

English — Prep & Practice Guide

Topic: Figurative language in poetry

How to use this guide. If this material is new to your child, read Part A together first, then do Part B. If it has already been taught, try Part B first — and use Part A afterwards for whatever was missed. Either way, upload the finished Part B pages as a Performance Review with this guide as the prior guide: the answers come back with that review, and it ends with the next practice set.

Part A — Learn

6 short lessons, one for each idea in the practice test that follows. Each says what the idea is in the course's own method, works one example with the reasoning before the answer, and names the mistake to watch for. Each lesson also has a two-minute video, on this guide's page in your Guru portal.

Distinguishing simile from metaphor in a quoted line

A simile and a metaphor both compare two unlike things, but a simile uses the word like or as to make the comparison, while a metaphor says one thing IS another thing directly, with no like or as. You'll be asked to look at a quoted line and decide which device it is, and then explain what the comparison makes you picture or feel. This comes up whenever you're handed an exact quotation and asked to name the device, as in Worksheet 3.2. The quickest check is to scan the line for the words like or as — if one is there, it's almost always a simile. If the line just states an equation between two things, it's a metaphor. Either way, naming it is only step one; you still have to say what the comparison suggests about the thing being described.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Is "I wandered lonely as a cloud" a simile or a metaphor, and what idea about the speaker does it create?

First scan the line for the comparison words like or as — the line contains "as a cloud," so this signals a simile rather than a metaphor. Next identify the two things being compared: the speaker and a cloud. Then think about what a cloud is actually like — it drifts slowly, alone, without a fixed path, high above everything else. Finally connect that picture back to the speaker: the comparison suggests the speaker feels isolated and is moving aimlessly, detached from what's below, which sets up the mood before the daffodils surprise him.

Answer: It is a simile (it uses "as"), and it creates the idea that the speaker feels adrift and alone, drifting without direction like a cloud.

WATCH OUT — Students often call a comparison a metaphor just because it feels poetic, without checking for like or as. Notice this by always underlining the comparison word first — if you find like or as, stop and label it simile before thinking about meaning.

Identifying personification and explaining the human quality given to a non-human thing

Personification is when a poet gives human actions, feelings, or qualities to something that isn't human — an animal, an object, an idea, or nature itself. It applies whenever a non-human thing in a poem is described doing something only a person could do, like demanding, singing, or dancing. Spotting it means finding the non-human noun and the human verb or adjective attached to it. Explaining it means naming the human quality given and saying what effect that choice has — does it make the thing seem alive, threatening, gentle, hopeful? This matters because the human quality the poet chooses always carries a feeling the poet wants you to notice.

WORKED EXAMPLE

In Wordsworth's lines, the daffodils are described "Tossing their heads in sprightly dance." What human quality is given to the daffodils, and what effect does it create?

First find the non-human subject — the daffodils, which are flowers, not people. Next find the human action attached to them — tossing their heads and dancing, both things people do, not literally what flowers do. Then name the human quality: liveliness, playfulness, joy, as if the flowers are dancing at a celebration. Finally connect it to the poem's mood: this personification makes the daffodils feel joyful and full of energy, which lifts the speaker's own mood as he watches them.

Answer: The daffodils are given the human quality of dancing joyfully, which makes the scene feel lively and cheerful and lifts the speaker's mood.

WATCH OUT — Students often name personification correctly but stop there, without explaining what the human quality suggests. Notice this by checking your answer: if you only wrote "it's personification" and quoted the line, go back and add one sentence saying what feeling or idea that human quality creates.

Identifying alliteration by locating repeated initial consonant sounds

Alliteration is the repetition of the same consonant sound at the start of words that are close together in a line. It applies when you're asked to find a sound device rather than a comparison — you're listening for sound, not meaning. To find it, read the line slowly and listen to the very first sound of each word, not just the first letter, since you're listening for sound not spelling. Once you find repeated sounds, you should also be ready to say what effect the repetition creates, such as making a line feel smooth, sharp, or quick to read aloud.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Find an example of alliteration in the first two stanzas of Wordsworth's poem and explain its effect.

First reread the two stanzas slowly, saying the words aloud to listen for matching beginning sounds rather than scanning silently. Notice that 'beside' and 'beneath' both begin with the b-sound and appear close together in the same line. Confirm this by reading them aloud and hearing the repeated consonant sound clearly. Finally explain the effect: the repeated b-sound slows the line down and gives it a soft, gentle rhythm that matches the calm lakeside scene.

