



**FigureForge**  
*Meet the Cast*  
Advanced Edition

# Spark & Anvil

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This advanced edition collects 7 chapter books from the FigureForge cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register. Advanced edition: upper-middle-grade register (Wonder / Hatchet / Holes band) for readers ages 11-14 ready for longer sentences + more nuanced subtext.

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*For everyone who learns by reading between the lines.*

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# Introduction

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The FigureForge cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 7 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive — a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing. Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.

Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever) where you can practice what they teach.

This is the **Advanced Edition** — written for readers who are ready for longer sentences, layered subtext, and the trust that comes with not having every joke explained. The Standard Edition covers the same characters at a lighter register; pick whichever feels right for the reader at hand.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

# Ferry and Ripple



The Word Workshop, a quiet haven of crisp paper, warm tea, and the faint, sweet scent of chalk dust, was bathed in the late morning sun. Long, dusty bars of light slanted through tall windows, illuminating motes that danced in the air. A sturdy round table commanded the center of the room, and upon its polished surface lay a folded note. This mysterious missive had been slipped under the workshop door an hour earlier, left without a knock or a signature. Gathered around the table, the cast of characters awaited their new challenge.

Ferry, a small otter-tween with chunky, soft brown fur and a bright orange life vest, stood at one end. The vest, a bit too large, had straps that puffed out like nascent wings, and she rocked gently from one foot to the other. This rhythmic swaying was her familiar habit when deep in thought, a subtle current of anticipation. Across from her, Ripple sat with an elegant stillness. A pond-skater-tween, her long, slender legs rested lightly on the floor, while a small, shallow pond-disk sat on her workbench. A single, perfect drop of water shimmered at its center, a testament to Ripple's preference for things that began small and then gracefully expanded.

"Open it," Ferry said, her voice a quiet ripple of command.

"Slowly," Ripple advised, her tone a soft counterpoint.

Knot, a creature of many wiggly arms, carefully unfolded the note. The paper felt thick and substantial beneath his digits, and the handwriting, though unfamiliar, was remarkably precise. The message itself was brief, comprising only two lines of text.

*Line one: My grandmother's hands ARE soft brown maps.*

*Line two: My grandmother's hands are LIKE soft brown maps.*

Knot read the lines aloud, his voice a low murmur in the quiet room. He paused, then read them again, allowing the words to settle. Finally, he placed the note precisely between Ferry and Ripple. "Two lines," Knot observed, his gaze moving between the two. "Almost identical. Just one small word has been exchanged. The case asks us to determine — which line carries more weight?"

Ferry's rocking ceased abruptly. Her whiskers, fine as spun silk, twitched once, a tiny tremor of recognition. Ripple leaned forward, her long-soft legs barely shifting, her attention fixed on the note. On her pond-disk, the solitary drop of water seemed to tremble, mirroring the sudden tension in the air.

"It's mine," Ferry stated, her voice barely a whisper, yet imbued with an undeniable certainty.

"And mine," Ripple replied, her tone equally soft, equally resolute.

A quiet understanding passed between the assembled cast. Two distinct characters. A single, enigmatic note. Two lines that, despite their near-identical phrasing, clearly belonged to each of them. The case, it seemed, would have to be divided.



Ferry was the first to claim the note, pulling it gently toward her side of the table. She tapped the first line with a delicate claw. "My grandmother's hands ARE soft brown maps," she read aloud, her voice small but firm, carrying the weight of conviction. "That line belongs to me. That's **metaphor**. There's no middle word, no softening agent. The hands and the maps are presented as *the same thing*. It's a direct equation: X IS Y. You step from one side to the other, and you don't even notice the gap in between."

She tapped her bright orange vest, the fabric rustling softly. "That's precisely why I carry this boat. My purpose is to ferry meaning across. The reader boards at the bank of 'grandmother's hands' and disembarks at the bank of 'soft brown maps.' They don't pay a fare, they don't feel the crossing itself. They simply arrive at the new understanding."

Knot scratched his head with one of his wiggly arms, a gesture of mild confusion. "But hands aren't *actually* maps, are they?"

"That's exactly the point," Ferry explained, her voice gaining a passionate edge. "When you declare something *is* something else, you aren't lying. You're asserting that the two things share a profound feeling, a deep connection. Think about it: old, kind hands often have wrinkles that resemble roads. They might have brown spots like tiny islands, or lines that trace paths like rivers. The entire shape of a hand can tell the story of where someone has been. A map, after all, is a record of *all the places she's gone*. So, when I say her hands ARE maps, I am saying her hands ARE her entire life story, etched onto her skin."

Ferry's voice wavered slightly, the emotion of her explanation catching in her throat. She rocked once, a quick, involuntary movement, then visibly steadied herself.

"Metaphor is the brave one," she declared, her voice firm once more. "It doesn't equivocate with 'kind of like.' It says a resounding 'yes.' That directness makes it heavy, requiring true intent. That's why I always proceed slowly. Because once the reader steps onto the boat, they place their trust in the crossing. If the metaphor is flawed, they fall in, and the meaning is lost."

Hum, who had been quietly sketching, scribbled a final detail onto her drawing pad. She then held up the pad, revealing a small boat. Inside, two passengers sat side-by-side on the bench: a pair of hands and a folded map, both rendered with equal size and importance. Ferry's whiskers twitched in appreciation, and her ears turned a soft shade of pink.

"That," Ferry said softly, her gaze fixed on the drawing, "is precisely the boat."



