

Listing the Things of the World

How can we use comparisons (similes and metaphors) to see the familiar in new ways?

1. PERCEIVE

Work through the PERCEIVE card to carefully investigate your artwork.

2. CONSIDER

Draw a line down the middle of your paper. In the left-hand column, make a list of the things you see. List everything! If you think you have all the details, go back over the painting. Nothing is too small to list. Notice things like negative space, the sky, and the background seen through closer objects. In the right-hand column, compare by writing a simile or metaphor for each thing you have listed. What is it like? What does it remind you of? For example, if you chose *The Boxer* by Bloom and made a note of the ring ropes, describe them: What do they remind you of? What does the light on the ropes look like?

3. CREATE

Write a list poem bringing together your observations and descriptions. Poets use similes and metaphors to “paint a picture” in words. You should strive to create a poem that is packed with interesting similes and metaphors; a poem that recreates the painting through the senses. The individual lines in a poem do not have to be a complete thought or sentence. You can repeat lines for emphasis. You can also break a sentence in any place you choose and continue it on the next line. This adds rhythm to the lines and helps your reader want to read on to your completed thought.

The list poem is a very old form of poetry. The challenge of a list poem is to make it lively and interesting, not just a bland list. Add interest with good description and comparisons, repetition, and thoughtful line breaks.

Here is an example of part of a list poem. Jude Nutter wrote these lines in response to artist Damien Hirst's collage called *Amazing Revelations*, which is made from thousands of butterfly wings. This is part of a longer poem called "Mumbai." Notice how beautiful and unusual the comparisons are.

Blues like mouths held open around a single hue -- thalo
manganese, Prussian, cerulean --
blues that slip out of us when we are sleeping,
blues so fanciful it's like a door left open under
the grass. This wall of shimmering evidence: wings
like flakes of mica, like chips of spruce
bark and Roman tile; wings like snips of silk,
like face cards, like dresses too beautiful to wear; wings
like stolen coats of colored dust.

4. REFLECT

Read your poem aloud while looking at the artwork. What is your best metaphor or simile? Try moving that line to other parts of your poem. Is that change better or worse? Does the tone of your poem match the mood of the image? What words are key? Try longer or shorter breaks in your lines. How does the rhythm add to the mood?