

Task for *A Bridge to Wiseman's Cove*

Language strategies

1. Figurative language in *A Bridge to Wiseman's Cove*

Figurative language refers to an author's use of symbolism and figures of speech like similes and metaphors. A very important symbol in this novel is that of the osprey, a sea-bird with a broken wing that Joy Duncan has nursed back to health. In this case, the bird comes to symbolise an imprisoned creature that is then allowed to go free. Obviously, in the context of *A Bridge to Wiseman's Cove*, the osprey is used as a symbol for Carl, who gradually frees himself from all the constraints of his past, his family, their reputation and his own negative feelings about himself.

However, the figure of speech that James Moloney uses a great deal in this novel is the simile. A simile compares one thing to another quite unrelated thing, that nevertheless adds to the vividness of the description of scenes and characters in a novel. A simile is usually introduced by the words 'like' or 'as'. Some examples of his use of similes are given in the following chart. Ask students to find other similes in the story and add them to this chart.

Ask students to discuss the effect of the use of this sort of language on the telling of the story. Answers can be written in the right-hand column of the chart. An example has been given.

Another figure of speech that James Moloney uses, although less often, is the metaphor; this figure of speech compares one thing to another thing with which it has no real connection, although the two do have something in common. For example, 'He was a bull of a man' suggests that, although a bull and a man are quite different, the man referred to is large and very powerful.

Ask students to find examples of metaphors and, again, ask them to explain in the right-hand column the heightening effect of the metaphors on the atmosphere of the story.

Then ask students to consider the symbolism contained in at least some of the chapter headings. Again, ask them to explain the meaning of the symbols and how they contribute to the meaning of the novel. They should add other chapter headings that they think have symbolic meanings.

| Figurative language – Simile | |
|--|---|
| Examples | The effect of the use of figurative language in the telling of the story |
| 1. 'Weary travellers ... gathering like moths around a grimy bulb.' (p. 1) | 1. Readers would probably be familiar with the look of moths being drawn to |

| | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Carl Matt: 'like a box on stumpy legs' (p. 5) 3. 'Kerry's words shooting out of her mouth ... to form a speech balloon like frames from a comic book' (p. 5) 4. "'You made it then," she welcomed him, a cigarette bobbing like a diving board as she spoke.' (p. 15) 5. 'The girl now had her back to Carl with the arm of a handsome boy around her like the thick coil of a boa constrictor.' (p.28) 6. '... the drawbridge of the yellow barge yawned like a mythical beast awakened from its slumber.' (p. 87) | <p>a light bulb, so this simile would conjure up a vivid image of the travellers crowding around the light of the bus at night. Of course, moths are killed by the light so the simile also carries a slightly sinister connotation.</p> |
| <p>Figurative language – Metaphor</p> | |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 'She paused, staring back along the crowded beach, the natural caution of a roo checking the grassy plain for dingoes.' (p. 24) 2. 'Here, two barges waited side by side, their giant lips lowered, inviting traffic into their bellies.' (p. 71) 3. 'The second barge was a faded red, streaks of rust bleeding from wounds high on the hull.' (p. 71) 4. '... the giant frog mouth of the yellow barge' (p. 71) 5. '... the yellow barge was already disgorging its load.' (p. 72) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This metaphor, which compares Maddie's very cautious checking of the beach to what a kangaroo might do, looking around to make sure that there are no predators nearby, gives a vivid sense of her insecurity. |
| <p>Figurative language – Symbolism</p> | |
| <p>Chapter headings: e.g.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 'Birds of Prey' (Chapter 8) 2. 'Chains' (Chapter 19) 3. 'Turn of the Tide' (Chapter 25) 4. 'Drifting with the Tide' (Chapter 36) 5. 'A Shooting War' (Chapter 37) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The osprey, an important part of this story, is a bird of prey. However, the chapter heading could also mean that an innocent young man like Carl could be exploited by people like Bruce Trelfo and even his Aunt Beryl. |

Turning similes into metaphors

One way of making writing more vivid is to turn similes into metaphors. For example, from the list above, Carl Matt, 'like a box on stumpy legs' (p. 5) can be transformed into 'Carl Matt, the stumpy-legged human box.'

Ask students to experiment with turning their own similes into metaphors.

2. The use of verbs/verb groups

(a) Verbs/verbal groups to realise processes in English

Processes are of various kinds. For example:

- Action (doing) (e.g. 'The player raced for the line.')
- Verbal (saying) (e.g. 'She told him the answer.')
- Mental (thinking; perceiving) (e.g. 'She understood at once.')
- Relating (being; having) (e.g. 'They had been in the forest for hours.')

An interesting exercise is to look carefully for the verbs that are associated with the various characters in a novel. If, for example, a particular character is mainly associated with verbs that realise 'doing' processes then it is very likely that readers will automatically read that character as a person of action. Another character may be more thoughtful (associated with verbs that realise 'thinking' processes) and so on.

An exercise: identifying the processes associated with Joy and Skip Duncan

Ask students to identify the processes realised by verbs in these sentences used by James Moloney to introduce the characters Joy and Skip Duncan.

