

# Metaphors and Beyond: **Student Exercises**



Dr. Dann L. Pierce

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River Kishon Publishers  
Portland, Oregon

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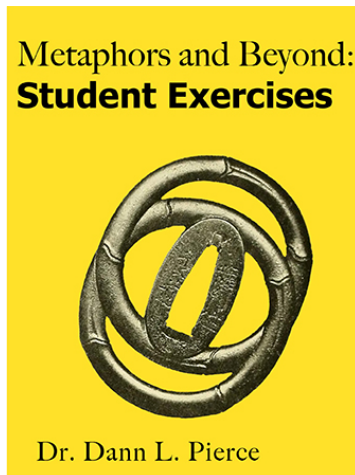
Cover Art created in collaboration with Six-Finger Press, Kyoto Japan.

# Cover Image

The cover of *Metaphors and Beyond: **Student Exercises*** features an ancient object. For me its form and appearance visually mimic characteristics and formal aspects of how metaphors work.

The Japanese decorative and ornamental iron sword hand guard features organic, bamboo-like joints helping indicate that metaphors emerged naturally from the depths of human experience. Moreover, overlapping, intersecting ovals visually signal how a metaphor interconnects unrelated concepts. The key-like center hole, obviously originally for a sword once we recognize the object, can with a little imagination mimic a keyhole – and metaphors often function as a key to open awareness. Finally, the rough metal finish and resulting light/dark interplay further signal interrelationships among elements in a metaphor. All in all, a pretty concise visual design we can appreciate when indicating how a metaphor works.

Work on the original iron sword hand guard is attributed to Yoshimichi, resident of Satsuma province. See the photo credits page in *Metaphors and Beyond: **The Guide*** for the citation.



# Dedication

This student exercise book is dedicated to all who enjoy and love metaphors. And who seek to create stronger understanding.

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# Introduction

## **Students and Metaphors**

Chances are quite strong that you already know and enjoy some metaphors. Now you have the opportunity to spread your wings, or take a lucky leap, or dive into a stronger awareness and array of non-literal comparisons.

## **Metaphors and other non-literal comparisons**

In the last paragraph you likely read the words “spread,” “wings,” “leap,” and “dive” without paying *any* extraordinary attention to those particular metaphors. That’s because metaphors are **SO** embedded into our day-to-day language, we frequently pass over them. Such metaphors are variously termed old, tired, worn-out, or stealth metaphors. We need to know about that type of metaphor, but also about several other basic kinds of metaphor. Let’s quickly review non-literal comparisons you already know.

## **Metaphor**

A metaphor joins two, typically different, concepts together via the resources of the words involved to create awareness or perspective. Hence, a novelist writes about a father in dysfunctional family dinner conversation, he “did his best but he was paddling a sinking canoe.” No real canoe is anywhere near any of the characters in that scene, but we gain some awareness of the trouble or futility of the father’s conversation by those different concepts (conversation and sinking canoe) being joined in a metaphor.

## **Simile**

A simile, similar to a metaphor, joins two, typically different, concepts together via the resources of the words involved to create awareness or perspective. But typically, similes use the words “like” or “as” to condition or highlight the joining. A journalist writing about a recent composing, singing, performing superstar notes this about some of her lyrics: “. . . deploying tossed off details like a forgotten scarf that comes back at the song’s end to stab you in the heart . . .” You’ve likely heard 2012’s *Red*, from Taylor Swift, yet in this simile we observe someone admiring how the different concepts (forgotten scarf/weapon and relationships) can be joined via the resources of the phrase “like a.”

## **Analogy**

An analogy takes two things and creates a comparison between them so as to create interpretation or understanding as to what unites or separates them. In an ad for specialized sunglasses, we find this copywriting: “You wouldn’t wear flip-flops or soccer cleats onto the court, would you? So why are you wearing lifestyle or generic sports eyewear instead of sunglasses built specifically for your tennis and pickleball game?” Hence, an analogy is built between certain footgear (flip-flops or cleats vs. pertinent tennis shoes) and the crux of the analogy concerns appropriate eye gear for tennis or pickleball.

Metaphors, similes, and analogies are three basic kinds of non-literal comparisons; more than a dozen others operate in our communication patterns, but let’s stick with these for the moment.

In the following sections you will find fourteen different sections of exercises designed to give you awareness, practice, and focus as to how you can better recognize and use non-literal comparisons. Use the sections and exercises in any order that makes sense to you.



Let's get started!

## Section 1

# Metaphors, Similes, and Analogies

Once again let's note that we are so surrounded by aging, stealth metaphors (and similes, and analogies) we hardly notice them. Quick example concerning recent work done by television pioneer Norman Lear:

In the last decade of his [Normal Lear's] life, he tried to convince TV executives they should have a show on the air about older people because that population is underrepresented.

But even Lear, whose immense talent turned the sitcom into a public square by creating shows that tackled racism, poverty, classism and feminism, could not break through the industry's entrenched ageism. While singing his praises, broadcast television executives rejected what could have been Lear's final contribution, a sitcom about a retirement community.

Let's examine this quotation about aging and an aging TV producer for stealth metaphors. In the initial paragraph we might be able to argue that "on the air" is a metaphor of sorts. But since the earliest days of television signals, moving through air is a distinct attribute of electronic signals we'll need to let that one rest.

In the second paragraph, however, see how many over-used, stealth metaphors you can find. We'll wait.

Yes, "turned," "tackled," "break through," "entrenched," and "singing praises" are all stealth metaphors; at some time, each was a vibrant, new, insight producing metaphor. But they've been used *so long* we pay little attention to them (just like the metaphoric notion of "paying attention"). So, for our first exercise, let's go stealth metaphor hunting.

**1** Find an article in a popular news source on nearly any subject (the Norman Lear article was from the *Chicago Sun-Times*, 05 Jan. 2024). Read through the article slowly asking this question: are the designations, observations, and words used in this article literally true? Norman Lear, talented as he was to the end, never literally “tackled” racism in television shows he produced.

Now let’s move to similes.

Recall that a simile is quite similar to a metaphor, but typically uses the terms “like” or “as” to signal the non-literal comparison being used or created.

**2** Go to Instagram and find [@metaphorsandbeyond](#). Once there, scroll through and find at least five non-literal comparisons that use a simile. Of the five you discover, which are your favorite two? Why? Did you find any similes that made little sense to you? Compare those with someone else’s favorite two picks. Any overlap? Do you typically use very many similes each day?

