

Grades 11–12 Playlist: Impact of Figurative Language on Meaning and Tone

Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4:

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

Welcome

How does word choice contribute to the meaning and tone of a text? More specifically, how does figurative language contribute to the meaning and tone of a text?

In this playlist, students will practice identifying several common types of figurative language and learn to think critically about how figurative language and descriptive language impact the tone of a passage and help to shape a text.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- identify several common forms of figurative language.
- analyze how an author's choices about language shape a text.

Review

Key Terms

- **Figurative language** is the term applied to language that has a meaning other than its most obvious or literal one. Similes and metaphors are types of figurative language, as are hyperbole, personification, and metonymy.
- The **emotional tone** of a passage is the mood it embodies and evokes.

Exploring the Standard

Writers use figurative language to communicate certain elements of a story such as emotion and theme. Figurative language can take many forms, and the way an author chooses to use it affects the shape the piece takes. For example, if an author chooses to use hyperbole, or exaggerated language, this will often have a comic effect. Including an extended metaphor, however, can make a piece of writing seem more serious because extended metaphors are often associated with highly stylized and poetic texts.



Watch!

As a start, watch this video about how imagery adds to a text. Pay particular attention to how Christopher Hanlon explains the way that imagery works to set tone and create emotional associations in literature.

- <http://www.watchknowlearn.org/Video.aspx?VideoID=41458>

A Closer Look: Figurative Language and Meaning

The following selection is from “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” by Washington Irving. While reading, look for instances of descriptive and figurative language and begin to think about how they contribute to the meaning of the story.

The gallant Ichabod now spent at least an extra half hour at his toilet, brushing and furbishing up his best, and indeed only suit of rusty black, and arranging his locks by a bit of broken looking-glass that hung up in the schoolhouse. That he might make his appearance before his mistress in the true style of a cavalier, he borrowed a horse from the farmer with whom he was domiciliated, a choleric old Dutchman of the name of Hans Van Ripper, and, thus gallantly mounted, issued forth like a knight-errant in quest of adventures. But it is meet I should, in the true spirit of romantic story, give some account of the looks and equipments of my hero and his steed. The animal he bestrode was a broken-down plow-horse, that had outlived almost everything but its viciousness. He was gaunt and shagged, with a ewe neck, and a head like a hammer; his rusty mane and tail were tangled and knotted with burs; one eye had lost its pupil, and was glaring and spectral, but the other had the gleam of a genuine devil in it. Still he must have had fire and mettle in his day, if we may judge from the name he bore of Gunpowder. He had, in fact, been a favorite steed of his master's, the choleric Van Ripper, who was a furious rider, and had infused, very probably, some of his own spirit into the animal; for, old and broken-down as he looked, there was more of the lurking devil in him than in any young filly in the country.

The narrator uses descriptive and figurative language to introduce the reader to the main character of the story, Ichabod. The language in blue creates a picture of Ichabod that changes as the passage develops. Initially, Irving uses the word “gallant” and employs a simile to compare Ichabod to a knight-errant, but he also uses descriptive language like “suit of rusty black” and “broken looking-glass” to paint a picture of a poor knight-like character. At this point in the passage, Ichabod appears to be the kind of protagonist who will prove to share the qualities associated with a knight, like courage and nobility, and use these qualities to overcome the hardships brought on by his penurious state. A little less than halfway through the passage, however, the language and subject begin to shift. Now a horse is being described, but there is something sinister about this horse, conveyed through phrases, such as “glaring and spectral” and “lurking devil.” This shift in language helps to develop the meaning of the story because the language describes something dark and potentially dangerous. So the shift alludes to a darker meaning that will slowly be unveiled as the story progresses.

Practice!

Pay attention to imagery and figurative language while reading the above passage. What similes and metaphors are used? Are there instances of similes and metonymies, for example? How do they function in the passage?



In addition, fill out this chart, describing what kind of figurative language the example is and its purpose pertaining to the story.

and a head like a hammer	
there was more of the lurking devil in him than in any young filly in the country.	
Still he must have had fire and mettle in his day	

Watch!

For details about metaphors, watch this video:

- <http://ed.ted.com/lessons/jane-hirshfield-the-art-of-the-metaphor>

A Closer Look: Figurative Language and Emotional Tone

Authors make choices about how to use language to create an emotional tone. The emotional tone of a passage is the mood it embodies and evokes. The passage from “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” has a humorous and a foreboding tone. The following excerpt develops a foreboding tone.

The immediate cause, however, of the prevalence of supernatural stories in these parts, was doubtless owing to the vicinity of Sleepy Hollow. There was a contagion in the very air that blew from that haunted region; it breathed forth an atmosphere of dreams and fancies infecting all the land. Several of the Sleepy Hollow people were present at Van Tassel’s, and, as usual, were doling out their wild and wonderful legends. Many dismal tales were told about funeral trains, and mourning cries and wailings heard and seen about the great tree where the unfortunate Major André was taken, and which stood in the neighborhood. Some mention was made also of the woman in white, that haunted the dark glen at Raven Rock, and was often heard to shriek on winter nights before a storm, having perished there in the snow. The chief part of the stories, however, turned upon the favorite spectre of Sleepy Hollow, the Headless Horseman, who had been heard several times of late, patrolling the country; and, it was said, tethered his horse nightly among the graves in the churchyard.

