



# The Poetry Object

## Overcoming Clichés and Using Specific Imagery Exercises

### CLICHÉ ALERT/ IMAGE EXCAVATION EXERCISE

STARTER	CLICHÉ/ OBVIOUS IMAGE	BE SPECIFIC/ INDIVIDUAL IMAGE
As black as...	night coal	
As white as...	Snow	the piercing glow of fluorescent bulbs in the 7/11 on Enmore Road at 2:11 am.
As dark as...		
As good as...		
As green as...		
As red as...		
As soft as...		
As sweet as...		
As grey as...		
As yellow as...		
As rough as...		
As hard as...		

Students complete the table by beginning by filling in the cliché or expected response.

Discuss what we mean by a cliché.



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Ask students why English teachers have such a horror of clichés. List the reasons why clichés make for bad writing on the board.

Students then complete the final column by composing a personal and specific image. It may help to read Mauree Applegate's poem 'Be Specific' before you begin this task.

Get them to add to the "starters" in the spare rows in the table.

Offer a chocolate prize for the best specific and personal image and for the worst cliché.

Sharing their personal and specific images with the class group is recommended.

This can make a good "list poem" activity if they list all their specific images. Get them to play with the order of their images ie look for a good opening and concluding line.

You can add a fourth column where the student develops the image: as in the development/ elaboration of the image in an Imagism poem.


Fog by Carl Sandburg (1878-1967)

The fog comes	SUBJECT
on little cat feet.	IMAGE

It sits looking	ELABORATION/ DEVELOPMENT
over harbor and city	
on silent haunches	
and then moves on.	



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Be Specific

Don't say you saw a bird: you saw a swallow,  
Or a great horned owl, a hawk, or oriole.  
Don't just tell me that he flew;  
That's what any bird can do;  
Say he darted, circled, swooped or lifted in the blue.

Don't say the sky behind the bird was pretty;  
It was watermelon pink streaked through with gold;  
Gold bubbled like a fountain  
From a pepperminted mountain  
And shone like Persian rugs when they are old.  
Don't tell me that the air was sweet with fragrance;  
Say it smelled of minted grass and lilac bloom;

Don't say your heart was swinging;  
Name the tune that it was singing,  
And how the moonlight's neon filled the room.

Don't say the evening creatures all were playing;  
Mention tree toad's twanging, screeching fiddle notes,  
Picture cricket's constant strumming  
To the mass mosquitoes humming  
While the frogs are singing bass deep in their throats.

Don't use a word that's good for all the senses  
There's a word for every feeling one can feel.

If you want your lines to be terrific;  
Then do make your words specific,

For words can paint a picture that's real.

Mauree Applegate



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## FEELING/ SENSE/ METAPHOR ACTIVITY

FEELING	SENSE	METAPHOR/ IMAGE
Jealousy	is the taste	of rusty nails
	has the feel	of oily green leather
	Is the smell	the sharp smoke of a blown out candle
Sadness	is the sound of	a shivering puppy in a pet shop crying for its long lost mother.
Anger		
Happiness		

This is a useful exercise for looking at the difference between direct and indirect comparisons. You can discuss the effect of choosing to use a simile instead of a metaphor in this task.

Again this can make an effective list poem.

You might put A3 sheets up around the room with a heading of a specific emotion. Get students to move around the room adding their metaphor to the relevant sheet. This will create a collaborative poem that ideally can be read aloud to the class.



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Students can choose some of the emotions from the list below to add to the table.

## EMOTION LIST

Affection Anger Angst Annoyance Anxiety Apathy Awe Contempt Curiosity Boredom  
Depression Despair Disappointment Disgust Dread Ecstasy Embarrassment Envy  
Euphoria Fear Fretful Frustration Gratitude Grief Guilt Happiness Hatred Hope Horror  
Hostility Hysteria Indifference Interest Jealousy Loathing Loneliness Love Lust Misery  
Pity Pride Rage Regret Remorse Sadness Satisfied Shame Shock Shyness Sorrow  
Suffering Surprise Wonder Worry



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