**3** In Chapter One of [Metaphors and Beyond: The Guide](#) find the comparison that uses the phrase: “a Lego palace of clichés.”

Have you ever played with Lego? Stepped on a lego? Lost a lego? If so, does any of that influence how you read and understand the film critic’s use of lego concerning the quality of a movie? Have you ever used lego as a metaphor or simile?

Now let’s move to analogies. And be prepared to look at any nearby plastic water bottle with some suspicion. Here’s our analogy quotation:

Sherri Mason, a professor and director of sustainability at Penn State Behrend in Erie, Pa., says plastic materials are a bit like skin – they slough off pieces into water or food or whatever substance they are touching.

‘We know at this point that our skin is constantly shedding,’ she said. ‘And this is what these plastic items are doing – they’re just constantly shedding.’

**4** Read three or four current news updates on scientific experiments or discoveries. Can you find within those articles any analogies that seek to guide your understanding? Recall that a common form of an analogy is: A is to B as C is to D (as in the prior example displaced micro plastics are to plastic water bottles as lost skin cells are to human skin). Do the analogies you discover help in any important way? Or do your discovered analogies create more questions than perspective? Why? Discuss which analogies seem most useful to you.

**5** For the sheer fun of it ask one of your best friends about their favorite metaphor, simile, or analogy. Since this is a non-typical question, be prepared for a lag time in response. Some friends may have an instant answer, other may take a day or two to recall an appropriate non-literal comparison. Compare your friend’s favorite non-literal comparison with one or more of the ones you’ve discussed in this section. What do you notice about how metaphors, similes, and analogies work? Do any non-literal comparisons fail for you? If so, why?

Then prepare for the exercises in Section Two. You’ll be glad you did.

## Section 2

# Metaphors Creating New Perspective

One of the superpowers metaphors can offer: creating instant awareness and perspective. An example:

‘Trash takes itself out every single time.’

Okay. Trash. Where’s the perspective? We can *instantly* figure out that trash as a concept may not signal the best. But trash that “takes itself out?!” That’s a clever twist that incorporates a phrase that in other contexts would mean self-sabotage. Exactly. To get “taken out” in any competitive sport or situation reveals weakness or defeat. To take oneself “out” is even worse. Yet when Taylor Swift uses this metaphor to address people who have hindered or harmed her career, she offers you and me perspective that weaves together two quite different elements: common, everyday practice (taking garbage out) and self-sabotage (a trash bag removing itself (!)). Consider saying the same thing in propositions: “Trying to defeat the enemies of my career is not necessary. Those enemies will discover a way to ruin themselves by making poor decisions in which they manage to create havoc in their own life while mine goes forward.” The “trash takes itself out” quotation wins every time.

So, let’s see what *you* can do to create perspective.

**1** We need a telling metaphor, simile, or analogy, created as quickly as you can, to characterize the style, look, and action of a movie about famous people. The movie emphasizes quiet, near, enclosed actions and close relationships. Take 10 minutes, if you need that much time, to create a pertinent non-literal comparison. Work in your comparison to create an intimate, quiet perspective about a movie. Next page will show the actual comparison.

See if this comparison, about a recent Sophia Coppola movie, creates perspective for you:

Shot by Philippe Le Sourd, often in deep, secretive tones, the movie [*Priscilla*] is so intimate, it seems to take place inside a seashell, with both the coziness and the claustrophobia that implies.

Most of us don't think of the confines of a seashell when pondering the depicted dynamics of famous characters in a movie. How does your created comparison match up when trying to raise or evoke themes of close, quiet, near, enclosed actions and relationships? Which perspective place or angle, perhaps not interior to a seashell, did your non-literal comparison help evoke or create?

**2** Now go to the blog page for [Metaphors and Beyond](#). Examine at least seven of the blog entries. Of the seven entries you select, which ones do the best job of showing the superpower of perspective creation? Which ones created the most surprise or unanticipated viewpoint? Why? How?

**3** Have you ever played tag? Have you ever admired the skill of someone on a college sports team? The following comparison example allows us to recognize that perspective can be created even with pretty ordinary elements. Combined new perspective *can* come not from odd items but the juxtaposition of two very ordinary elements. Concerning the skill of a football wide receiver:

[H]e could play tag in a phone booth.

Thus, wide receiver Tyler Sneed of East Carolina University was described by a sportscaster. Phone booths were ordinary (in the old era from which the sportscaster came), the game of tag is very ordinary. Yet by smooshing them unexpectedly together the broadcaster was able to laud the player's skill. A new vantage point from was crafted from ordinary items. Think of a substantial skill observable in someone you know. Painters. Athletes. Musicians. Planners. Dentists. Pilots. Feel free to select your own category within which you'll find excellence. Now, create a non-literal comparison (a metaphor, or simile, or analogy) in which you combine two ordinary items or elements in an unexpected way to address or highlight the wonder or excellence of the person you hope to describe.

**4** In Chapter Two of Metaphors and Beyond: The Guide find the comparison that uses the phrase: 'It's like moving a crater.'

Why was "moving a crater" under consideration? Hold on a second, with the exception of earthquakes, craters **don't** move. One of the things we'll find that signals quality perspective creation: the unexpected. We don't expect craters to move, or fires to be cold, or titanium to be soft. So, as you read through the "crater" comparison example, remind yourself to find or create comparisons that feature an unexpected item, element, or attribute. Can you do so? Pick three well known substances or places. Now make an absurd comment that clearly violates something about those well-known places or substances, e.g., "You'd need GPS and three days to get from San Francisco to the ocean." Can you find within the absurdity you've created the core of a non-literal comparison? Look deeply.

**5** Is your attention drawn to unusual actions or startling events or motion? Me too. Using such items as the core of a non-literal comparison may prove a wise move. Here's an example:

'Talking to my dad while he's eating is like talking to a blender with the top off.'

Zach Galifianakis recognizes that a blender with no top may catch our attention, should such a blender happen in real life. Hence, deciding to use such wild motion to describe his dad creates instant perspective. Can you do likewise? Create a list of five startling events or actions. Of the five which ones seem most likely to help in creation of a metaphor? Why? Keep your eye out for such comparisons in the next few days.

If perspective creation is a primary characteristic of quality comparisons, what happens if we *reverse* a comparison. Let's find out!



## Section 3

# Negation Comparisons

If we encounter these phrases in an article or post: “She’s no Beyoncé.” Or “He’s no Tom Brady.” Or “Their no Khaby Lame, we likely see, even if we disagree with the negation, the quick power of a negated comparison. Let’s see if we can find even more clues to how such comparison work.

