and metaphors in any type of writing you do. Obviously, the definition of what counts as overusing figurative language will vary depending on the person. Indeed, whereas some renowned writers adore metaphors and have a penchant for flowery passages, others opt to avoid them as much as possible à la Ernest Hemingway. No matter your preferred writing style, you don't want your text to be ambiguous, confusing, or completely devoid of concrete substance. A passage that is 90% metaphorical is a lot more likely to exhaust and confuse readers than it is to impress or inspire them. Moreover, too much figurative language will weaken the impact of each metaphor, and you want these to be particularly powerful. So tread lightly and always err on the side of less is more! #3: Be Sure the Comparison Makes Sense Although the two things being compared in a metaphor or simile should be pretty different from each other, you need to make sure that there's still something similar between them so that the comparison makes sense to the reader and can be readily understood and interpreted. For example, if you're trying to describe the delicious, tantalizing smell of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies, it wouldn't really make sense to compare it to the smell of a dumpster or something else notoriously gross and stinky. Similarly, the connection between the two things must be immediately clear to the reader. If you were to write, "He looked as comfortable as a penguin," readers would very likely have no idea how this feeling of being comfortable relates to penguins specifically. Instead, you could write, "He looked as comfortable as a penguin on ice," since penguins are most at ease in cold, icy settings. Alternatively, you could use a simile or metaphor to make an ironic or sarcastic statement. In the example given above, say you want to point out how uncomfortable the man is. This means you could write something like, "He looked as comfortable as a penguin in a Miami zoo." Because penguins' natural habitat is in the (much colder) Antarctic, the irony here is that the man is clearly not comfortable in the same way penguins must feel in a hot, caged environment. If you're not sure whether a metaphor or simile you've written makes sense, ask a family member or friend to read it (ideally in context) and see whether they can grasp the meaning you're trying to make with it. Be as comfortable (and as adorably fluffy) as these baby penguins. #4: Avoid Sticking With the First Metaphor You Think Of This final tip is for serious writers and one I got from my own creative writing professor in college. The basic point here is that you should never feel compelled to go with the first metaphor or simile you come up with. When people write stories, they can be tempted to stick with the very first "clever" metaphor or simile they think of—but oftentimes these phrases can be drastically improved upon and made clearer and more relevant. But is it really bad to stick with the first metaphor you think of? Of course not! Sometimes people do come up with amazing metaphors right away and end up keeping them as is, even in the final version of the text. But this certainly isn't the case for most people. In reality, the best writers will be the ones who take time to reread, tweak, and improve sentences and passages—including metaphors and similes—they've written. Doing all this will not only give you practice with metaphors and similes, but will also help you get used to the long-winded, albeit worthwhile, process that is creative writing! What's Next? Got questions about other common literary devices? Then check out our in-depth guide to the 31 most important literary devices you should know. Working on a story or prepping for the AP Literature test? Learn all about the most important literary elements that make up a story. Thinking about a major in creative writing? 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