Ripple then gently slid the note across the table, placing one of her long-soft front legs delicately on line two. She never pressed hard, her touch always light and considered. "My grandmother's hands are LIKE soft brown maps," she recited. The word "LIKE" received a subtle, almost imperceptible emphasis in her voice – just enough to highlight its significance without overstating it.

"That line is mine," Ripple explained. "That's **simile**. The middle word, 'LIKE,' or sometimes 'AS,' performs the crucial work. These two things remain distinct entities. The reader doesn't board a boat for a direct crossing. Instead, the reader stands on the bank and *looks across* the space between them."

Ripple carefully touched the single drop of water on her pond-disk. The drop, disturbed by her touch, spread outward into a perfect, expanding ring. That first ring then widened into another, softer circle. "Simile ripples," she elucidated. "The first thing, 'grandmother's hands,' remains at the very center. The next ring suggests 'kind of like' a map. It's almost a map, but not quite identical. The reader holds both images in their mind simultaneously: hands, and maps, existing side by side."

Knot looked intently at the spreading rings on the pond-disk. "Why would you want a *softer* version of the same idea?" he inquired.

Ripple offered a gentle smile. "Because softness creates room. If I say her hands are LIKE maps, the reader thinks, *yes, I see the wrinkles are kind of like roads*. But they also recognize, *and not exactly. Her hands are still hands*. The reader gets to retain her grandmother as she is, *and* appreciate the comparison."

Ferry watched from across the table, her expression thoughtful rather than critical. She was simply listening, absorbing Ripple's perspective.

"Sometimes," Ripple continued, her voice calm and steady, "the writer isn't quite ready to declare 'IS.' Sometimes the feeling is too vast, too overwhelming to step directly into. Simile allows the reader to approach it slowly, gradually. 'LIKE' is like a porch. You can stand on it, look out at the view, and you don't have to come inside if you're not ready. It's a gentle way to share a profound or difficult feeling."

From his corner, Mask emitted a soft sound that was not quite a laugh, more a dry acknowledgment. "So Ferry is the front door. And Ripple is the porch."

"Yes," Ripple confirmed. And Ferry, after a brief, thoughtful pause, echoed, "Yes."



Knot cleared his throat, directing their attention back to the note. "So the case asks which line means more. But you both claim the line is yours. So, which line *actually* means more?"

Ferry and Ripple exchanged a long, silent look across the table. Then, in a synchronized movement, Ferry slid the note to the exact middle of the table, and Ripple nudged her pond-disk to meet it. The solitary drop in the pan trembled, poised.

"Neither," Ferry stated, her voice clear and decisive.

"Both," Ripple added, her tone equally firm.

Hum stopped her drawing, her pencil hovering above the pad. Knot uncrossed one of his many arms, a gesture of surprise. Mask leaned forward, his usual stillness broken by curiosity.

"It's not a competition," Ferry explained, her gaze encompassing them all. "Line one and line two aren't adversaries. They are a pair, different sides of the same truth." She tapped her orange vest once more. "The writer chose me when they wanted the reader to *arrive*. To be right inside the feeling, with no porch, no window. Just here, now."

"And they chose me," Ripple added, "when they wanted the reader to *approach*. To do so slowly, with ample room to step back if needed. With space to keep grandmother as grandmother, and the map as a map, and the comparison as a soft, inviting idea between them."

Ferry nodded in agreement. "Both lines convey the same fundamental truth: that an old, kind woman's hands carry the story of a whole life. But Ripple's version whispers, *come closer*. And mine declares, *you're already here*. A skilled writer keeps both of us in their pocket. Some days, they need a ferry. Other days, they need a ripple."

Ripple gently touched the drop on her pond-disk, and it spread outward in a final, graceful expansion. "That's the essence of how figurative language works," she concluded. "We aren't different cases, vying for supremacy. We represent different distances, different approaches to the same profound meaning."



Knot carefully folded the note, smoothing the thick paper with his hands, then placed it back onto the table. "Then the case is solved," he announced, a note of satisfaction in his voice. "There is no 'better' line. There's a Ferry-day, and there's a Ripple-day. The writer simply chooses the day that best suits their purpose."

Mask offered a rare, genuine grin. Hum, meanwhile, had begun a final, comprehensive sketch on her pad. The drawing depicted a wide river. On one bank lay grandmother's hands, intricately detailed. On the opposite bank rested a folded brown map. Above the water, Ferry, in her small boat, rowed steadily from one side to the other, her journey free of charge. Below the water, Ripple stood on the near bank, her long-soft legs immersed in the shallows. She wasn't crossing; she was looking, observing, as the ripples from her feet spread outwards in soft, ever-widening rings.

Hum held up the drawing for everyone to see. "This," she declared, "is the case."

Ferry rocked once, a subtle, satisfied sway. Her whiskers twitched. "Put it on the wall," she said, her voice quiet but firm.

Ripple smiled, touching her pond-disk one last time. "Yes," she agreed. "Put it where the new visitors can see it clearly."

Outside, the sun had shifted, its trajectory carrying it lower in the sky. The dusty bars of light on the table had grown longer, stretching across the room. Somewhere down the hallway, a door creaked open. Footsteps approached, followed by a small, hesitant voice asking for the Word Workshop.

The cast looked up, their attention now focused on the door. A new case was undoubtedly coming. Ferry instinctively pulled her life vest a little tighter, adjusting the straps. Ripple lifted her pond-disk, holding it carefully. The single drop in its center was still trembling, poised and ready to spread.

"Together?" Ferry asked, her gaze meeting Ripple's.

"Together," Ripple confirmed, a soft assurance.

The two of them — the boat and the porch, the bold declaration and the gentle invitation, the IS and the LIKE — rose in unison, prepared to greet whoever was about to walk through the door.