**1** In Chapter Three of Metaphors and Beyond: The Guide find the first listed negated comparison. Now, make a list of four *other* famous people (everyone’s eligible except PewDiePie ). If you *negated* those famous folk, what would be each focal point of the negation? Speed? Talent? Intelligence? Or what? Was your famous list similar or different to that of others? Can you sense how negation might be a useful tool for you in comparison creation?

**2** Can we negate via knowledge of characteristics or properties? Of course. If we say that our cousin can’t keep up with a turtle, we harbor no illusions about their speed. Similar to our first exercise, make a list of four famous critters, or types of animals. Now, deliberately negate each animal and associate the negation with a person (e.g., “my uncle’s no hummingbird” or “my boss isn’t a snake). What sort of perspective is created by each negated comparison?

**3** Can we negate via knowledge of specific preferences? Perhaps. Let’s see. If we say that my room is as messy as Marie Kondo’s worst nightmare, you don’t suspect it’s very well organized. The negation is hidden in the expectation that Kondo would prefer an organized living space. Now, create a list of self-help leaders and deliberately negate each well-known preference that person might have (e.g., if you use James Clear, focus on poor habits). What sort of perspective is created by each negated comparison?

**4** Go to blog page entitled “Don't mess with historical record” (Aug. 2023) for the Metaphors and Beyond blog. (Remember you can do a “find” search for webpages using key words.) Should this complex comparison count as a negated comparison? Why? Why not?

**5** In Chapter Three of Metaphors and Beyond: The Guide you'll discover a discussion of negated actions (e.g., walking, pushing, swimming). Make a list of 10 *other* actions. Now simply negate each action. Which on your list of 10 negated actions seems to hold the most promise of attention or attraction of attention? Why? Likewise, are any of your selected negated actions associated with well-known people? Can you craft a negated comparison that uses both the action and the famous person? (e.g., Bet my cousin won't soon be replacing the Ziegler sisters on TikTok).

Negations stand aside. We need to find out the inner workings of non-literal comparisons. Don't be a laggard; move on to the good stuff.

## Section 4

# How Metaphors Invite Meaning

Properly created metaphors offer nearly instantaneous awareness. Good stuff. How does that happen?

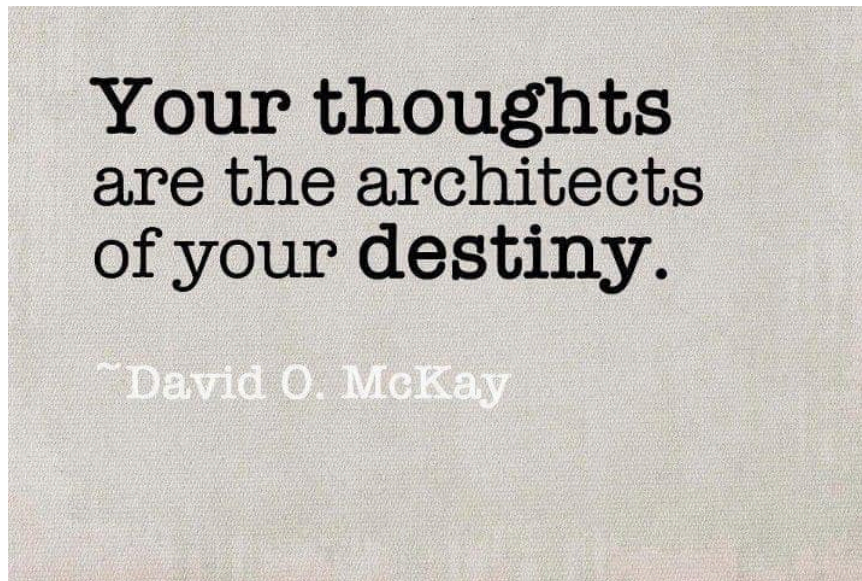
**1** Go to the [Metaphors and Beyond blog](#). Pick your favorite three comparisons on the blog. Now, more challenging work, discuss *how* each of the non-literal comparisons creates or offers meaning.

**2** Go to Instagram and find [@metaphorsandbeyond](#). Pick your favorite three comparisons on the site (sound familiar?). Now, more challenging work, discuss *how* each of the non-literal comparisons creates or offers meaning.

**3** In Chapter Four of [Metaphors and Beyond: The Guide](#) you'll discover a discussion of how non-literal comparison actually create meaning. Using the analysis scheme of elements numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4 go back to your best selected items in the two prior exercises to double check your pondering. If placing your non-literal comparison in the 1, 2, 3, 4 elements grid helps reveal the meaning dynamics, great. You've moved closer to better understanding metaphors, similes, and analogies. If not, [email me the details](#) and we'll work it out together.

**4** Read three or four current favorite books, articles, or blogs. Do metaphors seem very frequent in your reading sources? If so, which ones seem to best create quick perspective for you? How do they do that? Use prior developed tools and analysis frames to build your response. Feel free to use the handy chart at the end of this section if you so wish.

5 Examine the meme below.



Thousands, if not millions, of words have been written over human history about the power or influence of our thoughts. Do your thoughts influence your life? Have you ever, with or without David O. McKay, ever considered your thoughts as architects? So many questions! Do your thought architects use blueprints? CAD? Laser cutters? Or do those architect details ruin the simplicity of the comparison? Do you find many metaphors in memes?

Where should we next take our next thoughts about non-literal comparisons? Let's find out.

## Section 5

# Refurbishing Non-Literal Comparisons

**1** One of the first things we noted about non-literal comparisons: they are EVERYWHERE! We have so very many old, tired, worn-out, stealth, over-used comparisons hanging around our conversations, writing, and reading, it's almost impossible to keep track. For example:

Tailwind  
Count me in  
Over a barrel  
Finding a path forward  
Hot seat  
Bulletproof  
Level playing field  
Down the hatch  
Dreamboat  
Low ball offer

Wouldn't it be nice if we could update or refurbish some of those stealth metaphors? We refurbish houses, we refurbish laptops, we refurbish paintings, why not comparisons?

Between now and this time tomorrow keep track of all the phrases, words, and expressions you hear (we often call them idioms) that also have metaphor-like qualities. (Example: few of our "bulletproof" ideas would actually repel a bullet.) Can you think of any way to change, alter, update, or reconfigure any of your old, discovered comparisons. Give it a try.

