



1 Learn the Skill

Authors use **figurative language** such as **metaphors**, **similes**, and **analogies** to create vivid word pictures and memorable images. A metaphor compares two unlike elements: *the baby's face was a rose*. A simile makes this comparison by using words such as *like*, *as*, or *similar to*: *the burned cake was like a brick*. An analogy is a more general term for a comparison that finds a similarity, or parallel, between two unlike elements. Metaphors and similes are specific types of analogies.

Other types of figurative language include **hyperbole**, or extreme exaggeration, and **personification**, giving human qualities to animals or inanimate objects. Words such as *boom* and *splash* reflect the sounds they describe; they are examples of another type of figurative language: **onomatopoeia**.

2 Practice the Skill

By practicing the skill of interpreting figurative language, you will improve your study and test-taking abilities, especially as they relate to the GED® Reasoning Through Language Arts Test. Read the passage below. Then answer the question that follows.

AN AGING WRITER

The tears filled his mild eyes; something precious had passed away. This was the pang that had been sharpest during the last few years—the sense of ebbing time, of shrinking opportunity; and now he felt not so much that his last chance was going as that it was gone indeed. He had done all that he should ever do, and yet he had not done what he wanted. This was the laceration—that practically his career was over: it was as violent as a rough hand at his throat. He rose from his seat nervously, like a creature hunted by a dread; then he fell back in his weakness and nervously opened his book. It was a single volume; he preferred single volumes and aimed at a rare compression. He began to read, and little by little, in this occupation, he was pacified and reassured. Everything came back to him, but came back with a wonder, came back, above all, with a high and magnificent beauty. He read his own prose, he turned his own leaves, and had, as he sat there with the spring sunshine on the page, an emotion peculiar and intense. His career was over, no doubt, but it was over, after all, with *that*.

a A **simile** describes the way the aging writer feels about the end of his career. The narrator says, "it was as violent as a rough hand at his throat."

b The author uses **analogy** in saying that the writer "turned his own leaves." The literal meaning is that the writer turned the pages. Figuratively, these words suggest changing seasons and the writer's age.

From THE MIDDLE YEARS by Henry James, © 1893

TEST-TAKING TIPS

Be careful not to confuse straightforward comparisons with figurative language. If an author says "Angela looks like her sister," the author is comparing two similar elements and is not using figurative language.

- The narrator says, "This was the laceration—that practically his career was over." Which statement **best** explains this metaphor?
 - It compares the end of the writer's career with a serious sore throat.
 - It compares the probable end of the writer's career with a life-threatening wound.
 - It exaggerates the seriousness of the writer's ending career by comparing it with death.
 - It describes the writer's feelings by using human qualities to explain the end of his career.

3 Apply the Skill

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage, read each question, and choose the **best** answer.

TERROR

1 His room was as black as pitch [tar] with the thick darkness (for the shutters were close fastened, through fear of robbers) and so I knew that he could not see the opening of the door, and I kept pushing it on steadily, steadily.

2 I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening, and the old man sprang up in bed, crying out—"Who's there?"

3 I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed listening—just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches in the wall.

4 Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief—oh, no!—it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever since growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not. He had been saying to himself—"It is nothing but the wind in the chimney—it is only a mouse crossing the floor," or "It is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp." Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions: but he had found all in vain. All in vain; because Death, in approaching him had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim. And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel—although he neither saw nor heard—to feel the presence of my head within the room. ...

5 [T]here came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.

From THE TELL-TALE HEART by Edgar Allan Poe, © 1843

2. The narrator states in paragraph 3 that he "did not move a muscle." This phrase is an example of hyperbole because it

- A. compares the narrator's muscles with motion.
- B. is impossible to remain alive without moving muscles.
- C. gives human qualities to moving muscles.
- D. exaggerates the narrator's fear of the dark room.

3. In paragraph 4, the old man tries to explain the noise in the room as "... merely a cricket which has made a single chirp." How would substituting the word **noise** for the phrase **a single chirp** affect the sentence?

- A. The cricket would not be personified because its "song" would not be described.
- B. The vague word *noise* would be less vivid and specific both for readers and the old man.
- C. The old man would not be convinced that the sound came from a cricket.
- D. Readers could share the old man's terror by not knowing the precise sound of a cricket.