**Listen along + meet more of the cast at:**



<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/figureforge/ferry-and-ripple>

# Ferry



Ferry, a small river otter with fur the color of wet russet leaves and creamy foam, wore a chunky sailor cap perched just so on her head. Her paws, quick and precise, pushed a tiny wooden rowboat across her workbench. It glided smoothly from one side to the other, a silent journey. This, she often explained, was "meaning crossing over."

She was deeply curious about direct comparisons, always looking for the hidden links between things. Her favorite phrase, a quiet hum in her workshop, was, "X IS Y. The meaning ferries across."

That toy rowboat was her signature tool. It was a simple, carved piece of wood, but it physically demonstrated the power of a **metaphor**.

On one edge of the worn wooden bench, she carefully placed a small, hand-lettered label: "TIME." On the opposite edge, another label read: "RIVER."

She loaded the boat with a smooth, grey river stone, her special "meaning-token." With a gentle push, the boat began its journey.

"Time IS a river," she announced, her voice clear and bright. "The meaning ferried."



This simple act was the heart of her teaching. Ferry taught about **metaphor**. A metaphor is a direct comparison. It states that X IS Y, without using the words "like" or "as."

Many new students, she knew, often mixed up metaphor with simile. But they were truly different.

A metaphor makes a bold claim: X IS Y. It's a direct identification. A simile, on the other hand, is softer. It says X is LIKE Y.

The metaphor's claim is much stronger. It treats X and Y as if they are the same thing for a specific purpose. Saying "Time is a river" is not the same as saying "Time is like a river." Both use language in a non-literal way, but metaphor makes a much bolder statement.

Ferry's whole purpose at FigureForge was to make metaphors easy to spot. She turned it into a kind of detective case, a word puzzle to solve.

Ferry was always precise in her explanations. "X IS Y. Direct comparison," she would emphasize, tapping the boat. "The meaning ferries from one side to the other. Think: Time IS a river. Life IS a journey. Hope IS a feathered thing. No 'like.' No 'as.' Just the bold claim of sameness."



She taught her students how to break down these powerful comparisons.

First, the *Form*. "Look for the structure 'X is Y,'" she'd say. "Sometimes it's 'X equals Y.' It's always an assertion that they are the same thing."

Then, the *Tell*. "No 'like' or 'as' allowed," she'd remind them. "Those are simile's words. Metaphor commits fully."

Next, the *Function*. "A metaphor moves meaning," Ferry explained, guiding the boat again. "It takes what we already know about a familiar Y and applies it to a less-familiar X. When we say 'Time is a river,' it tells us Time shares a river's properties. It flows steadily. It has a current. You can't step in the same river twice. You can't go back in time."

She also showed them *Common types* of metaphors. "Some are 'dead' metaphors," she explained. "They're so common we don't even notice them anymore. Like the 'leg' of a table." She gently tapped her own leg. "Or the 'mouth' of a river." She gestured towards the window, where the real river flowed. "Live metaphors, though, are vivid and striking. They make you stop and think."

Her *Detective approach* was straightforward. "When you spot 'X is Y,' and Y is clearly not literally X, then you've found a metaphor."

She always ended with her *Anti-perfectionism* rule. "Spotting metaphors takes practice. It's completely normal for new readers to miss them. Don't worry about it. You'll get better."



Ferry grew up on a wide, curving bend of the river. Her family had been the original bridge-ferrying otters for their village. For generations, before the village built its first sturdy stone bridges, her ancestors had literally rowed people, goods, and messages across the flowing water.

They learned a profound lesson from their daily work. Carrying something physically across the river was a real, tangible action. They understood that language could do the same thing, but in a deeper way. Words could carry meaning from one idea to another, just like their boats carried passengers. Ferry had inherited this deep understanding. She carried that ancient lesson forward into her own work.

