

## **Four Elements of a Metaphor**

Written by Administrator

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Education/four elements of a metaphor

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The following information is from

***The Nature of Metaphors and Metaphorical Thinking.***

***Bridging by Pugh, Hicks, Davis, and Venstra***

## **Four Elements of a Metaphor**

### **“Grounding**

The grounding of each metaphor in a particular set of experiences points to the importance of prior knowledge in understanding metaphors. For example, if we speak of someone’s personality as being as warm and comfortable as Grandpa’s old patched sweater, those who have had experiences with kind grandfathers and comfortable old sweaters will best appreciate

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the metaphor. Others who have been told about these things can understand, but may not be impressed. People from regions such as the tropics, where sweaters are not common garments, may be quite puzzled.

### Form

Form relates to the general commonality of the two concepts involved and is usually what immediately strikes one about a metaphor. For example, in a comparison of the atom and the solar system, we need an overall picture of objects orbiting around a center. To entertain the metaphor that teaching is gardening, we need a structural picture of cultivation resulting in independent growth. The form may also be conceptual. The metaphor "iron curtain" requires a grasp of paradox, because one term seemingly contradicts the other; iron is hard and inflexible, whereas a curtain is usually soft and pliable. To combine them is to pose an anomaly and to heighten the threat of the phenomenon, which was the effect of the metaphor when it was first used.

### Correspondences

Correspondences occur within the form of the metaphor. They are the multiple points of comparison within the form, and it is through these correspondences that we see the working of the metaphor. The more correspondences we can perceive, the more complex and convincing the metaphor; thus, the better the metaphor works. As an example, Howard A. Peele develops this metaphor for the term *metaphor*, which contains a number of correspondences:

Metaphors cultivate the mind. They prepare furrows for planting ideas, which in time grow to mature understanding. If the climate is too arid for learning or if work has been neglected for too long, metaphors can break through an unreceptive crust to more fertile ground where the nutrients of teaching can be absorbed.(1984,2)

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Within the context of gardening, Peele brings out many correspondences: cultivation, planting, growth, climate, fertility, and nutrition. This metaphor, we might say, walks on many legs, not just one or two, but at least six.

### Connotation

Metaphors themselves become definitions of our experience, and as Lakoff and Johnson point out, primary experiences are physical. We know the world first through our bodies. From that center, we move outward into social, political, and religious realms. In other words, metaphors express our attitudes, the connotative meanings that phenomena have for us both physically and socially.

For example, let us examine the metaphor that the teacher is a candle. This metaphor implies that the teacher's life is consumed by providing illumination for others. This is a Malaysian metaphor that captures the attitude toward teachers in that culture, where the word for teacher is *guru*. The candle metaphor expresses the ideal that dedicated teachers expend their life forces as energy in the transference of wisdom

We might ask ourselves the extent to which this metaphor is appropriate to American culture. Do we, for example, have the same idea of teaching as self-sacrifice? We must consider the form and correspondences of the metaphor, and what these connote, in order to answer this question. To us the candle image may connote teacher burnout, which is probably not a connotation in the Malaysian metaphor.”