4. In paragraph 4, Death is personified as

- A. a victim of the narrator's fury.
- B. a black shadow outside the window.
- C. a stalker in the old man's room.
- D. an envelope on the old man's bed.

5. The simile in paragraph 5 comparing a watch wrapped in cotton with the sound of the old man's heart emphasizes the

- A. narrator's anger with the old man.
- B. late night setting of the story.
- C. steady rhythm of the heart.
- D. similarity between heartbeats and drums.

6. Figurative language builds suspense in this passage by

- A. describing darkness, fear, death, and rage.
- B. foreshadowing events that lead to death.
- C. personifying abstract feelings of terror.
- D. setting the story in a dark room on a dark night.

1 Review the Skill

Authors use **figurative language** when they compare one thing with something very different in order to explain an idea or create a particular effect. **Similes** make comparisons using key words such as *like* or *as*.

Metaphors make the same type of comparison but omit the key words. **Analogies** are longer, or extended, metaphors.

Authors use other kinds of figurative language as well. **Hyperbole** is extreme exaggeration. **Personification** gives human qualities to an animal, inanimate object, or element in nature. **Onomatopoeia** uses words that create the sounds they describe, such as *whish* or *buzz*.

2 Refine the Skill

By refining the skill of interpreting figurative language, you will improve your study and test-taking abilities, especially as they relate to the GED® Reasoning Through Language Arts Test. Read the passage below. Then answer the questions that follow.

DENCOMBE'S ILLNESS

The April day was soft and bright, and poor Dencombe, happy in the conceit of reasserted strength, stood in the garden. ...The sociable country postman, passing through the garden, had just given him a small parcel which he took out with him, leaving the hotel to the right and creeping to a bench he had already haunted, a safe recess in the cliff. It looked to the south, to the tinted walls of the Island, and was protected behind by the sloping shoulder of the down. He was tired enough when he reached it, and for a moment was disappointed; he was better, of course, but better, after all, than what? He should never again, as at one or two great moments of the past, be better than himself. The infinite of life was gone, and what remained of the dose a small glass scored like a thermometer by the apothecary. He sat and stared at the sea, which appeared all surface and twinkle, far shallower than the spirit of man. It was the abyss of human illusion that was the real, the tideless deep.

From *THE MIDDLE YEARS* by Henry James, © 1893

a In this description, objects are given human qualities. The **bench looked to the south**, and the **hill has a sloping shoulder**.

b Here, the **abyss of human illusion** is a metaphor meaning that the speaker's ability to fool himself is as great as the ocean's depths.

- The narrator compares Dencombe's remaining life to "the dose of a small glass scored like a thermometer by the apothecary" to
 - indicate the brief time that Dencombe has left to live.
 - reassure Dencombe that his medicine works.
 - show that the sea is shallower than it appears to be.
 - prove that the thermometer Dencombe uses is accurate.
- The comparison of the spirit of man with the sea means that
 - Dencombe has vast and deep thoughts about life.
 - the human spirit is of depths greater than the depth of the ocean.
 - Dencombe's ability to fool himself is shallower than the ocean.
 - the human spirit is shallow and superficial.

CONTENT TOPICS

Figurative language is not limited to fiction. Much nonfiction writing contains similes, metaphors, and analogies to explain information to describe places, or simply to make the writing more enjoyable.

★ Spotlighted Item: **FILL-IN-THE-BLANK**

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage. Then fill in your answers in the boxes below.

BREAKFAST IS SERVED

- 1 In the living room the voice-clock sang Tick-tock, seven o'clock, time to get up, time to get up, seven o'clock! as if it were afraid that nobody would. The morning house lay empty. The clock ticked on, repeating and repeating its sounds into the emptiness. Seven-nine, breakfast time, seven-nine!
- 2 In the kitchen the breakfast stove gave a hissing sigh and ejected from its warm interior eight pieces of perfectly browned toast, eight eggs, sunnyside up, sixteen slices of bacon, two coffees, and two cool glasses of milk.

From *THERE WILL COME SOFT RAINS* by Ray Bradbury, © 1950

3. What is the effect of the statement that the clock sang "as if it were afraid." This example of

personification gives the clock the ability to and the human sense

of

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage, read each question, and choose the **best** answer.