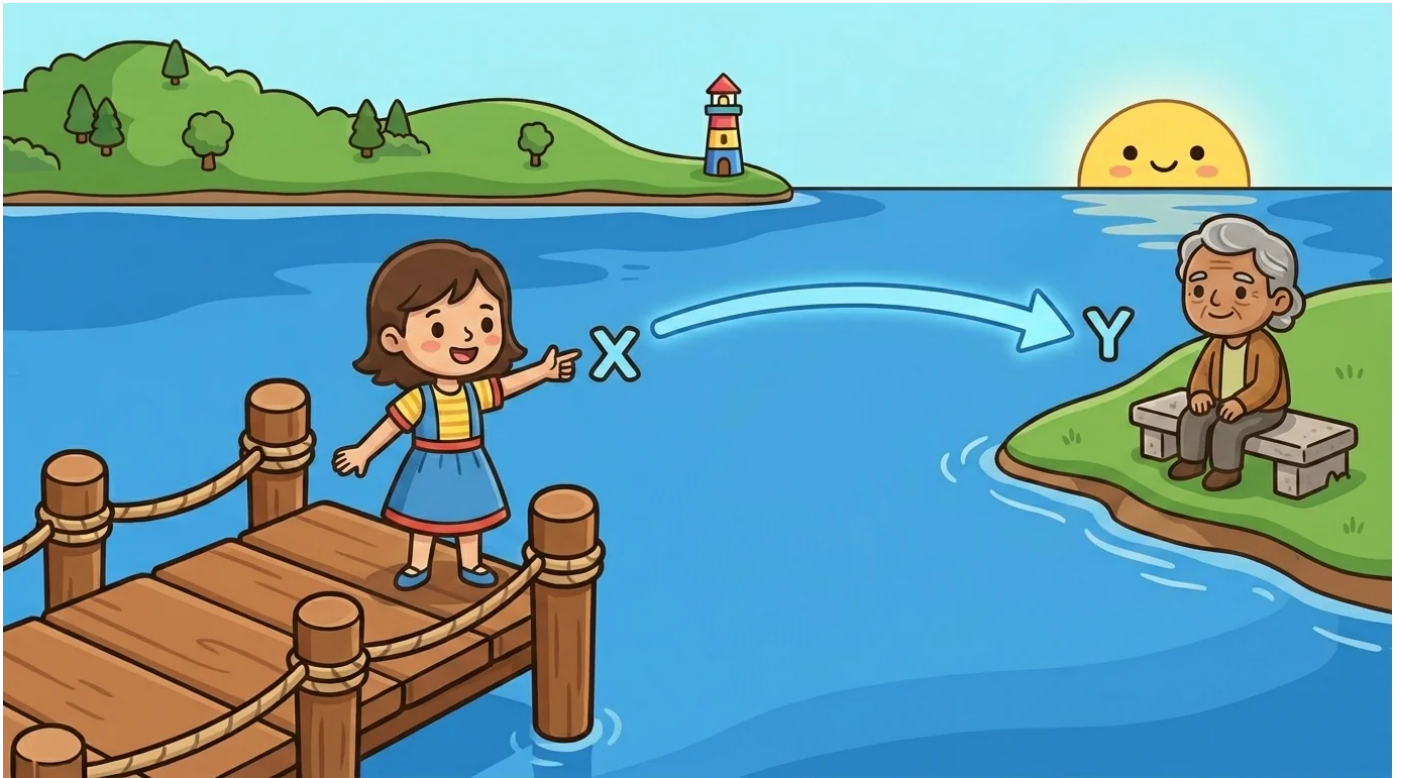
She walked to the FigureForge when she was just twelve years old. Her fur was still soft, her paws still small. The air hummed with the energy of creation.

Trope, the wise old mentor, watched her approach. Trope's eyes, deep and knowing, studied Ferry. "What is metaphor?" Trope asked, her voice like the rustling of ancient leaves.

Ferry stood tall, despite her small size. She didn't hesitate. "X IS Y. Direct comparison. The meaning ferries from one side to the other. No 'like.' No 'as.' Just identification."

Trope nodded slowly. A rare, gentle smile touched the corners of her mouth. "You are appointed," she said, and Ferry knew her life's work had begun.

Now, in her quiet workshop, Ferry often demonstrated with her toy rowboat. "Watch," she'd murmur, sometimes to a shy new student, sometimes just to herself, perfecting her technique.



She carefully placed the "TIME" label on one bench-edge. She put "RIVER" on the other.

With a steady paw, she pushed the tiny rowboat across. It carried the meaning-token, a small, smooth pebble. "Time IS a river," she explained again, her voice clear. "The boat carries the meaning from RIVER to TIME. Now TIME takes on a river's properties. It flows. It has a current. It can't be reversed." The power of that transfer always fascinated her.

She looked up, her bright, intelligent eyes serious. "I am Ferry. The primitive I teach is **metaphor**. The key move is to spot the bold claim of sameness. When you see X IS Y, and Y isn't literally X, you've found a metaphor. It's bold. It's direct. It's identification."

She was always gentle with beginners, understanding their struggles. "Don't be embarrassed if you miss a metaphor on your first read," she'd say, her voice soft and reassuring, like the river lapping the shore on a calm evening.

"Many metaphors are 'dead,'" she explained patiently. "They're so common in our language that we don't even notice them as metaphors anymore."

She picked up a small wooden table. "Think of the 'leg' of a table," she murmured, tracing its shape. "Or the 'mouth' of a river." She pointed towards the window, where the real river flowed past. "The 'face' of a clock." She tapped the clock on her wall. "All dead metaphors. We use them every day without thinking about the comparison."

"Live metaphors, though," she continued, her eyes sparkling, "the fresh ones, are a writer's deliberate choice. They jump out at you. Spotting them is the real detective work. It's where you discover the writer's cleverness and the deeper layers of meaning. That's where the fun truly begins."

**Listen along + meet more of the cast at:**



<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/figureforge/ferry>

# Hum



Hum was a small bumblebee, all plush-soft stripes of warm gold and black. He didn't have a stinger, not really. Instead, he carried a small drawing-pad everywhere, ready to sketch. He loved to capture non-human things wearing human expressions. A puffed-cheeked wind, a sea with a furrowed brow, a smiling sun, or time with a hurried stride filled his pages. Each drawing showed something without feelings acting like it had them.

This was Hum's whole world. He taught about **personification**, the skill of giving human qualities, emotions, or actions to things that aren't human. Most people use personification without even realizing it. They might say, "The wind whispers," and not think it's strange. Or, "The clock is mocking me," which is common in stories. Even a poet like Emily Dickinson wrote, "Hope is a feathered thing." Personification makes the world feel alive. It adds emotion to descriptions. Hum's job was to help students spot personification and understand why writers used it.



"The wind whispers," Hum would buzz, holding up a sketch of a gust with a mischievous grin. "The sea is angry." He'd show a drawing of waves crashing like a frustrated fist. "That's **personification**. Non-human things take on human qualities. Things that can't feel are described as feeling. Things that can't speak are described as speaking. It makes the world feel alive. It puts emotion into description."

Hum taught his students how to use personification, step by step:

First, the *definition*. Personification means giving human qualities—like emotion, action, speech, or purpose—to things that aren't human.



