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Lesson Five

FOCUS: Figurative Language

VOCABULARY WORDS

From “*Hope’ is the thing with feathers –*”

Gale, n.
A very strong wind

Abash, v.
Cause to feel embarrassed,
disconcerted, ashamed

From “*There is no Frigate
like a Book*”

Frigate, n.
A warship with a mixed armament,
generally lighter than a destroyer

Courser, n.
A swift horse

Traverse, n.
A route or path across or over

Frugal, adj.
Economical; thrifty

Figurative language asks us to stretch our imaginations, finding the likeness in seemingly unrelated things. A *simile* is a comparison of two things that initially seem quite different, but are shown to have a significant resemblance. Similes employ a connective, usually “like,” “as,” or “than,” or a verb such as “resembles.” A *metaphor* also compares two seemingly different things, but it states that one thing is something else that, in a literal sense, it is not. By asserting that a thing is something else, a metaphor creates a close association that underscores an important similarity between them.

?? Discussion Activities

As a class, identify the opening comparison in Dickinson’s poems “Hope’ is the thing with feathers –” and “There is no Frigate like a Book.” What correspondence exists between hope and something with feathers in the first poem, and between a ship and a book in the second? Take the time to go through each line of the poem as a class. Discuss the way Dickinson develops these particular metaphors throughout each poem to make a more comprehensive point about “the Human Soul.” What other metaphors can students find in these two poems?

If time permits, discuss Dickinson’s use of metaphor in other poems referenced in this Teacher’s Guide.

Writing Exercise

In the 1872 poem “Tell all the truth but tell it slant –,” Dickinson compares “Truth’s superb surprise” to lightning. Have students write a one-page analysis of what Dickinson’s comparison between light and darkness might suggest about how we discern truth.

To expand this question, consider the development of our scientific understanding of light and lightning since the nineteenth century, as well as Dickinson’s own problems with her eyes and sight.

Homework

Read “Before I got my eye put out –” and “Because I could not stop for Death –.”