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Similes, Metaphors, Homophones and Synonyms: Children's Books to Teach the Language of Words

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When I hear the word "analogy" or "metaphor" I immediately think of multiple choice questions and #2 pencils. I think I was introduced to these ideas as they related to test taking, never as a way to think about my writing or to better understand my reading. I remember working with these ideas in isolation on worksheets. Luckily, we now have great picture books that can introduce kids to these concepts of language.

We certainly don't want students to only be able to name these amazing techniques that authors use. Instead, we want them to be able to understand them in the context of their reading and writing. Knowing the name of something like a simile or analogy sometimes helps students grow as readers and writers.

The books I look for to introduce these concepts to children are those that invite understanding and play. I want books where the language is accessible, and invites play with the concepts introduced. My hope is that these books help students see the fun in the ways writers use language.

Similes and Metaphors

My Dog is As Smelly As Dirty Socks: And Other Funny Family Portraits and *My Best Friend Is As Sharp As a Pencil: And Other Funny Classroom Portraits* by Hanoch Pivan are playful books to introduce similes. The author/illustrator uses real objects and word play to demonstrate how these comparisons work. For example, in the illustrations, if the narrator says, "My mother is as bright as a light," a light bulb is used somewhere in the illustration of the mother. The book invites kids to try creating their own family and friend portraits, using objects as a beginning for understanding similes.

Another wonderful book on similes is *Muddy As a Duck Puddle and Other American Similes* by Laurie Lawlor. This text is unique in that it is set up as an alphabet book and focuses on similes that are truly American. The last few pages explain the origins of the sayings.

In *Crazy Like a Fox: A Simile Story* by Loreen Leedy, the similes work together to create a sequential story with a plot. The story is written in a kind of guessing game, so readers can guess the comparison in each simile. This book provides an engaging way to introduce these comparisons to kids.

My Heart Is Like a Zoo by Michael Hall is not chock-full of similes, but the ones included are shared in the context of feelings. The illustrations make this a delightful read aloud.

Analogies

Analogies seem to be one of the hardest things for children to understand. When we introduce them in isolation and with words that are difficult, some kids never understand the way they work.

One book that really makes this concept accessible to young children is *Beach Is to Fun: A Book of Relationships* by Pat Brisson. This is a truly unusual book--it is wonderful rhyming analogies put into picture book form. Each page compares things dealing with the summer time and every other page rhymes. The comparisons make the concept of analogies obvious to readers. When I've shared it with elementary students, they are inspired to write analogies of their own.

Homonyms, Homographs and Homophones

Classic books like *The King Who Rained* by Fred Gwynne are staples in school libraries for teaching homonyms, but I have been on the hunt for more recent publications. Newer titles with similar themes include *Did You Say Pears?* by Arlene Alda and *Dear Deer: A Book of Homophones* by Gene Baretta to my collection.

In *Did You Say Pears?*, the author uses photographs to show the different meanings of various homophones and homonyms. Rhymes and humor are abundant throughout the book.

The "plotline" of *Dear Deer: A Book of Homophones* is that Aunt Ant has moved to the zoo and is writing to her friend Deer

(Dear Deer) about some interesting animal behaviors. For example, "The monkey will tell you a TALE as he hangs from his TAIL." The homophones are used in creative ways that connect to tell a story. Kids love this book, and it helps that both homophones are often part of the same sentence. The illustrations are colorful and inviting.

Synonyms

Synonyms are important for students to understand, and we often forget that one of our main goals for teaching synonyms is to help students in their writing. If our students can use synonyms well, their writing becomes more interesting and specific.

A favorite book to introduce synonyms to students is *Chicken Cheeks* by Michael Ian Black. In this book, the author uses various words to talk about "butts". What can be funnier than lots of words used to talk about bottoms? The inside flap of this book explains, "This is a story with a beginning, a middle, and a whole lot of ends." A bear is trying to get honey from the top of a VERY tall tree. So, he gets the help of lots of friends, piling one on top of each other until they reach the top. On each page, the bear has the view of yet another "bottom". Each page consists of only two words--Such as "moose caboose" and "flamingo fanny".

Another book that does something similar is *SuperHero ABC* by Bob McLeod. *This is a comic type of superhero alphabet book. Each page introduces a superhero and explains (in alliteration) the super power the hero possesses. In many of these descriptions, the author uses various words for "bad guy". Words such as criminals, vandals, etc. are used. The book lends itself to charting all of those synonyms for bad guys and adding some of your own.*

Big, Bigger, Biggest! by Nancy Coffelt is a picture book that provides so much to talk about when it comes to words. Each section consists of three pages with related words. For example, the first three pages focus on the words small, smaller and smallest using animals to illustrate the meaning. But the best part of the book is that it goes a bit further than that, and gives readers other words that mean similar things. For example, on the "smallest" page, the spider says, "I'm smallest. I'm miniature. I'm miniscule. I'm microscopic!" This text almost serves as a mini-thesaurus, and can be used to start conversations about how even though the words have similar general meanings, the specific definition of each word is a bit different.

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