Next, the *detective tell*. Look for human verbs or adjectives attached to non-human nouns. If you read, "The leaves *danced*," you know leaves don't literally dance. That's personification. If "The shadow *creeps*," shadows don't actually creep. That's personification too. It's a reliable trick.

Then, the *function*. Personification makes inanimate things feel alive. It adds emotional weight to a description. An author can put feelings right into a setting, the weather, or even an object.

He showed *common forms*. Weather often gets personified: "The storm raged." Time, too: "Time crawled." Nature is another favorite: "The trees sighed." Even ideas, called abstractions, can be personified: "Fear gripped him." Parts of the body sometimes get in on the act: "Her heart sang."



Hum also explained the subtle difference between personification and anthropomorphism. Personification is usually a brief, figurative description. It's like a quick costume change for a non-human thing. Anthropomorphism is a consistent, structural choice, like Disney animal characters who always talk and act like people. Personification is figurative; anthropomorphism is structural.

Finally, Hum warned against *overuse*. Some writers personify everything. The result can feel forced or unnatural. Personification is most powerful when used carefully, for a specific effect.

Hum grew up in the meadow-village. His family had been flower-singers for generations. They were the bumblebees whose buzzing was so resonant it was said to "give voice to the flowers." Over time, they learned a valuable lesson. "Flowers don't actually sing," Hum's grandmother had told him, "but describing them as singing makes the meadow feel alive." Hum carried that lesson forward.



He remembered the day he arrived at FigureForge. He was only twelve. Trope, the old mentor, had looked at him with sharp eyes. "What is personification, young Hum?" Trope had asked. Hum hadn't hesitated. "It's when non-human things take on human qualities," he'd buzzed. "Like when the wind whispers, or the sea is angry. It animates the inanimate. It puts emotion into description." Trope had simply nodded. "You are appointed," he'd said.

In his workshop, Hum often showed his drawing-pad. "Watch," he'd say, sketching wind with puffed-cheeks. "The wind is blowing, yes. But I drew it like a person blowing through pursed lips. That's personification, visually." He'd sketch sea-with-furrowed-brow next. "The sea is choppy," he'd explain. "But I drew it angry. An author might write 'the sea is angry' instead of 'the sea is choppy.' Personification makes the reader *feel* the chop, not just see it." He'd look up, his antennae twitching. "I am Hum. The primitive I teach is **personification**. The move is to spot a human verb or quality attached to a non-human thing. When you find one, you've found me. And the author put it there to make you *feel* something."

He was gentle with new students. "Don't be embarrassed when you personify naturally," he'd say. "Everyone does it. 'The clock is mocking me.' 'My phone hates me today.' We personify because it feels accurate emotionally, even when it's not literal."

He'd always end with his most important rule: "Detective tell: human verb plus non-human noun equals personification. Reliable."

**Listen along + meet more of the cast at:**



<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/figureforge/hum>

# Knot



Knot was a small octopus-tween. His head was soft and bulbous, a warm purple color. Eight friendly arms, not scary tentacles, waved gently as he moved. He carried a small collection of rope-knots, each one carefully labeled. These weren't just any knots. Each one represented a famous saying, an **idiom**, whose meaning couldn't be figured out word-by-word.

Knot's cream-colored suckers clung lightly to the smooth wooden bench in his workshop. He often said, "You can't untie an idiom word-by-word." This was his favorite truth. One knot, thick and braided, had "Spill the beans" written on its tag. It meant "reveal a secret." Another, a simple loop, read "Break a leg." That one meant "good luck." A third, twisted tight, said "Cat got your tongue?" This meant "are you speechless?" The actual words didn't tell you the meaning at all. That was the whole point. Idioms were fixed phrases. Their meaning was agreed upon by everyone, not built from the individual words.



This idea was crucial. Knot taught the **idiom** primitive. These were fixed expressions. Their meaning could not be found by looking at each word separately. Most new students tried to do exactly that. They tried to understand "Break a leg" as if it meant to actually break a leg. They imagined "Spill the beans" as spilling real beans. But the meaning was conventional. Speakers of a language just agreed on it. Often, nobody even remembered how the phrase started. Idioms also changed from one language to another. English idioms rarely translated directly into Spanish, Mandarin, or Swahili. Knot's main job was to help students see idioms as a special category. He also showed them how much these phrases depended on culture.

Knot was gentle and very clear. "Fixed expressions," he would say, holding up a knot. "Their meaning isn't literal. You can't untie them word-by-word." He tapped the "Spill the beans" knot. "This has nothing to do with actual beans. And 'Break a leg' is a wish for good luck, not an injury. 'Cat got your tongue' is just asking why someone's quiet." He paused, letting his words sink in. "The words are like the knot itself. The meaning is what the knot has stood for. It's by convention, sometimes for hundreds of years."

One afternoon, a new student named Pip stumbled into Knot's workshop. Pip had bright green scales and a nervous twitch in one fin. "Hello?" Pip squeaked, looking around at the dozens of labeled knots. "Are these... fishing knots?"



Knot smiled, his purple skin rippling gently. "In a way," he said, his voice soft. "They are language knots. My name is Knot. I teach about **idioms**." He held out the "Spill the beans" knot. "Have you heard this one?"

Pip tilted their head. "Spill the beans? Like, drop them on the floor?"

Knot chuckled, a dry, rustling sound. "Exactly. That's what most people think at first. But if someone says, 'Come on, spill the beans!' they don't want you to make a mess. They want you to tell them a secret." He set the knot down. "An idiom is a fixed phrase. Its meaning is conventional. It's not built from the meanings of the individual words."



Pip looked puzzled. "So, if a phrase sounds weird literally, but everyone says it anyway... it's probably an idiom?"

