

What is Figurative Language?

It is language used in an imaginative way. Whenever you describe something by comparing it with something else, you are using figurative language.

Hip-hop music and poetry are full of figurative language. Here is a guide for identifying and using figurative language in rap songs and poems. In this list, each figurative language term has a pronunciation guide, a definition, and an example. Remember: Rap is poetry, and a lot of poetry is rap.

Simile (SIH-muh-lee): a comparison between two or more things using the words *like* or *as*.
example: "I move fast like a cheetah on the Serengeti."

Metaphor (MET-uh-for): a comparison between two or more things that doesn't use the words *like* or *as*.
example: "You are an ant, while I'm the lion."

Alliteration (uh-LIT-er-AY-shuhn): a phrase with a string of words all beginning with the same sound.
example: "Five freaky females finding sales at retail."

Hyperbole (hie-PER-buh-lee): an exaggeration.
example: "I fought a million rappers in an afternoon in June."

Personification, (per-son-if-ih-KAY-shon): giving an animal or object human-like characteristics.
example: "Alright, the sky misses the sun at night."

Symbol (SIM-bull): something that stands for something else (often something more abstract).
example: In Tupac Shakur's song *Me and My Girlfriend*, the "girlfriend" referenced is actually his gun.

Assonance (ASS-uh-nince): the repetition of vowel sounds to create internal rhyme.
example: ""Hear the mellow wedding bells." - Edgar Allen Poe"

Onomatopoeia (ON-uh-mat-uh-PEE-uh): a word that imitates the sound it is describing.
example: "Out of reach, I pull out with a **screech**."

Figurative Language Song

Chorus

Sometimes what you mean is not exactly what you say
That's figurative language, using words in different ways
Personification, alliteration, assonance, hyperbole
Onomatopoeia, metaphor, and simile

Verse I

When Sally seems to sit somewhere separate from Sonia, Or Caleb calls Chris 'cause he's coming to California It's called alliteration: that's what occurs When you got the same sound at the start of every word
But when you've got a vowel sound that keeps sounding the same That's a figure called assonance, yeah, that's its name It's what I'm trying to define by providing this example
But I cannot deny that assonance can be a handful

Chorus

Verse II

A simile is something that you use to compare
Two unrelated things with an element that's shared My mind is like an ocean; it's as smooth as jazz But it's only a simile if it uses "like" or "as"
A metaphor is similar, but watch out! Be careful 'cause you've got to leave "like" and "as" out My mind is an ocean; my words are a river, So keep your ears open as I continue to deliver

Chorus

Verse III

Now if the sun's smiling down, or the boat hugged the shore That's personification, nothing less, nothing more
But with a buzz or a ding or a hiss or a roar That's onomatopoeia that we're using for sure
Hyperbole: man, that's like a million times harder!
Take something true, then exaggerate it way farther
Now you've heard this song from beginning to the finish
Now you've got some tools to draw your literary image

THE WRECK OF THE EDMUND FITZGERALD

by Gordon Lightfoot

The legend lives on from the Chippewa on down
Of the big lake they call Gitche Gumee
The lake, it is said, never gives up her dead
When the skies of November turn gloomy.

With a load of iron ore - 26,000 tons more
Than the Edmund Fitzgerald weighed empty
That good ship and true was a bone to be chewed
When the gales of November came early

The ship was the pride of the American side
Coming back from some mill in Wisconsin
As the big freighters go it was bigger than most
With a crew and the Captain well seasoned.

Concluding some terms with a couple of steel firms
When they left fully loaded for Cleveland
And later that night when the ship's bell rang
Could it be the North Wind they'd been feeling.

The wind in the wires made a tattletale sound
And a wave broke over the railing
And every man knew, as the Captain did, too,
T'was the witch of November come stealing.

