

Grade 6 Playlist: Determining Figurative Meanings

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.4*:

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

Welcome

Shawn has an e-mail friend who lives across the country. Even though they have never met in person, they have been writing to each other weekly for over two years. Shawn likes the fact that he can talk to his friend about personal matters that he is not comfortable discussing with his school friends, such as his feelings when he did not make the middle school academic team. "Hey, it's all right," his friend replied. "I applied to join the honor society last year, and I didn't make it. Receiving that rejection letter cut like a knife. I was a walking rain cloud for a week. But it's not going to stop me from applying again this year!" His friend's response has Shawn scratching his head. What exactly did he mean when he said it *cut like a knife*? Or that he was a *walking rain cloud*? Shawn loves his friend's creativity with words. But sometimes he has trouble figuring out what he is trying to say!

Objective

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- determine figurative meanings as they are used in a text.

Review

Key Terms

- **Figurative language** is language that uses words and phrases in nonliteral ways. Instead of stating facts the way they are, figurative language exaggerates or alters the definitions of words.
 - **Personification** is a type of figurative language that uses human characteristics to describe nonhuman objects, such as animals, plants, or nonliving things.
 - **Simile** and **metaphor** are both types of figurative language that compare two things that are not alike are in order to make the reader notice similarities he or she might not have seen. Similes use the words *like* or *as*, while metaphors do not.

Watch!

Watch these videos to learn more about different types of figurative language:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZHKsTN2lc4>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tr0-kMIWJgw>



Exploring the Standard

This playlist discusses ways to determine the meaning of figurative language as it is used in a text. Figurative language adds color and interest to a text by using words in ways that may be unfamiliar. By examining the text, a reader can determine what these words and phrases mean, even if their meanings are not clear right away.

Example

The selection below is from *Call of the Wild* by Jack London. This book tells the story of Buck, a sled dog who lives in Alaska during the Klondike Gold Rush of the 1890s. In this selection, figurative language is used to creatively describe the story's setting, the Alaskan wilderness. While reading, try to determine the meanings of the underlined words and phrases.

¹When Buck earned sixteen hundred dollars in five minutes for John Thornton, he made it possible for his master to pay off certain debts and to journey with his partners into the East after a fabled lost mine, the history of which was as old as the history of the country. Many men had sought it; few had found it; and more than a few there were who had never returned from the quest. This lost mine was steeped in tragedy and shrouded in mystery. No one knew of the first man. The oldest tradition stopped before it got back to him. From the beginning there had been an ancient and ramshackle cabin. Dying men had sworn to it, and to the mine the site of which it marked, clinging their testimony with nuggets that were unlike any known grade of gold in the Northland.

²But no living man had looted this treasure house, and the dead were dead; wherefore John Thornton and Pete and Hans, with Buck and half a dozen other dogs, faced into the East on an unknown trail to achieve where men and dogs as good as themselves had failed. They sledged seventy miles up the Yukon, swung to the left into the Stewart River, passed the Mayo and the McQuestion, and held on until the Stewart itself became a streamlet, threading the upstanding peaks which marked the backbone of the continent....

³The months came and went, and back and forth they twisted through the uncharted vastness, where no men were and yet where men had been if the Lost Cabin were true. They went across divides in summer blizzards, shivered under the midnight sun on naked mountains between the timber line and the eternal snows, dropped into summer valleys amid swarming gnats and flies, and in the shadows of glaciers picked strawberries and flowers as ripe and fair as any the Southland could boast. In the fall of the year they penetrated a weird lake country, sad and silent, where wild fowl had been, but where then there was no life nor sign of life—only the blowing of chill winds, the forming of ice in sheltered places, and the melancholy rippling of waves on lonely beaches.

These phrases include words that are used differently than in the definitions found in a dictionary. So, what do they mean?

- *a fabled lost mine*: What is a fable? It is a fictional story that provides readers with a lesson or a moral. Fables often include characters who are animals or who have supernatural powers. So, to describe something as “fabled” would suggest that many stories had been told about it.
- *steeped in tragedy and shrouded in mystery*: What does it mean for something to be steeped? Think about how a tea bag is steeped in hot water. In order to make a strong cup of tea, the bag has to sit in the water for a long time. The fabled lost mine has been the site of tragedy so great that the story has been shared many times over the years. In other words, the tragedy of the mine is well known.