Answer: "Beside" and "beneath" repeat the b-sound, giving the line a soft, gentle rhythm that matches the calm scene by the lake.

WATCH OUT — Students often pick two words that start with the same letter but not the same sound, or pick words that are too far apart to create a rhyming effect when read aloud. Notice this by reading the line out loud — if the repeated sound isn't audible right away, it probably isn't a strong example.

Tracing an extended metaphor across multiple stanzas

An extended metaphor is a single comparison that the poet develops over several lines or the whole poem, rather than using it once and moving on. It applies when a poem keeps returning to the same comparison with new details in each stanza, building a fuller picture. To trace it, first identify the one big comparison the whole poem is built on, then go stanza by stanza and collect the specific details that add to that comparison. A strong answer names the comparison once and then points to at least two different details from different stanzas that develop it, showing how the comparison grows richer as the poem goes on.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Dickinson's poem is built on an extended metaphor. What is hope compared to, and what two details from different stanzas develop the comparison?

First find the comparison stated right at the start — "Hope is the thing with feathers," which sets up hope as a bird. Next check whether later stanzas keep developing the bird idea rather than dropping it: in stanza one, the bird "perches in the soul" and "sings the tune without the words," which are things real birds do. Then look at stanza two, where the bird is heard "sweetest — in the Gale," meaning it sings even in a storm, like a bird that doesn't fly away when weather turns bad. Finally check stanza three, where the bird never "asked a crumb" of the speaker, meaning hope doesn't need to be fed or cared for like a real bird would. Collecting these shows the comparison is developed, not just stated once.

Answer: Hope is compared to a bird. In stanza one it "perches in the soul" and sings without words; in stanza two it keeps singing even in the "Gale," showing the comparison is carried through the whole poem.

WATCH OUT — Students often name the comparison correctly but then only quote one detail, or quote details from the same stanza, which doesn't show the metaphor is extended. Notice this by checking that your two pieces of evidence come from two different stanzas before you finish the answer.

Interpreting what a symbol represents beyond its literal meaning

A symbol is something concrete and physical in a poem that also stands for a bigger idea beyond its literal self. It applies when an object, place, or image in the poem seems to carry more weight than its plain description would need, often because the poet lingers on it or returns to it. To interpret a symbol, first describe what the thing literally is, then ask what larger idea, choice, or feeling it could represent given everything else happening in the poem. A good answer always gives both: the literal thing and the idea it stands for, connected by reasoning from the poem itself, not just a guess.

WORKED EXAMPLE

In "The Road Not Taken," what do the two roads symbolize?

First note what the roads literally are: two paths in a yellow wood that the speaker must choose between. Next notice the poem spends many lines on the difficulty of choosing and the fact that choosing one road means not traveling the other, which suggests the roads mean more than just paths through a forest. Then connect this to real life: people often face moments where they must choose one option and give up another, unable to go back. Finally state the symbol clearly: the two roads represent life choices or decisions, especially ones that cannot be undone.

Answer: The two roads symbolize life choices — specifically a decision the speaker must make knowing he cannot go back and try the other path.

WATCH OUT — Students often stop at the literal description ("the roads are paths in a forest") without taking the next step to the bigger idea. Notice this by asking yourself after writing an answer: did I say what the thing stands for, not just what it is?

Writing a C-E-E (Claim-Evidence-Explain) paragraph analyzing a device's effect on meaning

C-E-E is the pattern for writing a short paragraph about a figurative language device: Claim names the device and what it's doing, Evidence is an exact quotation from the poem, and Explain says how those specific words create meaning or feeling and ties it back to the poem's overall message. It applies anytime you're asked to write a paragraph analyzing a device rather than just identifying it in a short answer. The claim should be one clear sentence, the evidence should be quoted exactly as written in the poem, and the explain part should be the longest section, since that's where the real analysis happens. Skipping straight from quoting to the next idea without explaining is the difference between a weak paragraph and a strong one.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Using the C-E-E pattern, write one paragraph explaining how Dickinson uses figurative language to show that hope is strong.

First decide on the claim: Dickinson uses the extended metaphor of hope as a bird to show hope is resilient, so that sentence should name the device and its job. Next choose the clearest piece of evidence supporting strength specifically, which is "sore must be the storm — / That could abash the little Bird," since it directly addresses how hard it would be to defeat hope. Then explain: the word "sore" suggests the storm would have to be extremely severe, and "little Bird" makes hope sound small and fragile, which makes its ability to withstand a severe storm even more impressive, proving hope's quiet strength. Finally check the explain section connects back to the poem's bigger message about hope sustaining people through hardship.

