

English in the Lower Grades.

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A teacher in one of the lower grades has asked for some hints on teaching figures of speech. I have found that children are readily interested in this subject if it is simply, and not too formally, treated.

The commonest figures are those based on comparison. For example, in the description of "The Eagle and the Swan," (N. B. Reader, No. 3, p. 32) occurs the following sentence:

"He glides through the air *like a falling star*, and, *like a flash of lightning*, darts upon the timid bird."

Get the children to tell you in what points these comparisons are true. A little questioning will soon produce a recasting of the sentence something like this:

"He glides *swiftly* through the air, and *suddenly* darts upon the timid bird."

Well, then, why did not the writer say "swiftly," and "suddenly," instead of "like a falling star," and "like a flash of lightning?" Do you ever use such expressions when you are talking, and especially when describing anything? Get as many examples from the children as you can. If they are slow about giving them, suggest some, such as "He runs like a —," "Black as —," "She fought like a —." Never mind if you do get a number of slang phrases, as, "To beat the band," and the like. They will serve as illustrations, and you had better wait for another opportunity to point the obvious moral, *i. e.*, that the frequent use of slang indicates a poverty of vocabulary and laziness in searching for the accurate word or phrase. By the time a dozen or more comparisons from ordinary conversation have been given, the pupils will probably be ready to tell you that we use them to express our thoughts more clearly, or more forcibly, or more attractively. Now look up some more examples in the readers. Byron's "Destruction of Sennacherib's Army," and Wordsworth's "Hart-Leap Well" furnish some simple comparisons. Let the children find the special point of comparison in each case, and express it in an adjective or adverb, as in the first example we took. Such comparisons as these are SIMILES, that is, the two objects compared are both named, and the comparison is formally stated, as in:

"The *sheen of their spears* was like *stars on the sea*."

In METAPHOR, the comparison is implied rather than formally expressed. A good example of metaphor is found in Hawthorne's "Rill from the

Town-Pump,"—"till the fearful deluge of fire-water burst upon the red men and swept the whole race away from the cold fountains." Here the effect of "fire-water" upon the Indians is compared in its destructiveness to that of the flood, but the comparison is not distinctly expressed. A little further on the fountain is spoken of as "the gem of the wilderness," and this is another metaphor; the corresponding simile would be "the fountain was *like a gem*." It is not necessary, however, to insist upon the children classifying the figures; what is important is that they shall see clearly the point, and the appropriateness of the comparison.

Not all expressed comparisons are similes. For instance, in "The Burial of Sir John Moore," the line,

"But he lay like a warrior taking his rest,"

is not called a simile, nor is the comparison in "St. Agnes' Eve,"

"My breath to heaven like vapor goes."

Nor are such expressions as "The man acted like a hero," or "The lion is as brave as the tiger." A little study of such sentences, together with the real similes, will draw from the pupils the conclusion that a simile compares two objects which are unlike in the main, but which have one strong point of resemblance.

The children will enjoy collecting comparisons, not only from their readers, but from story-books. Many good ones are to be found in the selections from Shakespeare and from the Psalms at the end of the Fourth Reader. "Cardinal Wolsey's Lament" furnishes some excellent examples for study.

Personification is an interesting figure of speech, and very common. It consists in speaking of inanimate objects as if they were living beings. There are three chief kinds of personification, exemplified in the following sentences:

1. "In the seaport of St. Malo 'twas a *smiling morn* in May."
2. "And the rills and rivers *sing with pride* the anthem of the free."
3. "O sleep! O gentle sleep!
Nature's soft nurse, how have I frightened thee."

In (1) the effect is produced by the use of an adjective; in (2) by the use of a verb; while in (3) an abstraction is spoken to as if it were a person. Personification and metaphor are often combined.

A form of expression much used by poets, and very delightful to study, is that which consists in