**2** Take the old idiom: “She stole the show.” In that form few people would **EVER** notice anything specific about stealing. We know the expression too well. On the other hand, make as long a list as you can about items, or tools, or actions associated with stealing. We’ll wait. (Remember gloves (can’t have fingerprints hanging around!), knit hats, lock picks, weapons, building floor plans, lookouts, etc.) Can you take *any* of the associated items and redo the idiom “stole the show” so as to make it fresh and noticeable? See what you can do.

**3** Go to Instagram and find [@metaphorsandbeyond](#) Pick any comparisons on the site that seems based on an older idiom or expression. Was any attempt made to change or alter the older expression? If so, how? Did it work for you? Why?

**4** In Chapter Five of [Metaphors and Beyond: The Guide](#) find the discussion about a refurbished roller coaster comparison from one of the creators of the movie *Sister Act*. As noted in the chapter, over the course of the next week, you will likely hear people use a rollercoaster metaphor or simile well over a dozen times. How did the movie producer select something that *no one has ever actually done* to recreate and give new life to the roller coaster comparison. You can do just as well. Think about how!

**5** Think of a relatively recent comparison (e.g., “not my first rodeo” or “stay in your lane”) that could use an extreme makeover. Actually, we should probably *first* reconfigure the idiom/idea of an *extreme makeover*. You first. Go which ever refurbishment direction makes the most sense to you. See if you can (actually **YOU CAN**) update or make a non-literal comparison better. Go for it!

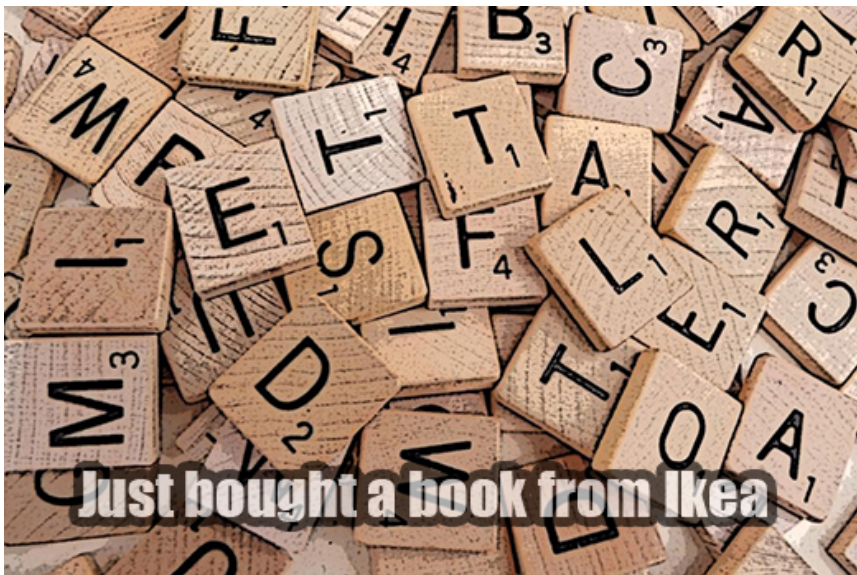
## Section 6

# Informational Metaphors: Meaning, Help, and Perspective

**1** Find an area of your life (or the life of someone you know well) wherein technical or scientific or complex information has regular use. Then find a popular article, blog, or meme that attempts to help laypersons understand some of that information or terminology. Chances are great that you'll discover the use of a metaphor or simile or analogy. Good start!

**2** In Chapter Six of Metaphors and Beyond: The Guide find the example of a Snickers bar helping us to better understand plate tectonics. After reading that comparison-based example will you ever be able to eat another Snickers bar in exactly the same way? Does the comparison work for you?

**3** Examine the meme below.



What do you or I need to know about Ikea for that meme to work? We hold in our mind vast stores of items that seem like facts (e.g., furniture you buy from Ikea need to be assembled). By co-joining the idea of a book and typical construction needed for some Ikea products the meme creator offers humor via the resources of information we already hold. Can you do likewise? Think of several famous products, companies, or institutions. How could you take common knowledge about any of those and create a meme? (Think Red Bull and go from there.)

**4** Go to Instagram and find [@metaphorsandbeyond](#). Select any meme on the site that attempts to create better understanding about something complex. How long did your search take? Are many memes designed to cultivate or introduce information? If not, what *is* the primary purpose of many memes (outside of humor)? Which informative memes seemed quite helpful? Why?

**5** Go to [Metaphors and Beyond](#) blog page entitled “Mermaid or Whale?” (Dec. 2023). (Remember you can do a “find” search on webpages using key words.) When done with this extended comparison ask if you seem to have greater, or better information? Why? Why not?



## Section 7

# Informational Metaphors: Explaining Technical or Material Matters

**1** Many times, in contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> Century life we need to tell regular people about some technical or material processes, or items, that normally fall within the expertise of very few people. Non-literal comparisons frequently are prime tools in creating those explanations. Consider this quotation:

Imagine a sponge, full of holes; if the solids are like this, with 25–60 percent of their volume being empty space, they can float. Some solids, like hydrogen cyanide ice, can also float due to surface tension effects.

Sponges? Technical info?? Floating? Somehow sponges, even if, from a distance, they resemble a solid mass, really doesn't seem the territory of high-powered informational explanation. But what if the items that float, but look solid, are 746 million miles away (or 1.2 billion km) from our shores? Such is the case with methane lakes, or seas, observed, at no small cost, on Saturn's moon Titan. These lakes seemed to show "magic islands" that seem to appear and disappear. The developed theory that accounted for this anomaly eventually featured the possibility of sponge-like material. Informational comparison to the rescue! So, think back to a time in math, physics, chem, or some other challenging area of investigation wherein a comparison aided *you* with awareness and information. Here's betting that such comparisons, done well, earned your appreciation.

**2** Science eventually has to carefully describe physical dynamics that are excruciatingly difficult to detect, much less about which to build proper theory. Here's Calab A. Scharf on this challenge:

I've also had critics say that they wish I'd just 'stick to the numbers' in describing things like the mass of black holes or the collections of hundreds of billions of stars that constitute galaxies. No talk of buzzing swarms of bees, or vast dandelion heads, or swirling stellar pizzas. According to these readers there is no need, or desire, to try to bring such cosmic structures 'down to earth'. It's a fair point, sometimes you want to feel that such things are untouchable, unknowable. But the simple truth is that scientists themselves constantly make use of analogies, metaphorical devices, and similes.

