

Name: _____

Date: _____

Interpreting Metaphors in Shakespeare

Metaphors, comparisons of two unlike objects, help writers to paint a clearer picture of a person, place, thing, or event in the story. By comparing something to a dissimilar object using a **metaphor**, the writer can highlight the characteristics that are similar.

Example: The teacher's voice saying that we have no homework is music to my ears.

In this comparison, the teacher's voice is compared to music because the statement is so pleasing to the student's ears.

Shakespeare uses many metaphors in his writing. Some of these are very famous comparisons.

Exercise:

Find the metaphor in each line of text. Name the two things being compared and explain the comparison.

All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. One man in his time plays many parts. (*As You Like It*, Shakespeare)

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate. ("Sonnet 18," Shakespeare)

But, soft! What light through yonder window breaks? It is the East, and Juliet, the sun! Arise, fair sun and kill the envious moon." (*Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare)

Duncan (speaking to Macbeth): Welcome hither. I have begun to plant thee, and will labour to make thee full growing." (*Macbeth*, Shakespeare)

But 'tis a common proof / That lowliness is young ambition's ladder, / Whereto the climber-upward turns his face; / But when he once attains the utmost round, / He then unto the ladder turns his back, / Looks into the clouds, scorning the base degrees / By which he did ascend.

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ANSWERS--Interpreting Metaphors in Shakespeare

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All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. One man in his time plays many parts. (*As You Like It*, Shakespeare)

The world is compared to a stage, and people are compared to actors (players). In our lives, we play many different roles (parts).

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate. ("Sonnet 18," Shakespeare)

The speaker is comparing his significant other to a summer's day. He is saying that she is more lovely and more temperate (meaning milder) than a summer day.

But, soft! What light through yonder window breaks? It is the East, and Juliet, the sun! Arise, fair sun and kill the envious moon." (*Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare)

Juliet is compared to the sun. Juliet's beauty is so bright to Romeo that seeing her face is like looking into the sun.

Duncan (speaking to Macbeth): Welcome hither. I have begun to plant thee, and will labour to make thee full growing." (*Macbeth*, Shakespeare)

Duncan compares Macbeth to a plant or tree. He is working to advance Macbeth—to make him more prosperous—and help him realize his political ambitions.

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Lowliness—or humility—is compared to a ladder. The ambitious person humbles himself to climb up in life, but then when he is at the top, he is not so humble, but proud.