In this excerpt, the narrator describes old ghost stories that terrify the villagers, evoking a sense of fear and foreboding. For example, the sentence “There was a contagion in the very air that blew from that haunted region” conveys a sense of impending doom. The word *contagion* means infection, so Irving is suggesting that something vile is afoot. There are several other examples of figurative and descriptive language that, put together, build up a sense of fear and suspense.



Practice!

Fill out this chart and explain what type of figurative language each phrase exemplifies and how it adds to the tone of the excerpt.

it breathed forth an atmosphere of dreams and fancies infecting all the land	
and mourning cries and wailings heard and seen about the great tree where the unfortunate Major André was taken, and which stood in the neighborhood.	
was often heard to shriek on winter nights before a storm,	

Listen!

To listen to “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” visit:

- <https://librivox.org/the-legend-of-sleepy-hollow-by-washington-irving/>

Applying the Standard

Analyze the way Irving’s use of language in this passage is similar to his use of language in the previous passage. What is the mood, or emotional tone, of this passage and how is it communicated?

¹As Ichabod jogged slowly on his way, his eye, ever open to every symptom of culinary abundance, ranged with delight over the treasures of jolly autumn. On all sides he beheld vast store of apples; some hanging in oppressive opulence on the trees; some gathered into baskets and barrels for the market; others heaped up in rich piles for the cider-press. Farther on he beheld great fields of Indian corn, with its golden ears peeping from their leafy coverts, and holding out the promise of cakes and hasty-pudding; and the yellow pumpkins lying beneath them, turning up their fair round bellies to the sun, and giving ample prospects of the most luxurious of pies; and anon he passed the fragrant buckwheat fields breathing the odor of the beehive, and as he beheld them, soft anticipations stole over his mind of dainty slapjacks, well buttered, and garnished with honey or treacle, by the delicate little dimpled hand of Katrina Van Tassel.

²Thus feeding his mind with many sweet thoughts and “sugared suppositions,” he journeyed along the sides of a range of hills which look out upon some of the goodliest scenes of the mighty Hudson. The sun gradually wheeled his broad disk down in the west. The wide bosom of the Tappan Zee lay motionless and glassy, excepting that here and there a gentle undulation waved and prolonged the blue shadow of the distant mountain. A few amber clouds floated in the sky, without a breath of air to move them. The horizon was of a fine golden tint, changing gradually into a pure apple green, and from that into the deep blue of the mid-heaven. A slanting ray lingered on the woody crests of the precipices that overhung some parts of the river, giving greater depth to the dark gray and purple of their rocky sides. A sloop was loitering in the distance, dropping slowly down with the tide, her sail hanging uselessly against the mast; and as the reflection of the sky gleamed along the still water, it seemed as if the vessel was suspended in the air.



Self-Check: RL.11-12.4

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

“Where I Lived, and What I Lived For”

Henry David Thoreau

- 1 . . . When first I took up my abode in the woods, that is, began to spend my nights as well as days there, which, by accident, was on Independence Day, or the Fourth of July, 1845, my house was not finished for winter, but was merely a defence against the rain, without plastering or chimney, the walls being of rough, weather-stained boards, with wide chinks, which made it cool at night. The upright white hewn studs and freshly planed door and window casings gave it a clean and airy look, especially in the morning, when its timbers were saturated with dew, so that I fancied that by noon some sweet gum would exude from them. To my imagination it retained throughout the day more or less of this auroral character, reminding me of a certain house on a mountain which I had visited a year before. This was an airy and unplastered cabin, fit to entertain a travelling god, and where a goddess might trail her garments. The winds which passed over my dwelling were such as sweep over the ridges of mountains, bearing the broken strains, or celestial parts only, of terrestrial music. The morning wind forever blows, the poem of creation is uninterrupted; but few are the ears that hear it. Olympus is but the outside of the earth everywhere.
- 2 The only house I had been the owner of before, if I except a boat, was a tent, which I used occasionally when making excursions in the summer, and this is still rolled up in my garret; but the boat, after passing from hand to hand, has gone down the stream of time. With this more substantial shelter about me, I had made some progress toward settling in the world. This frame, so slightly clad, was a sort of crystallization around me, and reacted on the builder. It was suggestive somewhat as a picture in outlines. I did not need to go outdoors to take the air, for the atmosphere within had lost none of its freshness. It was not so much within doors as behind a door where I sat, even in the rainiest weather. The Harivansa says, “An abode without birds is like a meat without seasoning.” Such was not my abode, for I found myself suddenly neighbor to the birds; not by having imprisoned one, but having caged myself near them. I was not only nearer to some of those which commonly frequent the garden and the orchard, but to those smaller and more thrilling songsters of the forest which never, or rarely, serenade a villager—the wood thrush, the veery, the scarlet tanager, the field sparrow, the whip-poor-will, and many others.
- 3 I was seated by the shore of a small pond, about a mile and a half south of the village of Concord and somewhat higher than it, in the midst of an extensive wood between that town and Lincoln, and about two miles south of that our only field known to fame, Concord Battle Ground; but I was so low in the woods that the opposite shore, half a mile off, like the rest, covered with wood, was my most distant horizon. For the first week, whenever I looked out on the pond it impressed me like a tarn high up on the side of a mountain, its bottom far above the surface of other lakes, and, as the sun arose, I saw it throwing off its nightly clothing of mist, and here and there, by degrees, its soft ripples or its smooth reflecting surface was revealed, while the mists, like ghosts, were stealthily withdrawing in every direction into the woods, as at the breaking up of some nocturnal conventicle. The very dew seemed to hang upon the trees later into the day than usual, as on the sides of mountains. . .