Joy:

- 'She ran her eye over him with greater interest.' (p. 67) e.g. *mental: sensing*
- "'I'm glad I met you, Carl,'" she said ...' (p. 68) e.g. *verbal: saying*
- 'She paused, remembering, while Carl fought down his panic.' (p. 68)
- 'The woman stared at him for a moment, summing him up ...' (p. 69)
- 'She grimaced, straightening from her position against the railing.' (p. 73)
- 'Joy let her eyes drift towards the other barge ...' (p. 73)

Skip:

- 'The barge captain turned back from his brooding. Offered a hand as hard and cracked as a concreter's glove.' (p. 72)
- '... Skip led with a good leg then dragged the other to the same level, shifted his weight and started the cycle again.' (p. 72)

Now ask students to write a short profile of each character based on the verbs associated with them (students could begin by finding more verbs associated with each).

(b) Verb choices to create a more vivid picture of what is happening in a story

James Moloney makes careful verb choices to bring his story to life.

Ask students to complete this short 'Lazy Cloze' exercise based on sentences in the novel. Once students have completed the exercise they can check the text itself to see the actual verbs that the author used:

The following sentence fragments have been taken from James Moloney's novel. Students are to choose, from the three choices offered after each fragment, the verb that they think the author himself used.

- “‘Keep an eye on Harley,’” Beryl _____ . (p. 37) (asked; demanded; said)
- ‘The only time he _____ into the waves ...’ (p. 44) (went; walked; ventured)
- ‘On the footpath he _____ a plastic shopping-bag ...’ (p. 67) (collided with; hit; ran into)
- ‘He _____, using the hand rails for support ...’ (p. 71) (came down; glided; descended)
- ‘He _____ away towards the Landrover ...’ (p. 81) (moved; walked; stumbled)
- ‘He _____ forward recklessly through the first disembarking vehicles ...’ (p. 108) (came; rushed; ran)
- ‘When two Landrovers arrived together and _____ over the drawbridge ... (p. 165) (came; drove; lumbered)
- ‘... Skip _____ back to the wheelhouse ...’ (p. 165) (hobbled; walked; went)
- ‘The circle around Carl _____, reforming like a swarm of flies around the pizzas.’ (p. 209) (broke up; fell apart; disintegrated)
- ‘The Duncans’ Landrover _____ up the ramp ...’ (p. 250) (ran; came; laboured)

3. The use of adjectives

James Moloney uses adjectives quite sparingly, depending more on his choice of strong verbs to give life to his story. However, there are two exceptions to this:

1. The use of adjectives to describe Carl Matt's appearance. Examples include:

- ‘his massive presence’ (p. 169)
- ‘massive body’ (p. 177)
- ‘his sheer size’ (p. 211)
- ‘his enormous shoulder’ (p. 215)
- ‘the bulk of his despised body’ (p. 280)

Students should discuss the author's emphasis on Carl's size and decide whether this is meant to be a positive or negative aspect.

2. The use of adjectives to describe Wiseman's Cove, the Duncan's garden and the nearby beach. Students should consider why James Moloney has described this environment in such glowing terms.

The garden:

- 'gnarled eucalypts' (p. 74)
- 'dappled light' (p. 74)
- 'shiny leaves' (p. 74)
- 'untamed native bushes' (p. 74) (as a point of interest, the word 'native' here is classifying rather than an opinion adjective)

The beach:

- 'insatiable wind' (p. 188)
- 'dense scrub' (p. 191)
- 'massive sandhills' (p. 191)
- 'white powdery sand' (p. 191) (again, note that 'white' is a classifier)

The release of the osprey is also so important to the story that James Moloney uses two strong adjectives to describe the moment that it struggles to gain height:

- 'powerful whooshing' (p. 193)
- 'frantic heaves' (p. 193)

4. Interesting sentence structures used in *A Bridge to Wiseman's Cove*

(a) Ellipsis

'Ellipsis' simply means that something has been left out. In the case of some sentences in the novel the subject of the verb has been left out after the first clause.

For example, on p. 85: "Carl dressed in the dark. Walked the kilometre from town ..."
Obviously the 'left out' subject of the second clause is, again, 'Carl'.

Here is another example: 'Carl stared in at the gaudy lights. Stopped in his tracks. Peered through the window with more purpose this time. Stuffed his hand into his pocket and fingered the notes that Skip had given him.' (p. 88)

Discuss with students the effect that they think is created by this technique of ellipsis.

Ask them to experiment with this technique by writing a string of short sentences, all with the same subject, and then removing the subject after the first clause.

(b) Use of participle phrases to flesh out information contained in an initial clause

Here are some examples:

‘Carl felt the dread tipping into his stomach, sinking to the pit like cement, forcing the salty chips upwards to the base of his throat.’ (p. 52)

‘Aunt Beryl charged on, pumping out words, gushing like a burst water pump.’ (p. 53)

The underlined words are called present participles of the particular verb. Each introduces a phrase that adds to the nominal group (noun) to which it refers, ‘dread’ in the first sentence and ‘Aunt Beryl’ in the second.

Again, ask students to consider the effect of this technique. They will find many examples throughout this novel.

And again, ask them to experiment with this technique in their own writing.

5. The use of dialogue

In addition to telling the story of the novel, James Moloney also gives his characters a lot to say in the same way that dialogue in a play reveals the nature of characters and also moves the action of the play forward. Of course, in a novel the author will use narration to connect chunks of dialogue, but it is often the dialogue that plays a more important role in the unfolding of the story.

Students will find one example of how dialogue is used to reveal character, provide a back story and move the current story forward on pp. 133–135 going from: ‘Mention of New Year’s Eve ...’ through to: ‘She must be worried it will happen again.’

They should then look for other examples of the extended use of dialogue in the story.