

Grades 9–10 Playlist: Figures of Speech

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.5.A*:

- Interpret figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze their role in the text.

Welcome

Writers often use figures of speech in order to provide emphasis and to bring freshness to common phrases or images. Figures of speech can also make writing creative and fun to read. If all writers used the same words to explain feelings or images, then literature would not be an avenue for exploration, creativity, or imagination, which have been the foundations of literature throughout history and make it important as an art.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- analyze and interpret effective figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in literature.
- identify and understand the roles of figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in a text.

Review

Key Terms

- **Figures of speech** are rhetorical devices and expressive uses of language in which the words are not taken in their literal senses. Figures of speech provide emphasis or create other meaningful effects.
- A **euphemism** is a mild, indirect, or vague expression that is substituted for an expression that is deemed offensive or harsh. For example, *restroom* is a euphemism for *toilet*.
- An **oxymoron** is an expression used when two seemingly contradictory words combine for a specific or meaningful purpose.
- A **paradox**, however, is an absurd or illogical conclusion developed through phrases and sentences.
- Figures of speech are often used to avoid a **cliché**, which is a phrase or opinion that has become overused. Clichés can lack creativity or cleverness.

Exploring the Standard

When writers are looking for new ways to explain or depict a familiar image, feeling, or expression, they often use figures of speech. Most writers try to avoid sounding cliché or boring, so they use common figures of speech like similes, metaphors, personification, and hyperbole to create fresh, new ways of expressing ideas. Writers also experiment with other ways of comparison like euphemism and oxymoron. The effect of using such devices can culminate in comedy, philosophical conundrum, or emphasis.



Watch!

The following video shows how euphemisms are used to replace common harsh phrases or ideas:

- <http://www.sophia.org/tutorials/euphemisms--3>

Practice!

Complete the following activities to practice identifying figures of speech:

- <https://www.opened.com/question/which-of-the-following-sentences-contains-an/1069691>
- <https://www.opened.com/question/select-all-the-sentences-that-contain-an-example/1069693>

A Closer Look: The Role of Euphemism and Oxymoron in a Text

Figures of speech play an important role in expressing the tone of a text while also enriching the text's meaning. Euphemisms in particular can be used to soften harsh, gross, or offensive language when a writer or speaker wants to keep a consistently polite or respectful tone. Through an elevated use of language and impressive wordplay, writers also use euphemism and oxymoron to emphasize a point or idea.

Shakespeare, for example, one of history's favorite poets and playwrights, who is often credited with being witty, funny, and awfully tragic all in the same piece of work, uses oxymoron to great effect. One of the most famous examples of oxymoron can be found in his play *Romeo and Juliet*, the classic love story that influenced many love stories thereafter.

Read the following excerpt from Act 1, Scene 1, in which the lead character, Romeo, expresses his emotional conflict at not being able to be with the woman he loves, Juliet, because their families are fierce enemies and would not tolerate such a union. Some examples of oxymoron are in red.

Example 1

¹Why, then, O brawling love! O loving hate!

O anything, of nothing first create!

³O heavy lightness! serious vanity!

Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms!

⁵Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health!

Still-waking sleep, that is not what it is!

⁷This love feel I, that feel no love in this.

Dost thou not laugh?



Teaching Notes: Figures of Speech

The goal of L.9-10.5.A is for students to interpret figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze their role in the text. Although the playlist focuses on euphemism and oxymoron, teachers can expand the playlist to interpret and analyze other figures of speech. The following activities, writing prompts, and additional resources contain ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classroom and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Activities

1. Have students get into groups of three or four, and have each group write a list of common clichés they’ve encountered through literature used in class or in their everyday lives. Examples could include “Actions speak louder than words,” “The grass is always greener on the other side,” or “Only time will tell.” Then, have groups use figurative language to create a new phrase that maintains the meaning of the cliché. Lastly, come together as a class and have groups recite their newly formed phrases.
2. Assign students a poem from classical literature, and have them identify as many figures of speech as they can. These devices can include, but are not limited to, metaphor, simile, oxymoron, paradox, and personification. Consider starting with one or more of Shakespeare’s sonnets, as Elizabethan and Victorian language often relied on such devices to enhance poetics and tone.

Writing Prompts

1. Choose common objects, activities, or concepts (e.g., a bedroom, a basement, a workout) that readily lend themselves to being euphemized. Then have students generate two or three different euphemisms for that item. Ask students to write a short story that incorporates the euphemisms.
2. As a post-activity reflection, have students free-write a response that details the experience of making up their own euphemisms and using figurative language in general. How did the figurative language change the content, tone, or meaning? What benefit does figurative language provide for writers and for literature?

Additional Resources

Consider these additional resources when teaching L.9-10.5.A:

- **“Shakespeare’s Sonnets”**: This web page provides an index of Shakespeare’s sonnets by number: <http://poetry.eserver.org/sonnets/>
- **“Purging Clichés, Redundancies, and Euphemisms”**: This article discusses how to avoid clichés and redundancies: <http://schoolvideonews.com/Broadcast-Journalism/Purging-Cliches-Redundancies-and-Euphemisms>

