Determine Figurative Meanings

Figurative language is language that communicates ideas beyond the literal meaning of the words. Shirley Geok-Lin Lim uses figurative language in the form of similes and metaphors to evoke images of the father and the speaker’s perceptions of him in "My Father’s Sadness."

A simile compares two dissimilar things using the word like or as.

A metaphor compares two things directly, without using like or as.

"I tense like a young man with a full moon / and no woman in sight." (lines 12–13)

"How hard it is to be a father, / a bull under the axle" (lines 16–17)

To understand the figurative language in the chart, identify what the things that are compared have in common. In the simile, the speaker and the young man both feel the tension of being frustrated. In the metaphor, the father and the bull are both burdened by heavy labor.

Analyzing the Text

Cite Text Evidence Support your responses with evidence from the selection.

1. Interpret What theme about fatherhood is developed in the first stanza? Explain how the poet uses figurative language to convey this meaning.

2. Cite Evidence What is the tone, or attitude, of the speaker toward the father? How do the details in lines 10–13 communicate this tone?

3. Analyze Explain how the metaphor in lines 13–16 contributes to the theme of the poem.

4. Evaluate Are lines 18–19, "the mangrove netted by its lianas, the host perishing of its lavishness," an effective ending for the poem? Support your view by explaining both the literal image created by the lines as well as their figurative meaning.

PERFORMANCE TASK

Speaking Activity: Oral Interpretation Prepare an oral reading of the poem:

- On a copy of the poem, highlight important words and phrases that you want to emphasize in your reading to bring out your interpretation.
- Present your reading in a small group. Discuss similarities and differences in the oral interpretations presented by you and your classmates.