

## ***Handout: Making Sense of “Metaphors,” by Sylvia Plath***

**Instructions:** Metaphors are often used to explain complex or abstract concepts by comparing them to familiar things. Your job will be to work together to try to figure out what the poem is about. We’ll answer some of these questions as a class, but make sure to write down the answers. You will need to hand this in at the end of class.

### ***Step 1: Purpose for Reading? To solve the riddle!***

At this point, just understand that our main purpose for working with this poem is to ultimately answer these questions: Who is the speaker? What is she talking about? How does she feel about her subject?

### ***Step 2: First Reading***

1. After reading the poem (or listening to it) for the first time, what do you think it is generally about?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Identify at least one vocabulary word that you didn’t know or that was used in a new way in this poem:

Word:

Meaning:

3. After discussing your first impressions of the poem with the class (or small group), how has your understanding of the poem’s general meaning and purpose shifted?

### **Step 3: Second Reading**

Now we are going to look a bit more carefully at the metaphors in the poem. Remember, a metaphor compares two unlike things without using “like” or “as.” First, reread the text. While you read, think carefully about what the speaker is comparing herself to, and why.

1. Put a star next to what you think are probably the four most important, interesting, or thought-provoking metaphors in the poem. In the margin next to each one, jot down what two things are being compared in the line.
2. Work with your partner to complete the chart. First, discuss the metaphors you have each starred. Decide on the four metaphors that most help you understand or picture who the speaker is, what she is talking about, or how she feels about her subject. Record each metaphor in the left column, and then, explain what the image suggests to you as a reader, adding a simple sketch to help you visualize the image.

| <b>Metaphor</b> | <b>What image does this metaphor give you?<br/>Create a simple sketch, and add your notes<br/>about what it means.</b> |
|-----------------|--|
| 1.              |  |
| 2.              |  |
| 3.              |  |
| 4.              |  |

3. Finally, work with your partner to consider these specific images from the poem.

An elephant

A stage

A ponderous house

A cow in calf

A melon strolling on two tendrils

A passenger on a train she can't get rid of

A big loaf with yeasty rising

Someone who has eaten a bag of green apples

New-minted money in a fat purse

A means

Discuss these images with a partner, and then decide together how you might divide them into at least two groups. As you work to group similar images, consider what they have in common, then assign a descriptive label to each group. Show your labeled groups here:

#### ***Step 4: Discuss It.***

Discuss the groupings that you and your partner made. Based on your groupings and what you have noticed about what these metaphors have in common with one another, answer these questions:

Who is the speaker?

What is she talking about?

How does she feel about her subject?

#### ***Step 5: Write about It.***

How do you interpret the poem? After reading it, think carefully about the images the poet uses, then write a one-paragraph response that summarizes your answer to the riddle: who is the speaker of the poem, what she writing about, and how does she feel about her subject? Remember to use and explain specific images from the poem to support your answer.