

If you only have 30 minutes ...

A metaphor is a word or phrase that serves as a symbol of something. For example, an hourglass can serve as a metaphor for the passage of time. Students of American society used to use the metaphor that the United States was a melting pot. More recently, the metaphor of choice has been a salad bowl. In a similar way, “Palermo’s Palimpsest Roads” uses different metaphors to describe the coexistence of cultures. These include “historical echo chamber,” “brain” and “palimpsest.” Here are the metaphors in the context of the article.

- “The Mediterranean is not an empty space filled with water. It is like a brain full of ideas
- ... Palermo, a historical echo chamber of many different cultures that give the city a unique character
- [King Roger II’s] court became a crucible of the cultures in the surrounding area.
- Located in downtown Palermo, [the church of Santa Maria is] a testament to architecture palimpsest.

Working alone or in small groups, consider these four metaphors used in the article to describe a multicultural society. With your group discuss, or if working individually, jot down each metaphor, and apply each to one or more examples of multiculturalism in the article. Thinking of the following questions below, address how each metaphor affects your understanding of an aspect of Palermo’s multiculturalism.

- How does thinking about a historical echo chamber shape your understanding of Palermo?
- How does thinking about a brain affect your understanding of the cultures of Palermo?
- How does thinking about Palermo as a palimpsest help you understand its architecture?
- How does thinking about King Roger II’s court as a crucible help you understand architecture?

In other words, how does the choice of metaphor affect your understanding of multiculturalism?

Discuss or think about your insights about how each metaphor shapes your understanding of a multicultural society. Then apply the American metaphors for multiculturalism—melting pot and salad bowl—to the examples in the article you just reviewed. How do the two terms affect your understanding of Palermo’s multiculturalism?

To bring the lesson together, discuss or think about this quote from the article: “Culture can reach what politics cannot.”

- What do you think the quote means?
- How has Palermo thrived as a multicultural city?
- How might that be different from the coexistence of cultures in the realm of politics?
- What are some examples of how policies can enhance cultural coexistence?
- What are some examples of how such policies can make coexistence more difficult?

Common Core Standard(s) Met:

CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

L.9-10.5A Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

RI.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).