

Writer's Idea Box: making metaphors/using the elements & the senses

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*Metaphor is a way of connecting what we are experiencing
now with what we have experienced before. (paraphrased)*

—Twyla Tharp

Do a Writing Warm-up

Make a list or write short accounts of life experiences with the elements: earth, wind, fire, water, ether

For example, I once stood at my window in the dark and watched the wind churning the trees, listening to its roar and later learned that a tornado had touched down only a block away, uprooting and tossing trees about like sticks.

Set a timer and write for three minutes.

Read a Writing Sample

- [Oranges, Gary Soto](#)

Do a Writing Exercise: Making Metaphors

Writing Exercise #1: a formulaic poem

1. Choose one of the elements to write about:

- earth: includes any mineral, plant, or animal
- wind: includes anything from a hurricane to a breeze
- fire: includes the back yard BBQ and the forest fire
- water: includes rivers, creeks, tap and toilet water...

2. Now write your element (or its variation) and compare it to **each of the senses** by filling in the blanks:

- (your element) is (a **smell** you associate with your element).
Example: Fire is the smell of charred, wild grass—nothing now but soot and ash.
- (your element) is (a **taste** you associate with your element).
Example: Fire is the taste of blood burned and served on a platter.
- (your element) is (a **touch** feeling you associate with your element).
Example: Fire is a feast for cold feet.
- (your element) is (a **sound** you associate with your element).
Example: Each sizzle and crack a comfort.

- (your element) is (a **sight** you associate with your element).

Example: Each pulsing ember, an evil, orange eye.

3. Try fleshing out your poem, adding words and lines, perhaps creating rhyme (optional), and finding a title from within the poem as in the poem below, revised from it's start in the exercise above:

glowing member

fire is the smell of charred, wild grass—
 nothing now but soot and ash.
 fire is the taste of blood having burned
 burned blood on a platter served
 fire is a feast for cold cold feet
 cold feet warmed by the fire's heat
 fire is sizzle & snapping crack
 sizzle and crack charred black
 fire is a pulsing orange ember
 an evil, orange glowing member

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Writing Exercise #2: a free verse poem

Review your writing warm-up list or short accounts. Find a story there to write about or choose a story about an experience with the elements you have remembered since. This could also be a story you have heard someone else recount.

Re-read *Oranges* by Gary Soto for ideas about how to tell your story in free-verse then try writing your own poem about your experience. For example, I might write a poem about my multiple experiences with tornadoes:

waiting for mother

the first time i watched the wind churn
 —a wild stallion running loose

 was from the window of my kindergarten
 where i waited for my mother to come

 —the day having turned dark gray
 i knew she was on her way

but fear was a fire burning
my small body churning

her blue pontiac
 pulling into the porte-cochere
her tentative smile
her tender embrace:

reigns
water
home

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Make Revisions

Read your poem aloud, either to yourself or to your writing partners. Notice:

- need for clarification
- excellent word choices or need for more descriptive word choices
- exquisite turns of phrase
- unique comparisons
- how the poem looks on the page: need for line or stanza breaks or other spacing
- play with writing the poem in a different arrangement
- read the poem aloud several times, listening for rhythm
- ask: Does the poem flow? Does it have a strong ending? Does it need more or less? Does the poem travel or take the reader somewhere unexpected?