



Taylor Mali's

METAPHOR DICE

Roll. Write. Repeat.



Instructions and tips!

OBJECT

Roll the dice until you formulate a metaphor that speaks to you, one you think you could explore for a few minutes in writing.

WHAT YOU NEED

- At least one red, blue, and white die
- A pencil and paper or your favorite writing implement

WHAT IS A METAPHOR?

A metaphor is a kind of equation between two nouns with perhaps an adjective or two used as variables. It's a way of saying, at least temporarily:

LET THIS BIG THING = THIS OTHER SMALL THING

So in this activity the red dice are filled with CONCEPTS, usually abstract nouns or bigger ideas that are hard to talk about and therefore require metaphors. The blue dice are filled with OBJECTS, which are usually smaller nouns or humbler things (except for the moon!). Lastly, the white dice are all filled with ADJECTIVES or short descriptive phrases.



HOW IT WORKS

1. Roll the dice until you can formulate a metaphor that inspires you.

2. After deciding on a metaphor you like and writing it down, the easiest thing to do is simply restate it artfully, elegantly, or economically in different words or as few words as possible. In other words, try to “justify” the metaphor by demonstrating the sense of it. You might discover that one single sentence or two is all you need.

TIPS FOR CRAFTING YOUR METAPHOR

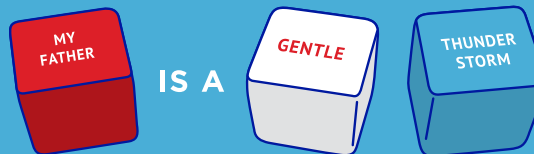
SUPPLYING THE VERBS

You will almost always have to add at least a verb to complete the metaphor, but it doesn't always have to be “is a.” Consider the following alternative verb phrases you could use with the roll MY FATHER _____ GENTLE THUNDERSTORM.

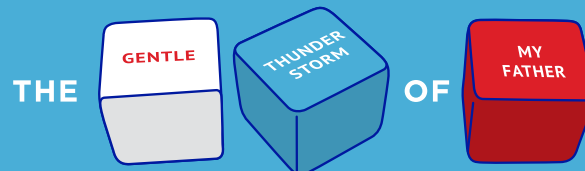
is not a
was born a
considered my mother a
claimed to be a

was never a
turned into a
thought he was a
dreamed of being a

REVERSING THE ORDER



The above roll can always be rearranged and read as follows if you prefer:



3. **WHICH IS TO SAY:** Use the phrase “which is to say” as often as you want to introduce an artful restatement of your metaphor. For example, “My mother is a broken mirror, which is to say, though flawed, I can still see myself in her. Or rather, I must handle her with care, which is to say, she has sharp edges.”

Check out our How-to-Play videos at MetaphorDice.com/videos

WHEN PLAYING ALONE...

Try picking two completely different metaphors and “connecting” them in some way through writing. How can you “get” from one to the other? For example, how might you connect “My father is a gentle super hero” to “Home is a mad blessing”?

A good way to end a poem like this is to delve a little deeper into one aspect of what you’ve just said, perhaps using an elided verb (where the verb is not repeated but is implied and replaced with a comma. For example, “My mother is a midnight meadow. Her winks are wild flowers, her singing, the sound of the crickets on the starlit breeze, and her hands, the trees.”

ADDITIONAL TIPS

Instead of “which is to say,” consider using one of the following phrases that accomplish almost the same thing: because, in that, by which I mean, or rather.

Consider introducing any metaphor that speaks to you by first writing, “Some people say,” or “I used to believe.” A phrase like that gives you somewhere to go next in the rest of the sentence to explain how things might have changed.

Resist the urge to REJECT the metaphor completely by just saying “No, it’s not.” Instead, if you don’t like one of the words in the metaphor you’re presented with, feel free to “correct” it by changing it to something else. For example, “My father was actually not a gentle super hero. He was an invisible one.”

Of course, try not to ruin the metaphor completely like people who explain a joke until it isn’t funny anymore (“See? Do you get it? It’s funny right? Because the chicken doesn’t actually cross the road, you see? Want me to tell it again?”).

WHEN PLAYING IN A GROUP...

In a group of about three (but not much bigger), you can play even with only three dice (one of each color), although more dice give you more options. Decide how you will all agree on a single metaphor to work with. One idea is to give everyone the right to reroll all (or a single) dice or to “freeze” a die with their finger (to insure it remains an option).

Once the group has all agreed on a single metaphor to work with, write independently for a few minutes and have each member of the group create two or three explanations or justifications for the metaphor. Then compare notes and try reading all the justifications one at a time, with each member of the group reading one of theirs until they’ve all been read. You will be amazed at how many different ways one metaphor can be interpreted! Consider the poem at right (“CALLOUSED HANDS PRAYING”).

LASTLY, do what works. Any technique or process is valuable if it helps you write or think in a new way or express something you didn’t know was inside you. And if you discover a great technique or simply love what you’ve come up with, be sure to post it on social media with the hashtag #MetaphorDice.

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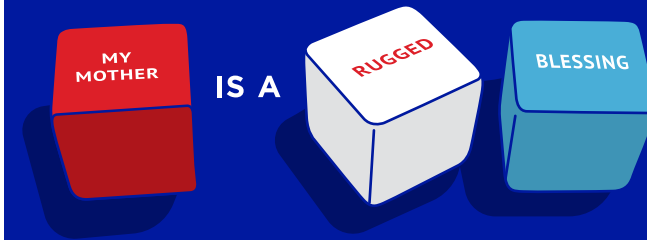
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EXAMPLES

NO ALTERATIONS NECESSARY

Your body is a desperate wedding gown
in a small town thrift store
waiting for you to step inside
and finally declare that it fits.

—Megan Falley



CALLOUSED HANDS PRAYING

My mother is a rugged blessing,
which is to say, sometimes she hugs me
so hard it hurts. And sometimes she curses
even when she is praying. Or rather,
she prays in the middle of scolding me.
Which is to say, her love is not fragile.
Which is to say, no matter how loudly
I slam my bedroom door in anger,
nothing can silence the prayers
that stream from her eyes like tears.

—Students from Grade 7

SECRET IDENTITY

My father was a gentle super hero,
which is to say, he held me in his arms
with the strength of 10 men, great fathers, all.
He never used his X-ray eyes to invade me.
He never flew away or even turned invisible.
To this day, I still think I see him everywhere.

—Taylor Mali