Similes

VOCABULARY PRACTICE

UPPER-INTERMEDIATE | B2

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1 Match each figurative simile with its meaning.

1 like a moth to a flame	____	a extremely difficult to locate
2 like watching paint dry	____	b very similar in appearance or behaviour
3 like finding a needle in a haystack	____	c refreshingly new or different
4 like walking on eggshells	____	d unable to feel comfortable in a situation
5 like a breath of fresh air	____	e irresistibly attracted despite possible danger
6 like water off a duck's back	____	f having no effect on someone
7 like two peas in a pod	____	g extremely boring to observe
8 like a fish out of water	____	h acting carefully to avoid upsetting someone

2 Complete the figurative comparisons.

duck's | eggshells | flame | fresh | haystack | paint | peas | water

1 drawn to danger like a moth to a _____

2 as exciting as watching _____ dry

3 like finding a needle in a _____

4 feel as if you are walking on _____

5 come as a breath of _____ air

6 let criticism run off like water off a _____ back

7 look like two _____ in a pod

8 feel like a fish out of _____

3 Choose the simile whose tone and meaning fit the context.

1 Finding one error in a million lines was *like finding a needle in a haystack / like two peas in a pod*.

2 The informal workshop was *a breath of fresh air / water off a duck's back* after hours of lectures.

3 At the diplomatic dinner, I felt *like a fish out of water / like a moth to a flame*.

4 Because the manager was irritable, staff were *walking on eggshells / watching paint dry*.

5 The twins even laugh in the same way: *like two peas in a pod / like water off a duck's back*.

6 Negative reviews never trouble her: *like water off a duck's back / like a breath of fresh air*.

7 Despite repeated losses, he returned to the casino *like a moth to a flame / like a fish out of water*.

8 The three-hour delay was *like watching paint dry / a breath of fresh air*.

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4 Complete the review with phrases from the box.

breath of fresh air | duck's back | eggshells | fish out of water | moth to a flame | needle in a haystack | paint dry | two peas in a pod

The two lead actors are like **1** _____, so their rivalry is never convincing. The newcomer, however, is a **2** _____. Her character first feels like a **3** _____ in the city. Searching for her missing brother is like finding a **4** _____. She is drawn to one suspect like a **5** _____, while every conversation with him feels like walking on **6** _____. Unfortunately, the middle section is like watching **7** _____. Criticism seems to roll off the director like water off a **8** _____.

5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

When a familiar simile still works

Conventional similes are sometimes dismissed as clichés, yet familiarity can be useful. A recognised comparison gives readers an immediate frame and keeps a fast-moving text economical. Its weakness is predictability: it may add no fresh insight. Context can revive it through reversal, precision or an unexpected detail. Writers should test both aptness and tone. Like a moth to a flame implies attraction and danger, so it would distort a situation involving only harmless curiosity.

1 Why can familiarity be useful? _____

2 How does a known simile help a fast text? _____

3 What is its main weakness? _____

4 Name two ways context can revive it. _____

5 What two qualities should writers test? _____

6 Why would moth to a flame distort harmless curiosity? ____

6 Rewrite using the expression in capitals.

1 The criticism had no effect on him. **DUCK'S BACK** _____

2 She felt completely uncomfortable at the ceremony. **FISH** _

3 We had to speak very carefully around him. **EGGSHELLS** _

4 The new colleague was refreshingly different. **FRESH AIR** __

OVER TO YOU

Write a **120-150 word** review of a film, book, event or experience. Use similes to evaluate atmosphere, characters and pace.

[ ] Use at least seven target similes. [ ] Control positive and negative connotations. [ ] Explain rather than decorate.

Similes

ANSWER KEY

1 Figurative similes

1 **e** 2 **g** 3 **a** 4 **h** 5 **c** 6 **f** 7 **b** 8 **d**

2 Figurative comparisons

1 **flame** 2 **paint** 3 **haystack** 4 **eggshells** 5 **fresh** 6 **duck's** 7 **peas** 8 **water**

3 Tone and meaning

1 **like finding a needle in a haystack** 2 **a breath of fresh air** 3 **like a fish out of water** 4 **walking on eggshells**
5 **like two peas in a pod** 6 **like water off a duck's back** 7 **like a moth to a flame** 8 **like watching paint dry**

4 Review

1 **two peas in a pod** 2 **breath of fresh air** 3 **fish out of water** 4 **needle in a haystack**
5 **moth to a flame** 6 **eggshells** 7 **paint dry** 8 **duck's back**

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 It provides an immediate frame. 2 It communicates economically. 3 Predictability/no fresh insight.
4 Any two: reversal, precision, unexpected detail. 5 Aptness and tone. 6 It implies danger as well as attraction.

6 Rewriting - possible answers

1 The criticism was like water off a **duck's back**. 2 She felt like a **fish out of water** at the ceremony. 3 We were **walking on eggshells** around him. 4 The new colleague was a **breath of fresh air**.

Over to you: Answers will vary. Check aptness, tone and the evaluative purpose of each comparison.