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# The Stranger, The Better

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## Logo LinX

### The Stranger, the Better by Judi Harris

“The metaphor is perhaps one of [humanity’s] most fruitful potentialities. Its efficacy verges on magic, and it seems [to be] a tool for creation...”

—Jose Ortega Y Gasset, 1925

Metaphors are fertile seeds for germinating creative writing. Consider, for example, what your students’ essays might contain if they were asked to address questions like these:

HOW IS A SAILBOAT LIKE A PAINTBRUSH?  
WHICH IS NOISIER: WISHING OR ACTING?  
HOW IS RACISM LIKE WEAVING?  
WHICH IS LESS TRUSTWORTHY: MEASURING OR SEEING?

In 1968, Synectics, Inc., an independent educational research group, published an excellent set of classroom materials that encouraged the conscious use of metaphor to stimulate creative thinking, and subsequently, original writing. They called the series “Making It Strange,” explaining that analogies and metaphors that make the familiar seem strange are powerful catalysts for unique perspectives from which to write.

The Greek-derived term “synectics” refers to joining two superficially irrelevant ideas. Synectics are the bases of metaphor. Four “Making It Strange” workbooks provide classes with guided activities that use different types of analogies as story starters. With a few simple Logo procedures, your students can generate individualized metaphors to inspire their creative writing. And unlike consumable instructional supplies, this type of Logo output is rarely repetitive and never exhausted.

#### Choices by Chance

The structure of an analogy is simple:

“How is \_\_\_\_\_ like \_\_\_\_\_?”

Or, in Logo:

```
PRINT ( SENTENCE [HOW IS] choice#1
        [LIKE] choice#2 "? )
```

Choices can be nouns or verbs; objects or ideas. Infinite numbers of analogies can be produced by using the RANDOM primitive with just a few question templates.

The well known PICK tool:

```
TO PICK :LIST
  OUTPUT ITEM ( 1 + RANDOM COUNT :LIST ) :LIST
END
```

can be used within NOUN, VERB, and IDEA procedures to output choices for analogy templates.

TO NOUN

```
OUTPUT PICK [ [A BALLOON] [A FROG] [A PAINTBRUSH]
              [A MAILBOX] [A DISHWASHER] [A QUILT] [A TRASH
              COMPACTOR] [A CARBERATOR] [A MODEM] [A BOOK]
              [A SPORTS CAR] [A PANDA] [A MUSIC VIDEO] [A
              NOTEBOOK] [AN ASH TRAY] [A HAMMER] [A POND] [A
              SAILBOAT] [A COMPUTER PROGRAM] [A TURTLE] [AN
              AIR CONDITIONER] [A TREE] [A SEASHELL] [AN
              ELEVATOR] [A SHOPPING MALL] [A BUMBLEBEE] [A
              CRAB] [A TULIP] [A COBRA] [A MINNOW] [A
              MIRROR] ]
```

END

TO VERB

```
OUTPUT PICK [SKIING SWIMMING LAUGHING STUDYING
              TYPING THINKING PLAYING ACTING SCRATCHING
              [BEING EMBARRASSED] PAINTING JOGGING SHOUT-
              ING COUNTING DISCUSSING TESTIFYING DISCOVER-
              ING SLEEPING COOKING KISSING EATING MEASURING
              REVISING WISHING GLIDING STRETCHING DANCING
              GIGGLING SWEATING PASTING TRAVELING WEAVING
              SEEING SEWING POUNDING]
```

END

TO IDEA

```
OUTPUT PICK [DEMOCRACY TRUTH HOPE LOVE HATE FACISM
              ORDER LEGALITY IMMORALITY RELIGION GOVERN-
              MENT POLITICS GENEEOLOGY ACADEMIA SEXISM
              RACISM ENLIGHTENMENT CULTURE MORALITY [THE
              WORK ETHIC] [AFFIRMATIVE ACTION] INDEPEND-
              ENCE LIBERTY FREEDOM INTELLIGENCE FRIENDSHIP
              INTEGRITY RESPONSIBILITY AWARENESS]
```

END

When constructed as procedures, these lists are easy to amend according to student interests, current topics of study, or new vocabulary.

Procedures which output lists of these categories:

```
TO CATEGORIES
  OUTPUT [ [NOUN] [VERB] [IDEA] ]
END
```

```
TO CATEGORIES2
  OUTPUT [ [NOUN] [IDEA] ]
END
```

can be used to randomly order choice types within question templates. For example:

HOW IS (a noun) LIKE (another noun) ?  
 HOW IS (verb, ending with -ing) LIKE (a noun) ?  
 HOW IS (a noun) LIKE (an idea) ?

### Productive Procedures

Production of these metaphors is a matter of simple synectics. In Logo, that is accomplished through random concatenation.

```
TO ANALOGY
OUTPUT ( SENTENCE [HOW IS]
      ( RUN PICK CATEGORIES ) [LIKE]
      ( RUN PICK CATEGORIES ) "? )
END
```

To use this procedure, type:

```
PRINT ANALOGY
```

The computer may print:

```
HOW IS A TREE LIKE A MAILBOX?
HOW IS COOKING LIKE KISSING?
HOW IS HATE LIKE A DISHWASHER?
```

Other analogy types can be generated easily with similar procedure structures.

```
TO COMPARE
PRINT ( SENTENCE [WHICH IS] COMPARISON ": )
PRINT ( SENTENCE ( RUN PICK CATEGORIES ) [OR]
      ( RUN PICK CATEGORIES ) "? )
END
```

```
TO COMPARISON
OUTPUT PICK [NOISIER HEAVIER THINNER [MORE
  IMPORTANT] SLOWER DEEPER HEALTHIER [MORE COL-
  ORFUL] BRIGHTER SMARTER [MORE HESITANT] [MORE
  POPULAR] [MORE SENSITIVE] [MORE EXPENSIVE]
  [MORE USEFUL] [MORE COMFORTABLE] [LESS
  TRUSTWORTHY] [LESS DEPENDENT] NEEDIER [LESS
  REMOTE] TASTIER [MORE PLUSH] [MORE LOVABLE]
  [LESS DANGEROUS] SHINIER [LESS FRAGILE]]
END
```

To see an example of this breed of writing idea, type:

```
COMPARE
```

The computer may return:

```
WHICH IS MORE HESITANT:  RELIGION
OR TRUTH?
WHICH IS MORE COLORFUL:  LOVE
OR LIBERTY?
```

Action-based metaphors can be generated with this procedure:

```
TO DESCRIBE
PRINT ( SENTENCE "DESCRIBE
      ( RUN PICK CATEGORIES2 ) VERB ". )
END
```

Type:

```
DESCRIBE
```

and the computer may show you:

```
DESCRIBE A MAILBOX BEING EMBARRASSED.
DESCRIBE INTEGRITY GIGGLING.
```

### Assisting (Not Replacing) Thinking

The Logo turtle is often described as an "object to think with." Simple, carefully crafted Logo tool procedures can also stimulate thinking. The power of Logo-catalyzed metaphor work lies in the computer's patient compliance with the requests of one student who generates 40 analogies before finding one that captures her imagination and inspires a divergent story idea, or those of another who insists upon changing the contents of the word lists before using the procedures to find his essay topic. These young authors would probably be impatient with class-wide uniform writing assignments, and their teacher probably does not have enough time to devise and distribute individualized story starters.

Thoreau said,

All perception of truth is the detection of an analogy. (1851)

Logo can be used to randomly synthesize analogies, but only humans can recognize interesting metaphors in computer output and portray them creatively.

The message is clear: it makes more sense to let computers *generate*, and people *create*.

### References:

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