A MYSTERIOUS HOUSE

- 1 "Today is August 4, 2026," said a second voice from the kitchen ceiling, "in the city of Allendale, California." It repeated the date three times for memory's sake. "Today is Mr. Featherstone's birthday. Today is the anniversary of Tilita's marriage. Insurance is payable, as are the water, gas, and light bills."
 - 2 Somewhere in the walls, relays clicked, memory tapes glided under electric eyes.
 - 3 *Eight-one, tick-tock, eight-one o'clock, off to school, off to work, run, run, eight-one!* But no doors slammed, no carpets took the soft tread of rubber heels. It was raining outside. The weather box on the front door sang quietly: "Rain, rain, go away; rubbers, raincoats for today ..." And the rain tapped on the empty house, echoing.
 - 4 Outside, the garage chimed and lifted its door to reveal the waiting car. After a long wait the door swung down again.
 - 5 At eight-thirty the eggs were shrivelled and the toast was like stone. An aluminium wedge scraped them into the sink, where hot water whirled them down a metal throat which digested and flushed them away to the distant sea.
- 6 The dirty dishes were dropped into a hot washer and emerged twinkling dry.
 - 6 Nine-fifteen, sang the clock, time to clean.
- From *THERE WILL COME SOFT RAINS* by Ray Bradbury, © 1950
4. How would the meaning of the sentence change if it read "the toast was hard" instead of "the toast was like stone" (paragraph 5)? The change would
 - A. describe the toast with greater accuracy.
 - B. make the toast seem less hard and more edible.
 - C. show that toast and stone are not similar elements.
 - D. explain why the toast was put into the sink.
 5. Which description is **most** like the house in this passage?
 - A. a computer program that schedules repairs
 - B. a mechanic who checks a car's computer
 - C. a car that drives itself
 - D. a remote control device

3 Master the Skill

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage, read each question, and choose the **best** answer.

MEG'S WEDDING DAY

- 1 "You do look just like our own dear Meg, only so very sweet and lovely that I should hug you if it wouldn't crumple your dress," cried Amy, surveying her with delight when all was done.
- 2 "Then I am satisfied. But please hug and kiss me, everyone, and don't mind my dress. I want a great many crumples of this sort put into it today," and Meg opened her arms to her sisters, who clung about her ... feeling that the new love had not changed the old.
- 3 "Now I'm going to tie John's cravat for him, and then to stay a few minutes with Father quietly in the study," and Meg ran down to perform these little ceremonies, and then to follow her mother wherever she went, conscious that in spite of the smiles on the motherly face, there was a secret sorrow hid in the motherly heart at the flight of the first bird from the nest. ...

JO'S LIFE AT PLUMFIELD

- 4 It never was a fashionable school ... but it was just what Jo intended it to be—"a happy, homelike place for boys, who needed teaching, care, and kindness." Every room in the big house was soon full. ... She had boys enough now, and did not tire of them, though they were not angels, by any means, and some of them caused ... trouble and anxiety. But her faith in the good spot which exists in the heart ... gave her patience, skill, and in time success, for no mortal boy could hold out long with [the Professor] shining on him as benevolently as the sun, and [Jo] forgiving him seventy times seven. Very precious to Jo was the friendship of the lads ...
- 5 Yes, Jo was a very happy woman there, in spite of hard work, much anxiety, and a perpetual racket. She enjoyed it heartily and found the applause of her boys more satisfying than any praise of the world, for now she told no stories except to her flock of enthusiastic believers and admirers. As the years went on, two little lads of her own came to increase her happiness—Rob, named for Grandpa, and Teddy, a happy-go-lucky baby, who seemed to have inherited his papa's sunshiny temper as well as his mother's lively spirit. How they ever grew up alive in that whirlpool of boys was a mystery to their grandma and aunts, but they flourished like dandelions in spring. ...