Thankfully, Scharf, and other scientists, do decide to write for the "imperfect" human brain and thereby use non-literal comparisons; hence, the use of bees, dandelion heads, or pizzas. The next time a research group reports a breakthrough discovery, examine with care the popular discussion *about* that discovery. What metaphors or similes or analogies do you find as the explanation goes forward? Do any such comparisons fall flat for you? Or do some provide deeply needed understanding and information?

**3** In Chapter Seven of [Metaphors and Beyond: The Guide](#) find the comparison use of two-way tape and potato chips. What possible science or research development would need to put together such unlikely items to help our understanding? Did that comparison make sense to you? Why, or why not?

**4** Go to [Metaphors and Beyond](#) blog entry entitled “Oh, Dear MaMa and DaDa.” (Oct. 2023). (Remember you can do a “find” search on webpages using key words.) Have you any concerns about the ongoing development of AI? Does the comparison used in this blog entry give you more hope or worry? How might *you* have approached using a different comparison to describe this future potential problem with AI making our decisions?

**5** Hospitals must be one of the most important locations joining the intersection of human health care, changes in scientific knowledge, and deep personal concern. Do a database or catalog search for popular stories about how new treatments for disease, or trauma, can be better understood or explained via a non-literal comparison. Use key terms such as “health care” “trauma care advances” or specific disease terms about which you care deeply along with “new protocols” or “evidence-based insight” or other terms useful to your search. What metaphors, similes, or analogies do you find in the resulting search? Do the non-literal comparisons help or hinder your understanding?

As we turn our attention to non-literal comparisons and argument in the next section, take a moment to recall the best examples of comparisons in this section that your work revealed to you. Then push on!

## Section 8

# Arguing with Metaphors

People in cultures all over the world have used non-literal comparisons to argue, or verbally fight, since before collections of human history started. We know from oral cultures that metaphors were frequently used to help deal with disputes, contested values, or differences of life philosophy. We're no different.

**1** Proceed to Instagram and use the entries at [@metaphorsandbeyond](#). Pick at least 10 memes whose creators clearly believe they're in the middle of an active argument. Your search won't take long. Did you find yourself internally cheering, or cringing at some of the meme-driven points being made? Why? Do social media disputes create horror or inspiration for you? In either case you'll often find metaphors, similes, or analogies in play in those arguments. Which ones seem strongest to you?

**2** Examine this political cartoon by Ramirez:

**RAMIREZ** LAS VEGAS FREE PRESS - JOURNAL  
2022 © CREATORS.COM



X @Ramireztoons

OUR MORAL COMPASS

michaelpramirez.com

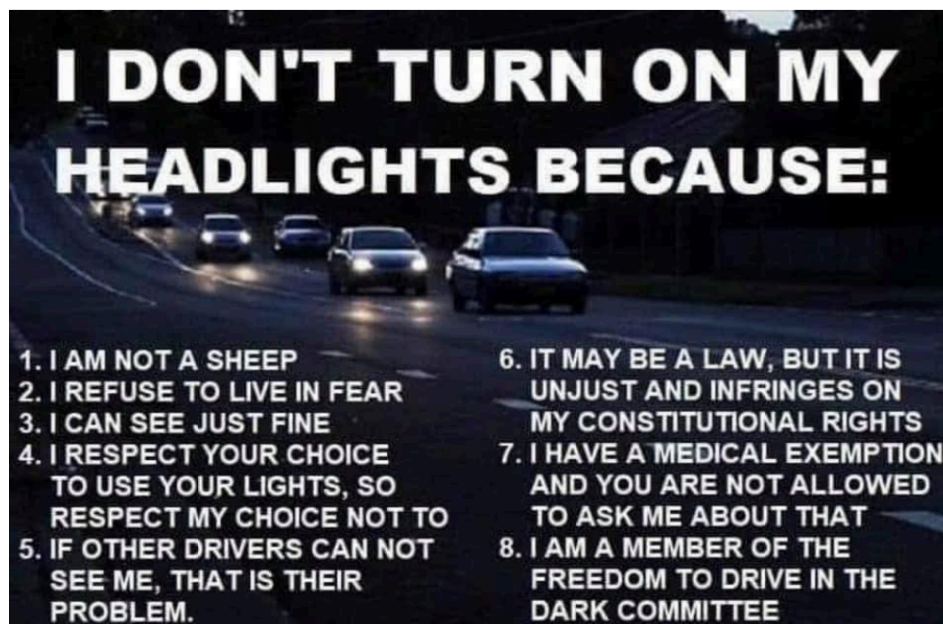
In your best estimation is Michael Ramirez pleased or not with recent moral decisions? Compasses, the North Star, and other markers or tools of navigation are frequently used as metaphors indicating when we're "on course" or "off course." Yet, when Ramirez replaces, "south" with "self" on this particular compass little hesitation exists over his apparent dissatisfaction. When you've been involved in important disputes and decisions, has anyone ever suggested or nominated someone, or some idea, as a primary means of ensuring proper direction or goals? Do you find such metaphor devices useful in an argument? Why? Or when are they more harmful than useful?

**3** Find the Metaphors and Beyond blog item entitled "Where'd that team go?" (Dec. 2023). (Remember you can do a "find" search on webpages using key words.) Even though the argument covered in the blog is silly and from a sitcom, it nonetheless represents how a metaphor can be redesigned to make a point. The characters in this scene use a very old idiom to address awareness of the expense of an item. But the inventiveness of one of the characters makes the exchange all the more memorable. And, by the way, also addresses our interests in section 5 of this series of exercises concerning how an old comparison might be given new life.

**4** In Chapter Eight of Metaphors and Beyond: The Guide find a comparison that defends the unlikely proposition that "everybody is a genius." How does this comparison create an argument wrapped in a miniature story? What part does detection play in the non-literal comparison? Does the resulting claim resonate with you? If so, share it with another friend and see if the resonance still works. Could you create such a mini-story or scene to make an argument point? Are you sure?

# 5

Examine the meme below.



Clearly something is left “out” of this meme. The keen, continuing focus on headlights and night driving continues throughout. Which cultural argument could the meme poster possibly have been attempting to address? A mention of constitutional rights is made in item number six in the list. Does such a meme argument work for you? Why or why not? Keep an eye out for similar arguments based in unspoken analogies as you move through your next month on social media.

Decisions. We all make them. We all also argue, or have our lives influenced by the cultural arguments of others, or both. Frequently we base our arguments in more or less straightforward propositions, evidence (we hope), and reasoning. Just as often, when push comes to argumentative shove, we turn to non-literal comparisons to help make our positions clear. What comes next?