"Precisely!" Knot said, his eyes brightening. "That's your first detective tell. Trust the weirdness as a signal." He picked up the "Break a leg" knot. "Take this one. It's often said to actors before a show. It means 'good luck.' Why 'break a leg'? Well, some say it comes from theater superstition. You shouldn't wish someone 'good luck' directly. Others say it's from bowing so much your legs feel broken. Many idiom origins are lost, but some are well-documented."

Knot gently moved a few knots on his bench. "My family were knot-makers for the village fishing fleet," he explained. "We lived in the tidepool-village, tying nets and rigging knots. Each knot had its own purpose and a name. My elders always taught me, 'The knot's name doesn't tell you how to tie it. You have to learn each one.' It's the same with language."

He remembered walking to FigureForge when he was twelve. Trope, the wise mentor, had asked him, "What is an idiom?" Knot had given his carefully practiced answer: "A fixed expression whose meaning isn't literal. You can't untie it word-by-word. 'Spill the beans.' 'Break a leg.' 'Cat got your tongue.' The meaning is conventional, not constructive." Trope had simply nodded. "You are appointed," he'd said. Knot had never forgotten that moment.



Now, in his own workshop, Knot showed Pip another knot. "This one — 'It's raining cats and dogs.' Doesn't mean animals are falling from the sky. It means it's raining heavily. Why? The origin is uncertain. We just know." He picked up a different knot. "'Cost an arm and a leg.' Means expensive. It doesn't involve actual body parts. Just convention."

"So, I just have to memorize them?" Pip asked, a little discouraged.

"You learn them," Knot corrected gently. "And you recognize them. The move is: recognize the weird phrase, look it up, and accept the conventional meaning. You don't have to derive idioms. You have to learn them." He paused, looking at Pip with kind eyes. "And here's something important. If someone doesn't know an idiom you use, that's fine. They might be from a different culture, or they might be learning English."

He held up a knot labeled "Pulling someone's leg." "This is a US idiom. It means to tease someone playfully. But it often confuses non-native English speakers. Idioms are cultural fingerprints. Recognizing one's home culture in idioms is the same as recognizing one's home language." Knot's voice grew serious. "Don't tease anyone for missing an idiom. Idioms travel poorly; that's just how they are." He put the knot back on the bench. "When you encounter a strange-sounding phrase that keeps popping up, look for it in an idiom dictionary. If it's there, you found a Knot."

**Listen along + meet more of the cast at:**



<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/figureforge/knot>

# Mask



Mask was a fennec-fox-tween, small and warm-cream colored, with large, soft pink ears that twitched when she was thinking. She wasn't scary at all. Her most noticeable feature was a small theatrical half-mask. She could flip it in either direction. One side showed a smiling, exaggerated grin. The other side was painted with a deadpan, blank face. Sometimes she wore the mask on the side of her head. That was her way of showing you that meaning could run sideways from what you actually said.

She was deeply curious about words that didn't quite match their meaning. "The words don't match the meaning," she liked to say. "That's the whole game." Her flip-mask was the perfect tool. It showed how **hyperbole**, understatement, and irony all shared the same secret: a gap between what was said and what was truly meant.



Mask grew up in the masked-pageant village, a place where stories came alive through performance. Her family had been mask-makers for generations. They crafted special masks for the village's seasonal plays. Some masks exaggerated features, like the joy-masks with grins so wide they seemed to swallow the entire stage. Other masks were designed to hide emotions, like the smooth, deadpan faces that kept every feeling a secret. Mask learned early that the mask was one face, and the performer underneath was another. The audience had to read both to understand the story. This lesson, about the visible and the hidden, was something she carried with her.

When she was thirteen, Mask walked the long path to FigureForge. The air in Trope's office smelled of old parchment and fresh ink. Mask, small even for a fennec fox, stood straight, her ears twitching with anticipation. Trope, a tall, calm figure with spectacles perched on her nose, looked at Mask with a steady gaze.

"What is the hyperbole-understatement-irony cluster?" Trope asked, her voice soft but clear.



Mask didn't hesitate. She reached up and touched the smiling side of her mask, then the blank side. "It's when you say one thing, but you mean another," she explained. "The words don't match the meaning. Hyperbole exaggerates. Understatement minimizes. Irony flips the meaning entirely." She paused, letting the words hang in the air. "All three rely on the same thing: the literal words aren't the intended meaning. The listener has to figure out the real message from the context."

Trope nodded slowly. A small smile touched her lips. "You are appointed," she said.

In her workshop at FigureForge, Mask often demonstrated her primitive with a small group of students. Today, a badger named Pip and a squirrel named Squeak sat on cushions, watching her.

"Watch this," Mask said, holding up her flip-mask. She wore the smiling-grin side. "I have an INFINITE amount of homework. INFINITE. I will be doing it FOREVER." She paused, letting her voice echo a little. Pip and Squeak giggled.



"That's hyperbole," Mask explained. "I don't actually have an infinite amount of homework. I have, like, three worksheets. But it *feels* like infinity, doesn't it?" She tapped the mask. "It exaggerates. It makes something sound much bigger or more extreme than it really is."

Next, she flipped the mask to the deadpan side. "It's a tad warm today," she said, her voice flat. The room was actually stifling, easily a hundred degrees. Sweat beaded on Pip's brow.

"That's understatement," Mask continued. "I'm minimizing what's actually quite hot. Making it sound less important than it is. It's the opposite of hyperbole."

Then, she tilted the mask sideways on her head. The smiling grin was visible, but askew. "What a beautiful day," she said, gesturing towards the open window. Outside, rain poured down in sheets, a sudden downpour that turned the courtyard into a muddy lake.