Answer: Dickinson uses the extended metaphor of hope as a small bird to show that hope is surprisingly strong. She writes that "sore must be the storm — / That could abash the little Bird," meaning only a severe storm could frighten hope away. The word "sore" emphasizes how extreme the storm would have to be, while calling hope a "little Bird" makes it sound fragile, which makes its quiet endurance feel even more impressive. This shows that hope keeps singing and supporting people no matter how difficult life becomes.

WATCH OUT — Students often quote the evidence and then simply restate it in different words instead of explaining why those specific words matter. Notice this by checking whether your explain sentence adds new thinking about word choice and effect, rather than just repeating the quotation in your own words.

Part B — Practice. A practice test on the ideas these pages say matter most at this level. Level: English 10, Unit 3 — reading poetry closely and identifying/analyzing figurative language.

11 questions across 6 ideas these pages cover — one or two for each, in the form the course uses. Work them on these pages. **The answers are not printed here: they come back with the review.** When the pages are done, upload them as a Performance Review with this guide as the prior guide, and Guru grades them and says which gaps have closed.

Distinguishing simile from metaphor in a quoted line

1. In a poem about a storm, the poet writes, 'Her anger was a wildfire, consuming everything in its path.' What device is this?

- (A) Simile
- (B) Metaphor
- (C) Personification
- (D) Hyperbole

Answer: _____

2. A poet describes a quiet library: 'The silence spread through the room like a soft blanket.' What device is this?

- (A) Simile
- (B) Metaphor
- (C) Alliteration
- (D) Symbol

Answer: _____

Identifying personification and explaining the human quality given to a non-human thing

3. In the line 'The old clock groaned with every passing hour, tired of counting time,' what human quality is given to the clock, and what feeling does this create? Answer in 2-3 sentences.

Answer: _____

4. In the line 'The river whispered secrets to the stones as it passed,' what human quality is given to the river, and what feeling does this create? Answer in 2-3 sentences.

Answer: _____

Identifying alliteration by locating repeated initial consonant sounds

5. Which phrase from 'The Road Not Taken' is the clearest example of alliteration?

- (A) 'two roads diverged'
- (B) 'long I stood'
- (C) 'wanted wear'
- (D) 'ages and ages hence'

Answer: _____

Tracing an extended metaphor across multiple stanzas

6. Imagine a poem that compares a mother's love to a lighthouse across three stanzas: stanza 1 describes the lighthouse 'standing steady through every storm,' stanza 2 describes its light as 'never going dark, even in the thickest fog,' and stanza 3 describes ships 'finding their way home because of its glow.' Name two details from two different stanzas that develop this comparison, and explain what each detail adds to the idea of a mother's love.

Answer: _____

7. A poem compares a student's growing confidence to a seed across its stanzas: stanza 1 shows it 'buried deep, waiting in the dark soil,' stanza 2 shows it 'pushing a single green shoot toward the light,' and stanza 3 shows it 'opening into a flower no storm could flatten.' Name two details from two different stanzas that develop this comparison, and explain what each detail adds to the idea of growing confidence.

Answer: _____

Interpreting what a symbol represents beyond its literal meaning

8. In a poem where a character stands before a closed door at the end of a long hallway, unsure whether to open it, the closed door most likely symbolizes:

- (A) A literal door in a house
- (B) An uncertain or unknown future the character must decide to face
- (C) The end of the poem
- (D) A disagreement between two characters

Answer: _____

9. In a poem where a caged bird sings every morning despite never being let out, the cage most likely symbolizes:

- (A) A birdhouse built by the speaker
- (B) The changing of seasons
- (C) Restriction or lack of freedom the speaker feels in life
- (D) The bird's literal home

Answer: _____

Writing a C-E-E (Claim-Evidence-Explain) paragraph analyzing a device's effect on meaning

10. Using the C-E-E pattern, write one paragraph explaining how Wordsworth uses figurative language in 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' to show that the daffodils seem endless and joyful. Name the device (Claim), quote exact words (Evidence), and explain how those words create meaning (Explain).

Answer: _____

11. Using the C-E-E pattern, write one paragraph explaining how Frost uses figurative language in 'The Road Not Taken' to show that the speaker's choice feels significant. Name the device (Claim), quote exact words (Evidence), and explain how those words create meaning (Explain).

Answer: _____

Built from: the ideas these pages say matter most at this level. Guru Seal: every question and its kept answer key were independently checked by separate AI systems; 1 item(s) were dropped in that check.