

4. WHY USE METAPHORS?

Okay, now that you know how to make metaphors and similes, you may ask yourself, “Why the heck would I want to use them?”

Here are some good reasons:

1. They can be funny; and . . .
2. They focus your reader’s attention on a specific detail; and since . . .
3. Story writing is all about choosing details that count . . .
4. Metaphor and simile make your writing come alive.

But don’t take my word for it. Get in there and play in the fields of metaphor and simile. You may find that you have more fun than a disco duck at a barnyard boogie.



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CHET GECKO’S

Mysterious Metaphors & Strange Similes

By Bruce Hale



Metaphors and similes are two of the spices that make for tasty writing. If you want to be a hotshot writer (or just avoid putting readers to sleep), take a tip from Chet Gecko, private eye and storyteller.

When Chet Gecko talks about his cases, he likes to use lots of colorful metaphors and similes. (Of course, he also likes to eat lots of stinkbug pie. But then, he’s a gecko.)

You, too, can use similes and metaphors to jazz up your own writing. Here’s how, in three simple steps.

1. KNOW YOUR TERMS

WHAT’S A METAPHOR?

It’s when you describe one thing as if it were another.

For example (from *The Big Nap*, page 15):

“Eena’s a pip.”

“A pip?” said Natalie, cocking her head.

“A peach, a sweetheart, a good egg,” said Ms. Glick.

Is Eena really a peach or an egg? Nope, she’s a guinea pig. What’s Ms. Glick really saying? That Eena is a nice, well-behaved student.



WHAT’S A SIMILE?

It’s when you compare two different things, often using *like* or *as*.

For example (from *Farewell, My Lunchbag*, page 1):

Mrs. Bagoong was a hundred pounds of tough, leathery iguana. Her eyes were like chocolate drops, her cheeks soft as AstroTurf and about the same color.

Does Mrs. Bagoong really have chocolate drops for eyes? Let’s hope not. Why does Chet say she does? He thinks about food a lot, so when he sees brown eyes, he thinks chocolate drops.

WHY USE METAPHORS AND SIMILES?

Well, they might get you a better grade in English class. But besides that, they give your writing pizzazz. We use these figures of speech to show that the two things we’re comparing share some quality. So by saying Eena is a peach, we’re not saying she’s a piece of fruit but that she is as *sweet* as a peach. Fancy, huh?

2. LEARN HOW TO BRAINSTORM

When I'm describing something, I'll often brainstorm several comparisons before finding the right one. So what is brainstorming? Is it when the inside of your head gets wet and lightning shoots out of your nose? I don't think so. It's when you come up with lots and lots of ideas, so you can find the one idea that really works.

Before you try brainstorming, consider two things: setting and character.

SETTING

My books are set in Emerson Hicky Elementary. Because of that, I use lots of school-related descriptions—for example: “as hard to find as a principal's sense of humor,” or “smoother than a sixth grader's lie.”

CHARACTER

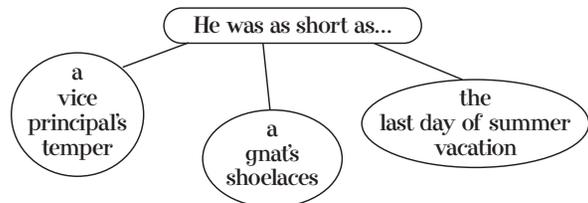
Chet loves food. So, many of my descriptions use that—for example: “cooler than a root-beer Popsicle,” or “Fred-o was a wasp in the ice cream of life.”

When brainstorming, take into account your main character and your story setting, and let those things color your ideas. You can brainstorm using a list, or using a web. To create a web, write the thing you want to brainstorm inside a circle, then draw lots of lines coming out of the circle and write your ideas on those lines.

For example, here's a simile that needs to be finished:

He was as short as _____.

Here's how Chet Gecko might handle this simile, using a brainstorming web:



Now, you try brainstorming with a list. Start by asking yourself, “What's short?” Then, “What else is short?” Push your imagination, get as wild as you want to, and fill in the blanks.

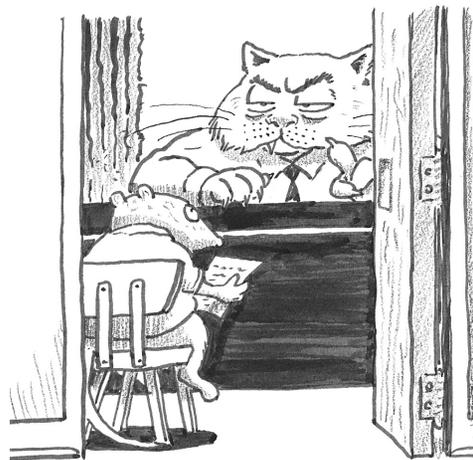
He was as short as _____.

He was as short as _____.

He was as short as _____.

3. FILL IN THE BLANKS

Here's a section from Chapter 2 of *The Mystery of Mr. Nice* (pages 6–7). I've left some comparisons blank, for you to fill in:



Visiting Principal Zero's office is about as much fun as _____.

Principal Zero and I had tangled in the past. He was the fattest of fat cats with the meanest of tempers. Big Fat Zero, the kids called him—but never to his face. . . .

As I approached the principal's office, my heart beat like _____. I wasn't nervous, exactly. I just liked having some skin left on my tuckus.

His secretary, a crow named Maggie with a voice like _____, sat polishing her beak at her desk. I stopped to talk.

“Hey, brown eyes,” I said. “How's tricks?” . . .

“Go right in,” said Maggie.

I took a deep breath and stepped inside. Behind a broad black desk sat Principal Zero, the source of all discipline at Emerson Hicky Elementary. I knew I was about to get mine.

Principal Zero's claws flexed, and his tail twitched. His wide smile was as full of poison as _____.

“Yes?” he said.

