**Honors English 9**

**A Brief Guide to Metaphors**

By now, you know that the first poem of the year you’ve discussed centers on the expression of a metaphor. Metaphors (and similes) are among the most common forms of figurative language in all literature and are used frequently in marketing, television commercials, political ads, and the most famous speeches in our nation’s history. The wide use and practicality of metaphor means it’s a great place to begin our study of English.

As you may know, a metaphor is a comparison between two unlike things, in which the figurative term (B) is substituted for or identified with the literal term (A). A simile simply uses comparison words (like, as, than, resembles) whereas a metaphor does not. Junior high students love telling the difference between simile and metaphor because they can “word hunt” for comparison words, though this distinction is neither interesting nor relevant in high school. What I find that incoming freshmen cannot do is correctly distinguish metaphors from symbols. Because symbolism will be our next term of focus, please carefully study this guide.

The first quality that you must commit to memory is that metaphor can *never* function literally. It *always* means something *other than* what it means. Let’s take a look at some examples to show this idea in context:

“It’s raining cats and dogs!”

“What pig lives in this bedroom?”

“Does your brother oink around this room all day?”

Immediately, you’ll understand that none of these metaphors can be literal. It never rains cats and dogs. And despite how messy one’s brother may be, he can never literally be a pig. None of them are particularly compelling metaphors, but they help you see its first quality in context: *metaphors are never literal*.

Metaphors follow an A = B formula where A is the literal noun/idea and B is the figurative noun/idea substituted for A. There are three ways to express metaphor:

Direct Metaphor: Both A and B are named (easier to identify)

Implied Metaphor: One or both of A and B are not named (harder to identify)

Extended Metaphor: Direct or indirect, a metaphor that is developed over a lengthy text

Function of Metaphor:

1. Most of the time, metaphors cause readers to think, feel or experience a familiar concept in a brand-new way that is richer than if it was simply explained literally.

2. Less frequently, writers use metaphor to temper or soften a literal experience that is too difficult or uncomfortable to reveal to their audience

Over the course of the next few classes, we will practice many different examples of metaphor and discuss them so that you feel more comfortable with not only identifying them but also analyzing them.