Figures of Speech: Romeo and Juliet

Shakespeare made his writing more vivid by often using figures of speech.

Simile

We know that a simile is a direct comparison between two things that aren't really alike. A simile uses like or as to make the comparison.

Here’s an example: “How silver-sweet sound lovers’ tongues by night, Like softest music to attending ears!”

Note: This simile is comparing the sweetness of a lover’s voice or words to the beauty of music.

Activity #1

Directions: Find the simile in each of the following examples and tell what is being compared. What is the purpose of each comparison?

“My bounty is as boundless as the sea, 
My love as deep.” (Act 2 Scene 2)

“The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars 
As daylight doth a lamp.” (Act 2 Scene 2)

“It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden 
Too like lightning, which doth cease to be 
Ere one can say “it lightens”…” (Act 2 Scene 2)
Personification

Personification is giving human characteristics to something that isn’t human, or writing about inanimate things as though they had human characteristics.

Here’s an example: “The all-seeing sun
            Ne’er saw her match since first the world begun.”

Here the sun is said to be able to see. Not only can she see, but she is said to see her match (beauty/light) in Juliet. The purpose is to emphasize Juliet’s beauty and Romeo’s intense feelings for her.

Activity #2

Directions: Find the personification in the following examples and explain what is being personified. What is the purpose of each comparison?

“... an hour before the worshipped sun
Peered forth the golden window of the east
A troubled mind drove me to walk abroad.” (Act 1 Scene 1)

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“Arise fair sun and kill the envious moon
Who is already sick and pale with grief
That thou her maid art far more fair than she.”

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“Jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.”

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A metaphor is an indirect comparison between two things that aren’t really alike. A metaphor links the two things in a sentence without using the words like or as.

Here’s an example: “O serpent heart, hid with a flow’ring face! (Act 3 Scene 2)

This oxymoron is Juliet’s reaction to find out that Romeo killed her cousin Tybalt. According to Juliet, Romeo has a serpent heart, (a heart compared to a cold blooded snake) that is hidden behind a pretty (flow’ring) face. Romeo’s face is compared to a flower. Both convey her stress and confusion over these tragic events.

Activity #3

Directions: Find the metaphor in each of the following examples and tell what is being compared. What is the purpose of each comparison?

“Love is a smoke raised with the fume of sighs; Being purged, a fire sparkling in lovers’ eyes; Being vexed, a sea nourished with lovers’ tears.” (Act 1 Scene 1)

“Take thou some new infection to thy eye And the rank poison of the old will die.” (Act 2 Scene1)
“For still thy eyes, which I may call the sea,
Do ebb and flow with tears. The bark thy body is,
Sailing in this salt flood; the winds, thy sighs,
Who raging with thy tears and they with them
Without a sudden calm will overset
Thy tempest-tossed body...” (Act 3 Scene 5)

“Thou detestable maw, thou womb of death
Gorged with the dearest morsel of the earth,
Thus I enforce thy rotten jaws to open,
And in despite I’ll cram thee with more food.” (Act 5 scene 3)