

"Words Are Birds"

Teaching Metaphor with Francisco X. Alarcón

Students spot **similes** easily. Just look for the *like* or *as*. **Metaphors** often pose a challenge for readers, particularly when they don't seem to make sense.

Take, for example, the title of Francisco X. Alarcón's poem "Words Are Birds." Words are clearly not birds. So what does the poet want us to know? What is he inviting us to consider about the nature of words?

READ

Read the poem "[Words Are Birds](#)" and choose a stanza where the comparison of words to birds made you stop and think about how words sometimes behave like birds.

Reread the stanza aloud and share your thinking about it.

WRITE

Choose another creature (a lion, a grasshopper) or object (a bicycle, a can opener) or person (a clown, a wrestler) and write a poem of your own called "Words Are _____."

Try to include at least five ways in which words are like your creature, object, or person. If you get stuck, go back to the Alarcón poem and borrow his phrasing:

- Some words are ...
- For them there are ...
- Some words are familiar like ...

When you are satisfied with your poem, read it to a friend.

ILLUSTRATE

Find an online image or draw a picture to illustrate one of the metaphors in your poem. You could also take a photo with your phone. If the illustration pleases you, send it to a friend.

ANALYZE

The poem you just wrote—along with Francisco X. Alarcón's— is a [conceit](#), an extended metaphor. Making surprising comparisons can be a powerful way to stretch your imagination as well as to delight readers.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Learn more about [Francisco X. Alarcón and his poetry](#).

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