Fantastic Metaphors
Lesson Plan

**Grade Level:** 9-12  **Curriculum Focus:** Literature  **Lesson Duration:** One to two class periods

**Student Objectives**

- Discuss the use of metaphoric writing in *Don Quixote* and various poems.
- Try their hand at portraying everyday objects as something else in poetry or prose.

**Materials**

- Discovery School video on unitedstreaming: *Great Books: Don Quixote*
  Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

  Selected clips that support this lesson plan:
  - Swept Away By Romance: Don Quixote Steps Into His Own Literary World
  - Coping Mechanisms: The World Through Don Quixote's Eyes
  - Tilting at Windmills: Don Quixote's Encounter With the Giants
  - The Duel Between Don Quixote and Samson Carrasco

- *Don Quixote*, by Miguel de Cervantes
- Computer with Internet access

**Procedures**

1. Engage students in a discussion of Don Quixote’s fantasy world—the world of chivalry, of fortunes, of heroic conflicts, and perseverance.

2. Ask students to describe and defend some of knight-errant Quixote’s perceptions, such as that the windmills are an enemy force. Can they explain what in the appearance of the windmills and other objects and what in Quixote’s self-image causes these errors in perception?

3. Explain that Quixote’s imagination is distorted because of an illness, but that sometimes even the sanest of people intentionally view an everyday object as something else entirely. In the literary world, for example, poets often perceive and describe an object as something else.

4. Tell students that they are going to write imaginative descriptions of ordinary objects and have other students try to figure out what real-world object the writer had in mind.
5. Review with students the definition of a metaphor (a figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit comparison; a thing that is conceived as representing another; a symbol).

6. Share with students a few examples of highly metaphoric poetry. Examples include:
   - Emily Dickinson’s “I Like to See It Lap the Miles,” in which a train is represented as a horse;
   - Carl Sandburg’s “Fog,” in which fog takes the form of a cat; and
   - May Swenson’s “Southbound on the Freeway,” in which automobiles are described as living objects by a tourist from Orbitville.

7. Read these or other poems without telling students the titles. Then lead a discussion of what the poets seem to be describing and what they are really describing. Have students consider and offer explanations as to why the poets took this indirect approach to description.

8. Challenge students to think of objects that might be seen as something else—especially by someone (such as the tourist from Orbitville) who has never seen them before. The following suggestions might stimulate students’ thinking.
   - Movie projected on a free-standing screen
   - Cell phone
   - Lampshade thrown out with the trash
   - Fire extinguisher
   - Television
   - Kite

9. Now have students draft a metaphoric description of their objects in prose or poetry.

10. Give students a chance to read their prose or poem to one or more students in the class. Can the listeners figure out what the reader, below the surface of the prose or poem, is describing? Do the listeners find the description apt and entertaining, or obvious and boring? Encourage classmates to offer editing advice and possible revisions to one another.

11. Lead a final discussion of the power of symbolic comparisons and writing. Ask students if they know anyone who often sees or interprets the world as they want to see it, rather than as it is, or if they know any other works of literature in which metaphors help us see with new eyes.

**Assessment**

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students’ work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students actively participated in class discussions; demonstrated a clear understanding of the power and use of symbolic descriptions and writing; wrote creative and engaging descriptions of everyday objects; offered classmates valid suggestions for edits or revisions.

- **2 points:** Students participated in class discussions; demonstrated some understanding of the power and use of symbolic descriptions and writing; wrote somewhat creative and
engaging descriptions of everyday objects; offered classmates some suggestions for edits or revisions.

- **1 point:** Students participated little, if at all, in class discussions; had difficulty understanding the power and use of symbolic descriptions and writing; wrote relatively unimaginative descriptions of everyday objects; made no attempt to offer classmates suggestions for edits or revisions.

**Vocabulary**

* **coping mechanism**
  *Definition:* A method by which an individual contends with difficulties and attempts to overcome them
  *Context:* Psychiatrists would call Don Quixote’s altering of reality his coping mechanism.

* **knight-errant**
  *Definition:* A knight traveling in search of adventures in which to exhibit military skill, prowess, and generosity
  *Context:* Alonso Quixano steps into his literary world and becomes a knight-errant, just like those from his books of chivalry.

* **quixotic**
  *Definition:* Foolishly impractical, especially in the pursuit of ideals
  *Context:* We have come to describe Don Quixote’s type of vaulting ambition as quixotic—full of lofty, yet impractical, ideals.

* **sally**
  *Definition:* A venture or excursion, usually off the beaten path
  *Context:* On his sallies through the landscape of La Mancha, Don Quixote encounters hundreds of characters.

* **tilt**
  *Definition:* To engage in combat with lances; to joust
  *Context:* Don Quixote’s tilting at windmills is one of the most enduring, if ridiculous, images in all literature.
Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL’s Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit link: http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Language Arts—Writing: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process, Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association have developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching the English language arts. To view the standards online, go to http://www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.htm

This lesson plan addresses the following NCTE standards:

- Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions, media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
- Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html