The dawn came late and the breakfast had to wait
When the gales of November came slashing
When afternoon came it was freezing rain
In the face of a hurricane West Wind

When supper time came the old cook came on deck
Saying fellows it's too rough to feed ya
At 7PM a main hatchway caved in
He said fellas it's been good to know ya.

The Captain wired in he had water coming in
And the good ship and crew was in peril
And later that night when his lights went out of sight
Came the wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald.

Does anyone know where the love of God goes
When the words turn the minutes to hours
The searchers all say they'd have made Whitefish Bay
If they'd fifteen more miles behind her.

They might have split up or they might have capsized
They may have broke deep and took water

And all that remains is the faces and the names
Of the wives and the sons and the daughters.

Lake Huron rolls, Superior sings
In the ruins of her ice water mansion
Old Michigan steams like a young man's dreams,
The islands and bays are for sportsmen.

And farther below Lake Ontario
Takes in what Lake Erie can send her
And the iron boats go as the mariners all know
With the gales of November remembered.

In a musty old hall in Detroit they prayed
In the Maritime Sailors' Cathedral
The church bell chimed, 'til it rang 29 times
For each man on the Edmund Fitzgerald.

The legend lives on from the Chippewa on down
Of the big lake they call Gitche Gumee
Superior, they say, never gives up her dead
When the gales of November come early.

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Stars

Glittering specks
illuminate the darkness;
Each one shines like a tiny diamond.
Some huddle together in clusters;
others stand alone.
Still others shoot through the sky
like arrows;
on these one makes a wish!

"Corner" by Ralph Pomeroy

Directions: Underline all examples of similes, metaphors and personification and label them.

The cop slumps alertly at his motorcycle,
supported by one leg like a leather stork.
His glance accuses me of loitering*.
I can see his eyes moving like a fish
in the green depths of his green goggles.

His ease is fake. I can tell.
My ease is fake. And he can tell.
The fingers armoured by his gloves
Splay* and clench, itching to change something.
As if he were my enemy or my death,
I just stand there watching.

I spit out my gum which has gone stale.
I knock out my new cigarette --
Which is my bravery.
It is all imperceptible*:
The way I shift my weight,
The way he creaks in the saddle.

The traffic is specific though constant.
The sun surrounds me, divides the street between us.
His crash helmet is whiter in the shade.
It is like a bullring as they say it is just before the fighting.
I cannot back down. I am there.

Everything holds me back.
I am in danger of disappearing into the sunny dust,
My levis bake and my T-shirt sweats.

My cigarette makes my eyes burn.
But I don't dare drop it.

Who made him my enemy?
Prince of coolness. King of fear.
Why do I lean here waiting?
Why does he lounge there watching?

I am becoming sunlight.
My hair is on fire. My boots run like tar.
I am hung-up by the bright air.

Something breaks through all of a sudden.
And he blasts off, quick as a craver,
Snug in his power; watching me watch.

* **loitering (v)**: moving around or waiting suspiciously in a public place

***splay (v)**: to spread out, expand, or extend

* **imperceptible (adj)**: Impossible or difficult to see or sense

Analysis Questions for "Corner"

1. Copy two lines from the poem that are examples of metaphors.

2. Identify the objects being compared in each metaphor.
 - a. Metaphor 1: _____|_____

 - b. Metaphor 1: _____|_____

3. Copy two lines from the poem that are examples of similes.

4. Identify the objects being compared in each simile.
 - a. Simile 1: _____|_____

 - b. Simile 2: _____|_____

5. Copy two lines from the poem that are examples of personification.

6. Copy one example of alliteration in the poem.

7. Copy one line from the poem with an example of onomatopoeia.

8. Why do you think the author compares the cop's eyes to a fish's eyes?

9. Why does he compare his cigarette to "bravery?"

10. Why do you think the speaker stays in the heat of the sun rather than moving into the shade?

11. How would you answer the speaker's question, "Who made him my enemy?"

12. Create a line that you could add to the poem to create a hyperbole?