

Poetry Works

Poetic Techniques to Hone All Your Writing

METAPHOR

Enrich Your Writing With Imagery

Mark Doty in *The Art of Description* offers a bit of insight into why metaphor is important to poetry and writing in general:

- metaphor introduces tension and polarity to language
- metaphor allows us to create some distance, speak more freely about sensitive subjects (i.e., sex, shame, grief...)
- metaphor is an act of inquiry, not an expression of what we already know

Perhaps the World Ends Here by Joy Harjo

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been since creation, and it will go on.

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse. We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.

Perhaps the World Ends Here by Joy Harjo

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live. **survival**

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been since creation, and it will go on. **sustenance**

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it. **everyday**

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women. **lineage**

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers. **mischief/humor**

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table. **humility**

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun. **shelter**

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory. **struggle**

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here. **cycle of life**

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse. We give thanks. **spirituality**

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite. **joy**

A great place to start with figurative language is a word bank.

ABSTRACTIONS:

love betrayal fear death trust darkness happiness maturity depression jealousy surprise
disease racism prejudice pity friendship anger angst laughter faith freedom childhood
anxiety joy sorrow grief embarrassment humor distrust loathing excitement ecstasy

Directions:

1. Select an abstract word and write concrete nouns that relate to the five senses.
2. Write one line for each sense...sight, smell, touch, taste, hear.
Do not say smells like... or feels like... just describe.
3. Bonus round: Write a scene that communicates an abstraction by infusing the scene with concrete and sensory language that echoes the big idea.

Example:
Trust:

sits calmly in the passenger seat;
expands like yeasted dough;
is your damp palm in mine;
is a brew of fresh coffee with a splash of almond milk;
snores like a dog at the foot of the bed

	sight	smell	touch	taste	sound
joy	yellow	coconut	tingle	lemon	giggle
	smile	linen	kitten fur	peach	lapping water
trust	passenger seat	dough	holding hands	coffee & milk	dog snore

The image features a teal top section with a fine, repeating pattern of small, light-colored lines. Below this is a solid orange section. A white, V-shaped notch is cut into the boundary between the two colors, centered horizontally. The text 'Setting & Character' is centered in the orange area.

Setting & Character

Accident, Mass. Ave.

Jill McDonough

I stopped at a red light on Mass. Ave.
in Boston, a couple blocks away
from the bridge, and a woman in a beat-up
old Buick backed into me. Like, cranked her wheel,
rammed right into my side. I drove a Chevy
pickup truck. It being Boston, I got out
of the car yelling, swearing at this woman,
a little woman, whose first language was not English.
But she lived and drove in Boston, too, so she knew,
we both knew, that the thing to do

But she hadn't hit my truck. She hit
the tire; no damage done. Her car
was fine, too. We saw this while
we were yelling, and then we were stuck.

The next line in our little drama should have been
*Look at this fucking dent! I'm not paying for this
shit. I'm calling the cops, lady.* Maybe we'd throw in a
*You're in big trouble, sister, or I just hope for your sake
there's nothing wrong with my fucking suspension,* that
sort of thing. But there was no fucking dent. There
was nothing else for us to do. So I
stopped yelling, and she looked at the tire she'd
backed into, her little eyebrows pursed
and worried. She was clearly in the wrong, I was enormous,
and I'd been acting as if I'd like to hit her. So I said

*Well, there's nothing wrong with my car, nothing wrong
with your car . . . are you OK?* She nodded, and started

to cry, so I put my arms around her and I held her, **middle
of the street, Mass. Ave., Boston, a couple blocks from the bridge.**

I hugged her, and I said *We were scared, weren't we?*
and she nodded and we laughed.