

Altered Shoes Lesson: Tracing a Journey

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Note to teachers

Please adapt and modify this lesson so it is suitable for your students. If your students are not ready to discuss their pasts, you can adapt this lesson to make it all about the future.



What is a metaphor?

A **metaphor** is a comparison between things that do not seem alike but share some things in common. We use metaphors everyday. For example, we might say, “My Mom is a rock.” We don’t mean she is *really* a rock; we mean she is strong, solid, always there. Or we might say, “I’m between a rock and a hard place,” when we mean we don’t have any good choices. If we experience sadness, we might say, “My heart is a stone,” meaning that our hearts are heavy with grief. These metaphors help explain a situation or feeling. Writers use metaphors in poetry and fiction.

What is a symbol?

A **symbol** is an object, word, or image that stands in for or represents something else. For example, a dove is a symbol of peace. A circle with a line through it is a symbol for “Don’t!” or “No.” Can you think of other common symbols? Artists use visual metaphors and symbols to make their work richer and more meaningful.

Shoes as Metaphor

There is a saying “Life is a journey.” This is a common metaphor. If we explore that metaphor, we might think of all the paths and roads we have taken in our lives. Did we slog through a lot of muck? Did we skip down streets? Did we climb high mountains? You can see that if you think of the roads and paths as symbols, they stand in for a time in your life. Maybe you did not climb high mountains *really*, but you did go through a struggle to get something you wanted.



There is a saying: “Don’t judge someone until you have walked in their shoes.” This means “Don’t judge someone until you really know what his or her life is like.” Shoes can be seen as metaphors. Once we think about the paths and roads we’ve walked down in our life journey, we can think about the shoes we have worn along the way.

Did we wear high heeled pointy shoes for part of our journey? Or sturdy work boots? Did we have a time

when we wore bedroom slippers a lot (maybe a long illness)? Did we walk part of our journey with shoes worn very thin, with holes on the soles? Did we walk another part of the journey with designer shoes?

What about paths and roads you want to take in the future? What kinds of shoes will you need? Do you need white clogs so you can work in the medical field? Do you need sensible, low-heeled shoes for office work, or steel toed work boots for work in the field? Will you need a pair of fuzzy slippers to pamper yourself after a bath, or a pair of good running shoes to get into shape? Or both?? (Remember, the running shoes don't have to *really* mean you want to be a runner; maybe they could be a metaphor for getting into shape.)

Many artists have transformed old shoes into works of art. This is something you can do, too, as a way to reflect on your past life and to look ahead. Here are some things to consider if you want to use shoes as metaphors for your life journey.

Part I: Look at Pictures

Look at some pictures of shoe art other people have done. (See links to websites below for ideas.) What do you think the shoes tell you about the person who decorated them?

Part II: Reflect on the Past and Future

Take a few minutes to think about the following questions. Or you can work with a partner to ask these questions of each other.

- Where have I been in the past?
- What jobs have I had?
- What roles have I had (mother, father, worker, athlete, cook, etc.)?
- Where did I used to walk a lot, and how did I walk? Did I strut, skip, etc?
- What kind of shoes would work as a metaphor for where I was in the past?
- How can I decorate those shoes to show people where I have walked in the past? For example, will I add bold color? Words? Glitter? Band aids?
- Where do I want to see myself in the future?
- What kind of job do I want?
- What role do I want to embrace?
- What roads do I want to walk down?
- What kind of shoes can work as a metaphor for my future?
- How can I decorate those shoes to show people where I want to walk in the future?

Part III: Pick Some Shoes

- Once you have finished Parts I and II, select a pair of shoes to represent your past. It is up to you which part of your past you want to focus on. You can select children's shoes to represent your childhood, or select shoes that represent a certain part of your teen or adult life. Even shoes that represent last year are fine.

- Now select a pair of shoes to represent your future. Keep in mind what you reflected on.

Part IV: Transform Your Shoes!

Materials:

- Gesso or other white acrylic paint
- Various colors of acrylic paint, student grade (Basics is a good brand. I would get large tubes of red, yellow, blue, black, and white and either mix colors in advance or allow students to mix in cups or right on the shoes.)
- Mod Podge in either matte (flat) or shiny (gloss)
- Paintbrushes in various sizes
- Cups of water for cleaning brushes
- Paper towels, rags for clean-as-you-go
- Cups to distribute mod podge
- Stuff for “collaging”:

Note: I would avoid the generic craft bags of “colored feathers and glitter” as the products come out looking very similar and tend to block some creative thinking about reusing and recycling other material for art projects.

- Maps of students’ home countries to tear up (Do the tearing in advance. Tearing works better as it allows for a more organic look for the collage rather than rigid edges.)
- Maps of the T, buses, etc.
- Images of tickets, passports, etc.
- Copied images of photos of various sizes of students and family members (need to do in advance)
- Images of flags of students’ home countries
- Torn pages from magazines (do in advance and have in containers arranged by color or theme)
- Cloth ribbon fragments or other fabric trim (rick-rack, pom-poms, etc.)
- Different colored tissue paper
- Beads, recycled jewelry pieces, game pieces
- Googly eyes
- Texts from various sources that feel meaningful to students – cut or torn into strips for collaging
- Little people (from old toys, games, etc)
- Wings (constructed ahead of time or purchased)
- Little wheels (from old toys, etc.)
- Various textures and colors of bendy/curly wire or ribbon for lace-up shoes

Implementation:

1. Show students a finished shoe and explain how the mod podge works as both an adhesive and as a protection for the entire shoe. Note how it dries clear even though it goes on white.
2. Choose shoes with a fairly smooth surface area. Strappy sandals would be kind of hard to work with, but you never know!
3. Prepare the shoes by coating them with Gesso or white acrylic paint. You may need a couple of coats on some shoes. This is a primer or base coat, much like an artist prepares a canvas.
4. Students can paint a base color if they want to. Then let it dry before applying collage elements.
5. Students can also choose to alter their shoes with just painting, using the shoes as a canvas.
6. If painted, let dry, then begin applying collage elements:
 - a. Cover areas of the shoes with first layer, such as torn paper, etc. Use mod podge. Apply mod podge to surface, place material on shoe, then mod podge over it as a fixative. The mod podge dries clear and acts as a protection for the shoe.
 - b. Students can let each layer dry and add further embellishments or complete the whole thing at once.
7. When done, coat the entire shoe with the mod podge. This will serve as a kind of varnish to keep the shoes from getting dusty.

Altered Shoes Resources

<http://www.brighthub.com/education/k-12/articles/36327.aspx>

altered shoes lesson plan ideas

<http://secretlifeofshoes.blogspot.com/2005/03/evil-shoe-art-project.html>

altered shoes

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oj1SGyfqCBI>

chalk shoes to the highline

<http://www.solesistersfilm.com/shoes-are-important-to-women-in-dallas-county-jai>

<http://kathyspinkneedle.blogspot.com/2009/09/my-altered-art-shoes.html>

altered sandals—“a how to”