6. Meg's statement "I want a great many crumples of this sort put into it today" means that Meg
- A. does not care whether her dress gets wrinkled.
 - B. cares more about love than about a wrinkled dress.
 - C. is concerned because she looks different in her wedding dress.
 - D. would rather stay with her sisters than get married.
7. The comparison in paragraph 3 indicates that Meg's mother
- A. smiles but secretly disapproves of the man Meg will marry.
 - B. fears that Meg will not attend to the birds in the garden.
 - C. worries about the family's finances after Meg marries.
 - D. shows joy mixed with sorrow because her first child is leaving.
8. In paragraph 4, the narrator says, "no mortal boy could hold out long with [the Professor] shining on him as benevolently as the sun, and [Jo] forgiving him seventy times seven." Which statement **best** explains the hyperbole?
- A. The Professor and Jo treat the boys with a great deal of kindness and patience.
 - B. Troubled boys do well at Plumfield because of its strict behavior standards and academic focus.
 - C. Plumfield emphasizes permissiveness and shows little attention to academic standards.
 - D. The Professor is providing little academic training, and Jo is losing patience.
9. What does the metaphor "whirlpool of boys" suggest?
- A. a group of boys at the beach
 - B. boys studying the movement of water
 - C. the boys' constant motion and activity
 - D. the movement of a top or spinning toy
10. The comparison of the boys flourishing "like dandelions in spring" shows that the boys
- A. are growing fast and constantly.
 - B. help keep the lawns under control.
 - C. enjoy playing outdoors in the spring.
 - D. prefer wildflowers to cultivated gardens.

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage, read each question, and choose the **best** answer.

SENTENCED TO DEATH

The narrator has been sentenced to death by the judges of the Inquisition.

- 1 I WAS sick—sick unto death with that long agony; and when they at length unbound me, and I was permitted to sit, I felt that my senses were leaving me. The sentence—the dread sentence of death—was the last of distinct accentuation which reached my ears. After that, the sound of the inquisitorial voices seemed merged in one dreamy indeterminate hum. It conveyed to my soul the idea of revolution—perhaps from its association ... with the burr of a mill wheel. This only for a brief period; for presently I heard no more. Yet, for a while, I saw; but with how terrible an exaggeration! I saw the lips of the black-robed judges. They appeared to me white—whiter than the sheet [of paper] upon which I trace these words... I saw them fashion the syllables of my name; and I shuddered because no sound succeeded. I saw, too, for a few moments of delirious horror, the soft and nearly imperceptible waving of the sable draperies which enwrapped the walls of the apartment. And then my vision fell upon the seven tall candles upon the table. At first they wore the aspect of charity, and seemed white and slender angels who would save me; but then, all at once, there came a most deadly nausea over my spirit, and I felt every fiber in my frame thrill as if I had touched the wire of a ... battery, while the angel forms became meaningless specters, with heads of flame, and I saw that from them there would be no help. And then there stole into my fancy, like a rich musical note, the thought of what sweet rest there must be in the grave. The thought came gently and stealthily, and it seemed long before it attained full appreciation; but just as my spirit came at length properly to feel and entertain it, the figures of the judges vanished, as if magically, from before me; the tall candles sank into nothingness; their flames went out utterly; the blackness of darkness supervened; all sensations appeared swallowed up in a mad rushing descent as of the soul into Hades. Then silence, and stillness, night were the universe.

- 2 I had swooned [fainted] ...

From THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM by Edgar Allan Poe, © 1842

11. The onomatopoeic words **hum** and **burr** near the beginning of the passage help reveal that the narrator
- suffers from ringing in his ears.
 - hears voices as musical notes.
 - cannot distinguish individual sounds.
 - is held captive in a mill.
12. Which feeling does the narrator's comparison of the candles with charitable angels **most** likely represent?
- warmth
 - regret
 - hope
 - fear
13. When the narrator says that he felt every fiber in his frame thrill as if he had touched the wire of a battery, what does he **most** likely mean?
- His dread is causing him physical discomfort.
 - He is excited to be alive.
 - The judges have sentenced him to be electrocuted.
 - His captors have finally unbound him.
14. The thought of death entering the narrator's mind "like a rich musical note" emphasizes that death seems something the narrator **most** likely would
- fight against.
 - welcome with pleasure.
 - find difficult to understand.
 - consider a creative act.
15. As the narrator loses consciousness, he compares his fainting spell with a soul's descent into Hades. On the basis of other details in the passage, which sentence **best** describes the effect of this comparison?
- It confirms that the narrator deserves to be condemned.
 - It emphasizes the narrator's hopeless situation.
 - It foretells the narrator's fiery death.
 - It suggests that the Inquisition judges are demons.