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Lesson Five

FOCUS: Figurative Language

Writers use figurative language such as imagery, similes, and metaphors to help the reader visualize and experience events and emotions in a story. Imagery—a word or phrase that refers to sensory experience (sight, sound, smell, touch, or taste)—helps create a physical experience for the reader and adds immediacy to literary language.

Some figurative language asks us to stretch our imaginations, finding the likeness in seemingly unrelated things. Simile is a comparison of two things that initially seem quite different but are shown to have significant resemblance. Similes employ connective words, usually “like,” “as,” “than,” or a verb such as “resembles.” A metaphor is a statement 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 these two things.

Metaphor is important in *Love Medicine*. In “Flesh and Blood,” Marie tussles with Sister Leopolda over a heavy black spoon, which to Marie is much more than just a spoon. Marie has invested a simple spoon with enormous power and cruelty, symbolizing the oppression, guilt, and misery she experienced under the authority of the Catholic Church. The spoon’s physical presence allows her a physical expression of her rage and hatred.

Discussion Activities

Students should contrast the way Marie uses metaphor in “Flesh and Blood” with Nector’s very different metaphorical language in “The Plunge of the Brave.” Does Nector, with his “taste for candy,” seem to have a gentler world view than Marie? If so, how is this reflected in their language?

Ask the students to find other examples of figurative language in the chapters they’ve read so far. How does this affect the reader’s perception of the characters? Students might also want to locate other extended metaphors in the novel, similar to the spoon passage quoted above.

Writing Exercise

Ask students to write a brief two-page story about one of their own relatives using figurative language such as metaphor and simile.

Homework

Students should read “A Bridge” and “The Red Convertible” (pp. 163–189). They should continue to identify the narrators of each chapter. They should also find two or three main symbols from the novel thus far, particularly in the chapters read for tonight’s homework. Remind students to use their reader’s journals for homework assignments.