## Section 9

# Old Metaphor Standbys

You may have had a chance to read Chapter 9 in the Metaphors and Beyond: The Guide e-book. If so, you've already come across "Whac-a-Mole," "Holy Grail," "buggy whips," "drinking Kool-Aid," "houses on fire," "tidal waves," and "Trojan Horse" to name but a few of our oldest, most overused metaphor standbys.

Trying to do exercises about an unending list of such idioms, metaphors, similes, and analogies is daunting, but let's try.

**1** Keep a list this week of sayings, phrases, idioms, and other written or verbal messages that you read or hear (be sure to include social media, movies, radio, streaming, and related sources). It may be slow at first, but you'll soon be on a roll; as a matter of fact, there's your first item: "on a roll." Go find more! After a week of tracking and recording, ask this: how many items on my list are metaphors, or similes, or analogies? Which ones seem most worthless to me? Most overused? Most helpful? And, as always, why?

**2** Find a home furnishing store, or a tourist shop, or a sports store. (You can also, obviously add other possible locations or stores.) Keep track of posters, signs, plaques, silly awards, or other forms of public messages for sale. Which ones immediately catch your eye? Which ones did you have to seek out? Do you have any such signs, messages, or pictures in your own personal dwelling? Do many of these public messages use metaphors, or similes, or analogies? Which do you like best? Which do you despise? Why?

**3** Go to a public gathering place (e.g., student union, airport terminal, train station, busy store area, courthouse, sports arena, etc.). Keep track of all the shirts and hats that include more than team names or logos. Do many

of *these* public messages use metaphors, or similes, or analogies? Which do you already own yourself? Which do you hope never to see again? Why?

**4** Find [@metaphorsandbeyond](#) on Instagram. Pick any meme on the site that you've easily heard or seen over a dozen times in your life (or perhaps in the last two years of your life). Take long to find any? Are such memes tired for you? If not, what appeal do you think they might have for others? Are there any hidden advantages to using an older, perhaps overused phrase or idea? Why?

**5** In Chapter Nine of [Metaphors and Beyond: The Guide](#) you'll find reference to the metaphoric idiom of "picking low-hanging fruit." Ask three people who are, respectively, five, ten, and twenty years older than you about this phrase. When did *they* first hear the phrase? Do they find the phrase useful or bothersome? Then ask yourself, do *your own* experiences with the phrase mirror those of any of the three people with whom you checked? Is "low-hanging fruit" useful or outdated? Why?

Analogies come next in our series of exercises. Your awareness of analogies is to your writing and speaking what a good saw is for a carpenter. Be alert!



## Section 10

## Analogies

**1** You've used analogies from a very young age. Once upon a time you tried to convince a sibling or a friend that allowing you to use one of their possessions was clearly fair. After all, just last week (yesterday? this morning?) you let them use your \_\_\_\_\_. You get to fill in the blank and the memory. Yes, analogies have been at your side for a very long time. On that basis, can you remember an analogy that a parent, teacher, or employer used with you to explain a situation? Was it clear? (i.e., did you understand their analogy?) Did you find the analogy misleading or disruptive? Why did that memory stay with you? Did you do anything to dispute or argue with the analogy when you first encountered it?

**2** Using Chapter Ten of Metaphors and Beyond: The Guide recall if you've ever come across a book about raising bamboo. After re-reading the related extended analogy, does it remind you of any other complex analogies? At times, writers, or teachers, or employers use such analogies to frame teaching or observations; do such analogies help *you* concerning how we should conduct our lives? Do you enjoy such involved analogies? Why, or why not?

**3** Discover in the array of memes on Instagram @metaphorsandbeyond any that specifically use an analogy form (often A is to B as C is to D; for instance, *Believing* in climate change is like believing in Santa (optional, ultimately unimportant), whereas understanding climate change is based in science (not optional, deeply important). Is such reasoning valid and useful for you? If not, what appeal do you think meme analogies might have in certain argument situations?

**4** Almost every year we encounter a few terrifying stories about airline safety. The overall safety record of commercial aviation is outstanding. Nonetheless, each time we fly, we're aware of the risks, however slight, of danger in the skies. Almost inevitably some legislation or lawsuits will attempt to change or address perceived risks of air travel, or its regulation. When such disputes erupt parallel arguments appear, often using analogies, concerning the safety of air travel compared to travel on roads. Find two of these arguments by searching in pertinent legal, popular, or local databases or catalogs. Do you find the analogies used in such exchanges worthy of your respect? What part of that respect, or lack of it, is due to the soundness of the analogy? What counts, for you, as a sound analogy?

**5** Consider this analogy used to persuade young people about genetically modified food:

Tizard knows that many people are freaked out by genetically modified organisms. They find the idea of eating them repugnant, and of releasing them into the world anathema. Though he's no provocateur, he, like Zayner, believes that such people are looking at things all wrong. 'We have chickens that glow green,' Tizard told me. 'And so we have school groups that come, and when they see the green chicken, you know, some of the kids go, "Oh, that's really cool. Hey, if I eat that chicken, will I turn green?" And I'm, like, "You eat chicken already, right? Have you grown feathers and a beak?"'

Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness molecular biologist Mike Tizard uses a functional analogy to respond to typical questions of school children visiting his lab.

Do you buy his analogy? If so, why? If not, how would you explain any weakness in his analogy?

Let's bid fond adieu to analogies. Where can we discover shifts in power in non-literal comparisons? Only the brave can so discover!

## Section 11

# Differential Importance within Metaphors

**1** We can find metaphor power, perspective, and force in several different parts of non-literal comparisons. Consider this quotation:

Think of the coronavirus pandemic as a fire ravaging our cities and towns that is spread by infected people breathing out invisible embers every time they speak, cough, or sneeze. Sneezing is the most dangerous – it spreads embers farthest – coughing second, and speaking least, though it still can spread the embers. These invisible sparks cause others to catch fire and in turn breathe out embers until we truly catch fire – and get sick.

No, our coughs are not fiery, invisible embers. But contrast how you feel now when someone in a boarding area starts coughing compared to how you may have reacted in 2018. In 2020 much was unknown, scary, and disturbing. Recall the rise of zoom, lockdowns, and sporting events with empty arenas. The very real danger and fear during that period of time clearly encouraged researchers and policy makers to utilize potent similes and metaphors. For our purposes, however, concerning differential importance of metaphors, which is actually MORE dangerous, a cough in a crowded room, or a burning ember pushed by the wind in front of a raging forest fire? Investigating how power in a non-literal comparison can shift can be quite helpful in honing your metaphor awareness.

