Identifying & Creating Metaphor
by Wafaa Mustafa

DURATION: 1.5 hours
GRADE LEVEL: Middle & High School
WRITING LEVEL: Experienced
FOCUS: metaphor, origin stories

EXAMPLE TEXT
Thinking Like a Split Melon
by Jamaal May

Check in | 15 minutes

When do you feel most creative or most inspired?

OVERVIEW | What about our consciousness allows us to compare the fullness of the moon to the fullness of a pregnant belly, or a tree to a person? Where does metaphor begin?

Resource Building | 15 minutes

EXERCISE | Do you ever interpret your dreams? Make a list of images in them that symbolize or represent something else. If you cannot remember a dream, write about an image from a dream and what it could mean (Example: falling, losing teeth, an open door, etc.)

Close Reading | 20 minutes

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER
- What is the poem saying about broken things?
- How is it different from the way we may typically think about broken things?
- Why does the poem reference time and age in terms of lost journal scribbles? What did your 6th grade self write in the margins of notebooks?
- What is the poet saying about our five senses and their creative capacity?
- Does the body know metaphors before the brain does? (Example: Snakes are symbols we use to represent evil. Is it because we see how they slither to move, and so they might be thought of as sneaky?)

Writing Prompt | 20 minutes

Where does metaphor begin? Personify the metaphor and give it an origin story.

OR You find an old journal or notebook with poems written by your younger self. Write that old journal entry from the perspective of your younger self.
Thinking Like a Split Melon
by Jamaal May

In a sixth grader’s notebook
only two lines are written:

I go outside. I look at the stars.
   Then I’m sad because of death and stuff—

At a funeral when I was her age, I punched
dots into the program with a bow compass then held it to the light
to trace paths I drew between holes.
   Those constellations. The paths
drawn between neurons. Their firing
is how I think.

She adds in pencil

   the castle of the mind is full
   of hundreds of bright specters—

and I wonder what’s going on in her head
   and mine. What sky did we fall from?

sounds like an appropriate question,
   when I think about it

but it’s too much to ask a child, right?

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Outside, I ask a steel sculpture
   ascending from the depths
   of museum grass if I am
   contextualized by its immensity.

The bending blades of grass
told me it’s not appropriate
to ascribe words—

which become ideas,
and soon become my ideas—
to them, as they’ve done nothing wrong.

The wind says
nothing
we can’t figure out on our own,

I said, but no one was talking to me.

A melon falls from a bag,
a platoon of ants pours in
and out of its gash,

and I wonder if it takes being broken
open and emptied
to be filled with something new.

Didn’t a poet say cracks are how light gets in everything?

I’m probably mixing that up.

But this is how I think. Give me a box,
and I’ll fill it with dirt
or fill it with water
or fill it with both

and trouble that mire
with whatever stick I happen to find.

Thinking Like A Split Melon by Jamaal May, The Collagist