

“A Day at the Mall Reminds Me of America”

Poem by Sarah Blake / motionpoem by Ayse Altinok

Lesson plan by Janet Burroway

Time: 50 minutes

Imagery is the basis of all poetry, for the very good reason that the things of this world carry many meanings for us. An “image” is anything that can be taken in by the senses: heard, seen, smelled, tasted, touched. Generalizations and abstractions, by contrast, exist as ideas that can *not* be heard, seen, smelled, tasted or touched. The imagery of a poem is meaningful to the extent that it can suggest something in these areas of the intellectual realm. You might see an apple, feel its surface, bite into it, hear your teeth, smell the juice. In the process you might think of the qualities of redness, roundness, waxiness, crunchiness, sweetness and tartness—and you might also think of guilt, from Adam and Eve; risk as in William Tell, a gift to the teacher, spring’s blooms, autumn’s harvest. What else?

Metaphor is powerful in poetry because it compares one thing to another, and evokes the qualities that the two things share. In the process we make a physical connection to an abstract idea, which exists in a kind of tension between the two objects. The woman is a rose because? She is perhaps: slender, vivid, beautiful, in her prime...and possibly concealing thorns? None of that needs to be spelled out; it exists in the tension between the images of woman and rose.

OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, students will:

1. Identify images.
2. Learn to recognize metaphors.
3. Analyze the elements of a good metaphor.
4. Work “backwards” to discover a metaphor representing something they care about.
5. Write a draft of a poem employing that metaphor.

MATERIALS

- “A Day At The Mall Reminds Me Of America,” the poem and Motionpoem: motionpoems.org/episode/day-at-the-mall/
- Pen and paper or other writing instruments
- Tell the students to bring to class “a common object bigger than your earlobe but smaller than your head.”

ACTIVITIES

1. **The Poem** (20-25 mins): Have students read “A Day at the Mall Reminds Me of America” and:
 - a. make a quick list, either individually or in small groups, of all the images the poem mentions. These images include anything that you can take in with the senses: objects, people, places.
 - b. pick one or two of these images and jot down what they suggest in the poem *besides* what you can see, hear, etc.: ideas, moods, textures, qualities, other objects, people or places.
 - c. answer the following questions: How does the poem compare “a day at the mall” to “America”? How are the things you can see, hear, smell, taste, touch, compared to the abstract idea of “America”? What are the qualities, good, bad or indifferent, that the poem, and a day at the mall, suggest?
2. **The Film** (20-25 mins): Watch the film adaptation of “A Day at the Mall Reminds Me of America.”

- a. Have the students make a quick list of images in the film that are *not* in the words.
- b. How do these images strengthen or widen the meaning of the poem? Do any of the images contradict your understanding of the poem as you read it?

Tell the students to take out their “common objects.”

- c. Have them make a quick list of the qualities of that object. They can include size, shape and color, but also mood, memory or meaning of any sort. What made them pick it to bring?
- d. Pick one or two of these qualities and list other objects (or people or places) that share those qualities.
- e. Write the draft of a poem in which they compare the common object to one of the others on the last list. The more unlike they are physically, the more interesting the poem is likely to be.