**2** Examine with care at least a dozen memes on Instagram [@metaphorsandbeyond](#). In any of your selected memes can you find a person, place, action, policy, or dispute *MORE* important in creation of meaning than the actual non-literal comparison used? For instance, the meme phrase “as risky as picking row 26 on a 737 Max 9!” clearly refers to news about a genuine life-or-death situation on an aircraft with serious structural damage issues. Few life situations that might be put at the front end of that simile could match the terror or danger. Can you think of a life situation that would hold even greater danger? Discovering such pivot points, usually with a touch less drama can reveal the internal dynamics of a non-literal comparison.

**3** Using Chapter Eleven of Metaphors and Beyond: The Guide reread the example of a Dietrich Bonhoeffer statement. Can you think of other non-literal comparisons that start out slow, or soft, and then ramp up the intensity? Does such a strategy work to surprise or shock an audience? Why, or why not?

**4** Perhaps your dentist or orthodontist has used differential importance to convince you about either treatment or procedures designed to help with dental care. Which is more important to you, your car or your teeth? Likely both, but if forced to choose many of us might go with our teeth. Knowing that a dental professional might use the following comparison in an effort to convince a reluctant patient to have x-rays done:

When you take your car into the shop for maintenance to ensure properly operation, do you tell the auto mechanic that they cannot lift the hood of the car and look at what’s inside?

In this patient persuasion scenario, the dentist or orthodontist knows that the patient really *does* value their teeth; moreover, refusing to allow a mechanic to look

under the hood of a non-EV car borders on ridiculous. Hence, using that recognized differential importance allows the metaphor to work. Can you think of other situations in which the primary item under consideration, in this case care of one's teeth, is actually of *greater value* or worth than the item or element being used to create the metaphoric perspective? When findable, such a meaning dynamic can go a long way toward creating useful perspective.

**5** In 2015 America and Cuba agreed after decades of official disengagement to reopen embassies in each country. At least some citizens were unimpressed:

Opening the American Embassy in Cuba will do nothing to help the Cuban people and is just another trivial attempt for President Obama to go legacy shopping.

Those were the words of U.S. Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R.-Fla.), a critic of both Mr. Castro and Mr. Obama. Without regard to the wisdom of reopening embassies we should note the differential between “shopping” and any U.S. President’s legacy. Remember that the item under consideration is the historic reopening of embassies by former bitter national political enemies—whether you agree with the reopening or not. Rep. Ros-Lehtinen’s choice of a casual activity—mere shopping—strongly suggests that the policy implication of the move was either ignored or downplayed. Moreover, she clearly did not support burnishing a long-range legacy of a soon-to-be out of office president in her word selection. Do take special care here to, as much as possible, place aside any actual political advantage or disadvantage to diplomatically recognizing a former enemy government; instead, for our purposes, ask yourself if you can think of any other throwaway activities that seem as relatively unimportant as “shopping.” That verb does suggest specific action on the part of a chief executive and his advisors for a specific purpose. Can you think of other casual, everyday activities that could stand in the place of “shopping” in this comparison? Make a list of five possible alternate verbs and place each one in association with the word “legacy.” What other impressions or perspectives get unlocked when

using a different verb? Would you choose any of your five verbs over the one picked by the Florida Representative? Why?

Focusing on differential importance of the items, people, policies, or actions under consideration shows us that meaning power in a metaphor can come from any one of several parts of a completed non-literal comparison. Learning how such comparisons work should be a selected focus for you. Build your understanding of how metaphors, and other non-literal comparisons, function.

Next, let's pursue exercises concerning other factors, approaches, and forms of non-literal comparisons than we've been able to find thus far. Jump in!

## Section 12

# Metaphors: More Interesting Factors and Approaches

1 Examine the analogy meme below.



This comparison meme works for us to ponder just *how* we can consider all elements and factors in non-literal comparisons when we find them. First imagine that you were not from an English-speaking or reading background, i.e., your language of origin was something quite different than English. The meme then would have very little discernible meaning at all. But what if you have very little idea about the degree to which the “rest of the world” is watching America. Moreover, what if you never, ever saw or heard about Tiger King (either the nickname, or the show). You would understand the analogy form but might grasp very little of what the comparison was attempting to reveal. If you *did* know of Joe Exotic or the *Tiger King* Netflix program,



what do you make of the comparison? If the meme is at all accurate, does America, in the analogy, come off as good, bad, or something completely different? Feel free to factor in the closed-in pandemic viewers who made up a substantial portion of the early audience. Exercises to follow will seek to examine some of the nooks and crannies of non-literal comparisons that we've been unable to address thus far. Stay tuned.

**2** In Appendix 2 of Metaphors and Beyond: The Guide find the saying of a character playing a military general in an old, popular tween movie. After re-reading that quotation about a sparkplug, do you have *any* idea as to *why* the scriptwriters, director, and actor all accepted it an “in-character” statement of frustration? What did it add at that moment in the movie? Let's admit that we know of many “down-home” folk sayings, but few are as directionless as this one. Does this comparison saying work for you? Did it accomplish an authentic sense of both character and possible character expression? Why? Feel free to stream the movie to check it out in context.

**3** In Appendix 1 of Metaphors and Beyond: The Guide search out the comparison about an artist being compared to a top-tier, American, male, movie star. In the resulting analogy, what do you learn about the artist that may have escaped you prior to the comparison? Could you use the same analogy for someone in your family? Why or why not?

**4** Go to Instagram and skim through the memes on @metaphorsandbeyond until you find the meme where two characters are at an art museum or gallery. One of the paintings depicted allows the older gallery visitor to make a remark. How does that influence *your* focus on the physical appearance of the character in the painting? Here's betting that you've never thought about the implied underlying cultural issues for these characters – in exactly this way. Yet, the comparison allows playful commentary about technology to make a comment on some very human issues. Comparisons can surprise. Would this

comparison work if it were told as a story? Would verbal words be able to carry forward the same instantaneous meaning creation?

**5** Go to [Metaphors and Beyond](#) blog page entitled “Bright Shiny Broken Parts, Magpie, Oh My!” (Dec. 2023). (Remember you can do a “find” search on webpages using key words.) If possible, don’t scroll down past the initial quotation. Read the comparison quotation and ask yourself which mental images are created; then, scroll and see the accompanying image (which was *never* with the original article from which the comparison was taken). Does that change in any way your thoughts about the meaning or expression in the comparison?

