

“The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost
 “O Captain! My Captain!” by Walt Whitman

Literary Analysis: Comparing Types of Description

Descriptive writing paints word pictures for readers. A variety of descriptions can be used in poetry to present **levels of meaning**.

- **Literal meaning** is the actual, everyday meaning of words.
- **Figurative meaning** relies on figures of speech and the symbolic nature of language.

An **analogy** is a figurative description that compares two or more things that are similar in some ways, but otherwise unlike. For example, a poem that literally describes the ocean also can be read as an analogy: It may compare the ocean to life because both are vast, deep, and ever-changing. The poem, therefore, has two levels of meaning—one literal and one figurative.

DIRECTIONS: *On the following chart, for each quotation from a poem, note words and images that give you clues about its figurative meaning. The first one is done for you.*

Passages from “The Road Not Taken”	Which words and images give you clues about the figurative meaning of the passage?
1. “Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,”	Two roads = choices; yellow wood = life
2. “Then took the other, as just as fair, / And having perhaps the better claim, / Because it was grassy and wanted wear;”	

Passages from “O Captain! My Captain!”	Which words and images give you clues about the figurative meaning of the passage?
3. “O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done, / The ship has weather’d every rack, the prize we sought is won,”	
4. “My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still, / My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will.”	