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## Lesson Five

### FOCUS: Figurative Language

Writers use figurative language such as imagery, similes, and metaphors to help the reader visualize and experience events and emotions in a story. Imagery—a word or phrase that refers to sensory experience (sight, sound, smell, touch, or taste)—helps create a physical experience for the reader and adds immediacy to literary language.

Some figurative language asks us to stretch our imaginations, finding the likeness in seemingly unrelated things. Simile is a comparison of two things that initially seem quite different but are shown to have significant resemblance. Similes employ connective words, usually “like,” “as,” “than,” or a verb such as “resembles.” A metaphor is a statement that one thing is something else that, in a literal sense, it is not. By asserting that a thing is something else, a metaphor creates a close association that underscores an important similarity between these two things.

### ?? Discussion Activities

The story Rat Kiley tells in “Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong” is highly implausible. Ask your class if they feel its lack of believability makes it any less compelling. How much of the story seems real? Is there a moral to Rat Kiley’s story? How does O’Brien’s use of figurative language enhance the reader’s experience?

Divide the class into three groups. Assign each group a topic: the topography of Vietnam, the Green Berets, or Mary Anne’s transformation. Each group should find instances of how O’Brien uses imagery to appeal to the readers’ senses.

### Writing Exercise

Ask students to write a short essay on Mary Anne’s transformation from an innocent high school girl into a predatory killer. How does her gender change the reader’s expectations about her reactions to the war? How does she defy those expectations? What does the story tell us about the nature of the Vietnam War?

### Homework

Read “Stockings,” “Church,” “The Man I Killed,” “Ambush,” and “Style.” Students should review the stories they’ve read, identify at least one object that functions as a symbol, and come to class prepared to discuss its symbolic importance.