Next stop: exercises that try to see, perceive, or recognize a non-literal comparison before a comparison is actually created or used. More fun than humans ought to have!

## Section 13

## Comparisons Waiting to Happen

**1** The very essence of a “comparison waiting to happen” (CWTH) is being able to perceive comparison possibilities. Think back over some of your now-favorite comparisons encountered in prior exercises. For the most part, someone, somewhere had to come up with the idea, or experience, or understanding that led to *any* non-literal comparison you’ve enjoyed thus far. So, our purpose here is to jumpstart *that* process. Think of the five most outrageous, wacky, interesting things that have **ever** happened to you. You’ve likely shared them in brief story form at some time in the past with friends or family (or perhaps with the last person you sat with on a 9-hour flight). Now pick out the highlight, or the most absurd portion, or the most unusual aspect of any of the five stories and ask this question: Can this element be turned into a metaphor, or simile, or analogy? Don’t worry too much right now as to what your personal key element or item will be attached to. Just ask about its essence or core point(s) of interest. We’ll swing back to this exercise in the fifth exercise of this group. Be ready.

**2** In Appendix 3 of Metaphors and Beyond: The Guide find the meme about “Hope.” Does this meme comparison speak to you? Did the notation of “another go” just put frosting on the cake of the comparison? Why?

**3** In Appendix 3 of Metaphors and Beyond: The Guide search out the meme about “Boiling Water.” Can you imagine someone at a stove somewhere actually coming to this understanding or realization? Of course, it would take just the *right set* of events, but when the opportunity comes, why not take note, and remember it as a possible guide to others.

**4** Go to Instagram and skim through the memes on [@metaphorsandbeyond](#). Find the meme where we learn of two ways an egg can be broken. Would this comparison work if it were told as an experience someone had one morning? Perhaps the final cap comparison statement may have arrived later, but no matter. It seems to have worked for someone.

**5** Now go back to your list of personal experiences you created at first. Then look at the examples in 2, 3, and 4 and realize that each of these non-literal comparisons may well have come from personal experience and observation. Yet each one of them ended up on social media as potent, possibly insightful, non-literal comparisons. Can you condense, reconfigure, or tinker with any of *your* stories to move it from a comparison waiting to happen (CWTH) to an actual non-literal comparison. Hope so. Someone will be glad you did.

Our last exercise section offers a peek at a peak experience provided when a well-designed non-literal comparison steps in to enter our memory with force.

## Section 14

# Metaphors and Sticky Memory

**1** We've already pointed out several times that a worthy non-literal comparison can come with an extra punch. We hope against hope that any comparison we create, find, or use will create perspective, and (most of the time) create it quickly; we tend to be impatient people. If that same comparison can create a sticky memory – all the better!

Use the next three minutes of your life and explore all of the metaphors, similes, or analogies you simply have already in your mind. It's fine if you use some we've already recalled.

Now ask: what made that comparison sticky? Then try to separate out those that seem naturally "sticky" to your memory and any others lodged in your mind due to repetition. What made the comparisons sticky? Be as specific as you can in your responses.

**2** Next up, an Aunt or Uncle. No, not personally and directly as comparisons, but as resources. Email, text, or message an Aunt or Uncle of yours and ask them about their favorite metaphor. Feel free to substitute neighbors, friends, or co-workers if no aunts or uncles seem available. Once you've secured their favorite metaphor, ask: how, or why, did you remember it? That should begin to reveal some aspects as to how non-literal comparisons gain stickiness in memory. Ponder how you might copy or emulate the dynamics in that comparison to create another one with equal sticking memory power.

**3** Go to Instagram and pick two memes at [@metaphorsandbeyond](https://www.instagram.com/metaphorsandbeyond). Which of the two seem to hold the most promise of you remembering it in two weeks? What's then the difference between the two?

**4** In Chapter Fourteen of Metaphors and Beyond: The Guide find the comparison from the original GOAT. What did Muhammed Ali stack together so as to create a series of comparisons memorable a half a century *after* he spoke? We now have music and video forms that copy such a style. Any memorable comparisons sticking in your memory from comparisons offered to you in stacked form?

**5** Ponder this quotation:

I learned long ago, never to wrestle with a pig. You get dirty, and besides, the pig likes it.

Quote investigator Ralph Keyes notes this saying has been attributed to George Bernard Shaw, or Mark Twain, or Abe Lincoln, or N.H. Eagle, and many others. It doesn't take long to see this quotation as an open-ended non-literal comparison. Few of us would actually need *this* specific information – as is – about pig wrestling. But! When applied to argument opponents, or mean next door neighbors, or ornery bosses it takes on the veneer of useful wisdom.

In life we need useful wisdom, no matter the source, no matter the form. But somehow dirty pigs and inadvisable wrestling with them has the real possibility of sticking with us. The mark of a comparison with something extra – something enduring.

# Next

Your work in some, or all, of these exercises places you in readiness for even *more* insight. Keep learning, keep finding, keep probing about metaphor and many other language forms. Doing so will enhance your work, life, and experience.

# More Metaphor Pondering

## **Fun website addressing metaphors:**

Rhetoric, Set, Go! Metaphors ([click here](#))

## **Related e-book:**

*Metaphors and Beyond: The Guide* ([click here](#))

## **Related blog addressing metaphors:**

Metaphors and Beyond: The Blog ([click here](#))

## **Book: Introductory Metaphor Rhetorical Analysis**

Apple: *Introductory Metaphor Rhetorical Analysis* ([click here](#))

Kindle: *Introductory Metaphor Rhetorical Analysis* ([click here](#))





# Bio

Dann L. Pierce is an emeritus professor from the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Portland where he researched and taught for 34 years. He was awarded the Ph.D. in Rhetorical Studies from top-ranked University of Iowa in 1985. His research and publications investigate public communication in American culture. He is the author of *Rhetorical Criticism and Theory in Practice, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.* (River Kishon, 2016) and *Metaphors and Beyond: **The Guide*** (River Kishon, 2023). He serves as the chief analyst and owner of Pierce Communication, LLC. His work as a speechwriter, speaking coach, producer, teacher, director, persuasion analyst, workshop leader, and outside evaluator continues with new and current clients. He delights in language and lovers of language. His travels in Alaska, the Pacific NW, North America, and the world provide unending chances to connect with others who yearn to better understand rhetoric, language, and persuasion.

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