Pip squinted at the window. "But it's raining," he said, confused.

"Exactly!" Mask said, her ears twitching. "That's irony. I said 'beautiful day,' but I meant the opposite. The listener has to understand the actual meaning from the situation." She paused, looking at Pip and Squeak. "The primitive I teach is **say-one-thing-mean-another**. The move is to spot the gap between the words and the meaning. Hyperbole, understatement, irony—they're just three different flavors of the same game."

She often reminded her students, very gently, that irony could be tricky. "Especially in text, when you can't hear someone's voice," she said. "That's why some people use a little '/s' online, like a sarcasm-mark. It signals irony when the tone is invisible." She looked at them with serious eyes. "If you're ever unsure whether a comment is ironic, it's always better to ask. Asking prevents misreading."

Mask held her flip-mask in front of her. "Think of it this way," she said. "The mask is the words you say. The face underneath is the true meaning. Both matter, even when they don't match."

**Listen along + meet more of the cast at:**



<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/figureforge/mask>

# Ripple



Ripple's workshop hummed with a quiet energy, like a beehive on a cool morning. It wasn't a loud hum, more a gentle vibration from the small, shallow pan of water on her workbench. This was her **pond-disk**, a wide, ceramic dish filled to the brim. Ripple herself was small, her skin the color of warm cream, with faint blue bands circling her long, soft legs. She wasn't spindly or spiky like some insects; her legs were chunky, almost cartoonish, made for gliding.

Her eyes, a deep, curious blue, were always fixed on the pond-disk. She loved watching the way a single drop of water could spread across the surface, creating rings that moved outward. "See?" she would murmur, leaning close. "It's like something else, but it doesn't *become* that something else." This was her favorite kind of comparison: soft, gentle, and clear. "X is LIKE Y," she often said. "Softer than a metaphor. It ripples outward without claiming identity."



Ripple taught the primitive of **simile**. Simile, she explained, was a way to compare two different things using the words "like" or "as." It was a powerful tool for making language vivid, but it always kept things separate. "Think about it," she'd tell her students, her voice calm and steady. "'Brave LIKE a lion' tells you someone is comparing. They aren't saying the person *is* a lion, literally. It's a comparison, not a merger."

In her workshop, the air smelled faintly of damp earth and clean water. She kept her tools neatly arranged: tiny pipettes, smooth pebbles, and a magnifying glass for studying the smallest ripples. For Ripple, the pond-disk was more than just a tool. It was a visual demonstration of how a comparison could spread, connecting two ideas without ever making them one. The ripple moved, but the water stayed water, and the pebble stayed a pebble.

"Watch closely," Ripple instructed one morning, her voice barely a whisper. A new student, a nervous-looking moth-teen named Flicker, leaned forward. Ripple picked up a small, polished stone. It was smooth and gray, perfectly round. She held it above the pond-disk for a moment, letting Flicker see it, then dropped it.

*Plink.*



Tiny circles appeared where the pebble met the water. They grew, expanding across the surface, reaching the edges of the ceramic dish. "That ripple," Ripple said, pointing with one soft leg, "is the comparison. It starts with the pebble—that's our X. And it moves outward, toward the edge of the pond—that's our Y."

Flicker squinted. "But the pebble doesn't turn into the edge, right?"

"Exactly!" Ripple's antennae twitched with pleasure. "The pebble is still a pebble. The edge is still the edge. They remain separate. But the ripple connects them, showing how they relate." She paused, letting the last ripple fade. "I am Ripple. The primitive I teach is **simile**. The key move is to spot 'like' or 'as.' If those words connect X to Y, you've found a simile. It's a soft comparison. The terms stay separate."

Ripple had grown up in the Still-Pond Village, a place where the surface of the water was like an open book. Her family had been "ripple-readers" for generations. They were the pond-skaters who could tell if a storm was brewing, or if guests were arriving, just by watching the patterns on the pond. They learned that ripples carried information across the surface, but never changed the pond's identity. Ripple carried that lesson deep inside her.



She remembered the day she walked to FigureForge, barely twelve cycles old. Trope, the great mentor, had asked her, "What is simile?" Ripple had stood tall, her voice clear despite her trembling legs. "X is LIKE Y. It's a softer comparison. The two terms stay separate; the comparison ripples between them. 'Like' or 'as' are the signal-flags. If you see those words, you've found a simile." Trope had simply nodded. "You are appointed," he said. And that was that.

Now, she taught others the same clarity. "The words 'like' or 'as' are your signal-flags," she explained to Flicker. "They are the tell. You can't miss them." She wrote on a small slate:

- *Form*: X is LIKE Y. Or X is AS [quality] AS Y.
- *Tell*: The words "like" or "as" make it a simile. Full stop.

"These words are like little beacons," she continued, "shining a light on the comparison. They tell you, 'Hey, something is being compared here, but it's not the same thing.'"



She also taught the function of simile. "It gives you a vivid comparison without making a bold, absolute claim," Ripple said. "Quick like a fox' is a simile. It shows speed and cunning. But 'she is a fox' is a metaphor. That's a much stronger, more direct statement. Both are figurative, meaning they aren't literal. But the boldness differs."

Sometimes, students worried about getting it perfect. "What if a sentence feels like both?" Flicker asked, chewing on an antenna.

Ripple smiled gently. "Don't worry too much about perfection," she advised. "Some sentences can feel like they blend a bit. Many writers do that. What truly matters is whether 'like' or 'as' appears. If those words are there, connecting the two ideas, then you've found a simile." She paused, letting the thought settle. "The detective tell — 'like' or 'as' — is reliable. Spot them, and you've found me."

She often reminded her students, "Don't be surprised when similes feel less vivid than metaphors. They're meant to be softer. Metaphor says 'time IS a river' — that's a bold claim. Simile says 'time IS LIKE a river' — it's a comparison without identification. Both are powerful, just in different ways." Her pond-disk shimmered, a silent testament to the gentle power of connection, without merging.

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<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/figureforge/ripple>

# Twin



Twin arrived in the workshop like a perfectly rehearsed act. Two finch-tweens, no older than twelve, stepped in unison. One wore warm amber feathers with a cream belly. The other, an exact mirror, had a cream back and an amber belly. They moved as one, their tiny feet hitting the floor at the same instant. Even their heads tilted at the same angle, as if controlled by a single, invisible string. They were **Twin**, two characters acting as one primitive.

They were *two-but-one*, always curious about how things fit together. They loved to find patterns, especially those that matched. Their favorite phrase, spoken in perfect chorus, was: "X is to Y as A is to B." This wasn't just a saying; it was the key to understanding them. Their mirrored colors and synchronized movements weren't just for show. They were a physical example of how two different things could share the exact same structure.

When Twin taught, they didn't just talk about the lesson. They *became* the lesson. One finch would sing a phrase, and the other would answer with a mirrored version. This wasn't just a trick; it was their way of showing **analogy**.

Most people thought analogy was just another word for metaphor or simile. But Twin knew better. They knew the difference was crucial. A metaphor might say, "The moon is a pearl." A simile might say, "The moon is *like* a pearl." Both compare two objects. But an **analogy** compares *relationships*.



"Think of it this way," Twin chirped, one finch starting, the other finishing the sentence. "Bird is to sky as fish is to water."

They paused, letting the words hang in the air. "The relationship between the bird and the sky is 'lives in and moves through.' The relationship between the fish and the water is *also* 'lives in and moves through.' See?" They gestured with a synchronized flutter of wings. "We're not saying a bird *is* a fish. We're mapping the *relationship*."

This kind of thinking showed up everywhere. You could find analogies in tricky standardized tests, where they wanted to see if you could spot the hidden connections. Scientists used them to explain complex ideas. Lawyers built arguments with them. Twin's whole purpose was to make this parallel structure visible. They wanted everyone to see how relationships could be mapped, not just objects.

"X is to Y as A is to B," Twin repeated, their voices a single, clear chime. "This is a parallel structure. It maps a relationship across pairs. Hot is to cold as wet is to dry. The teacher is to the student as the doctor is to the patient. Always pairs. Always relationships. Always mappings."

Twin had a careful method for teaching **analogy**.



First, they showed the *form*. "X:Y::A:B," they wrote on a small whiteboard, one finch holding the marker, the other guiding its hand. "You read it as 'X is to Y as A is to B.' Sometimes you'll see the colons, sometimes a full sentence."

Next, they explained *what's mapped*. "It's not the individual objects," they chirped. "Not X, Y, A, or B alone. It's the *relationship* between X and Y that maps to the relationship between A and B." They drew a line connecting X and Y, then another connecting A and B, then an arrow between the two lines.

Then came the *detective approach*. "Look for two pairs," they instructed. "Two pairs where the *same* relationship holds true. Or, just look for that 'X is to Y as A is to B' structure."

They offered *types of relationships* to look for. "Is it part-to-whole? Like a finger to a hand? Or cause-to-effect? Like rain to puddle? Maybe function-to-tool? Like a painter to a brush? There are many possibilities." They listed a few more, their voices a soft, rhythmic chant.

They also showed how to *use analogy in argument*. "The economy is to a country as health is to a body," Twin stated. "Both need careful attention. See how that makes a point about countries?" It was a powerful way to persuade.



Finally, they explained how this connected to other subjects. "Analogical reasoning," they said, using a slightly more formal tone, "is part of how we prove things in math and science. Our 'parallel relationships' idea supports the way they work to prove things."

Twin grew up in the songbird village, a place where finches sang in pairs. Their family had been the village's official song-pair-singers for generations. Their songs always followed a parallel structure: one bird sang a phrase, and the other answered with a mirrored phrase. They learned, over many years, that "the parallel structure *is* the song." Twin carried that lesson forward.

When they arrived at FigureForge at twelve, Trope, the mentor, had asked a simple question. "What is analogy?"

Twin, in perfect chorus, answered without hesitation. "X is to Y as A is to B. Parallel structure. Relationship mapped across pairs. The mapping is the relationship, not the objects."

Trope smiled. "You are appointed," he said.



In their workshop, the two Twins often gave live demonstrations. One would face left, the other right. Then, both would raise their right wings. "See?" they chirped. "Mirror. Same pattern, different positions. That's **analogy**."

They sat down at two parallel chairs. "Cat is to kitten as dog is to puppy," one finch began. The other finished, "The relationship – adult-to-juvenile – is the same. The animals themselves differ."

They wrote on a board: "Doctor:patient :: teacher:student." Then, in chorus, they explained, "Both relationships show a care-giver and a recipient. Different domains, but the same structure."

They turned to face their audience. "We are Twin. The primitive we teach is **analogy**. The move is to map a relationship, not just objects. When you see X:Y::A:B and the relationships match, you've found us."

They were gentle teachers. "Don't get confused by the analogies you see on standardized tests," they advised, their voices soft and reassuring. "They're just testing if you can identify the relationship. Look at the *first* pair. Name the relationship in your head. Then, check which of the options has the *same* relationship. That's the trick."

Twin saw in twos. Twin thought in pairs. Parallel was the whole form.

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