1. Read the following excerpt from the passage.

“I saw it throwing off its nightly clothing of mist, and here and there, by degrees, its soft ripples or its smooth reflecting surface was revealed, while the mists, like ghosts, were stealthily withdrawing in every direction into the woods, as at the breaking up of some nocturnal conventicle.”

What effect does the use of simile and personification have on the reader?

- A. It creates an image of peace and serenity.
- B. It suggests an impression of fearful doubt.
- C. It evokes a feeling of supernatural wonder.
- D. It emphasizes a sense of great sadness.

2. Read the following sentence from the passage.

“The upright white hewn studs and freshly planed door and window casings gave it a clean and airy look, especially in the morning, when its timbers were saturated with dew, so that I fancied that by noon some sweet gum would exude from them.”

Which word or phrase is closest in meaning to the word “hewn” as it is used in the passage?

- A. pretty
- B. snipped
- C. installed
- D. small

3. What does the author most likely mean when he says that the narrator’s boat “after passing from hand to hand, has gone down the stream of time”?
- A. It was stolen several times.
 - B. It went on a long journey.
 - C. It is no longer functional.
 - D. It is no longer with him.



Read the passage. Then answer the question.

Excerpt from *A Country Doctor*
Sarah Orne Jewett

Nan Prince is a young girl who has grown up assisting the local doctor in his work. She now wants to become a doctor herself. In this excerpt, Nan visits her aunt, Miss Nancy Prince, and her aunt's friend, Mrs. Fraley. Mrs. Fraley's daughter, Eunice, is also in the room.

...

- 1 "Nancy," said Mrs. Fraley impatiently, "I was amazed to find that there is a story going about town that your niece here is studying to be a doctor. I hope that you don't countenance any such nonsense?"
- 2 Miss Prince looked helpless and confounded, and turned her eyes toward her niece. She could only hope at such a mortifying juncture that Nan was ready to explain, or at least to shoulder the responsibility.
- 3 "Indeed she doesn't give me any encouragement, Mrs. Fraley," said Nan, fearlessly. "Only this morning she saw a work on ventilation in my room and told me it wasn't proper reading for a young woman."
- 4 "I really didn't look at the title," said Miss Prince, smiling in spite of herself.
- 5 "It doesn't seem to improve the health of you young folks because you think it necessary to become familiar with such subjects," announced the irate old lady. It was her habit to take a very slight refreshment at the usual tea hour, and supplement it by a substantial lunch at bed-time, and so now she was not only at leisure herself, but demanded the attention of her guests. She had evidently prepared an opinion, and was determined to give it. Miss Eunice grew smaller and thinner than ever, and fairly shivered with shame behind the tea-tray. She looked steadily at the big sugar-bowl, as if she were thinking whether she might creep into it and pull something over her head. She never liked an argument, even if it were a good-natured one, and always had a vague sense of personal guilt and danger.
- 6 "In my time," Mrs. Fraley continued, "it was thought proper for young women to show an interest in household affairs. When I was married it was not asked whether I was acquainted with dissecting rooms."
- ...
- 7 "I have done my best to serve God in the station to which it has pleased Him to call me," said Mrs. Fraley, stiffly. "I believe that a young man's position is very different from a girl's. To be sure, I can give my opinion that everything went better when the master workmen took apprentices to their trades, and there wasn't so much schooling. But I warn you, my dear, that your notion about studying to be a doctor has shocked me very much indeed. I could not believe my ears,—a refined girl who bears an honorable and respected name to think of being a woman doctor! If you were five years older you would never have dreamed of such a thing. It lowers the pride of all who have any affection for you. If it were not that your early life had been somewhat peculiar and most unfortunate, I should blame you more; as it is, I can but wonder at the lack of judgment in others. I shall look forward in spite of it all to seeing you happily married." To which Miss Prince assented with several decided nods.



- 8 “This is why I made up my mind to be a physician,” said the culprit; and though she had been looking down and growing more uncomfortable every moment, she suddenly gave her head a quick upward movement and looked at Mrs. Fraley frankly, with a beautiful light in her clear eyes. “I believe that God has given me a fitness for it, and that I never could do anything else half so well. Nobody persuaded me into following such a plan; I simply grew toward it. And I have everything to learn, and a great many faults to overcome, but I am trying to get on as fast as may be. I can’t be too glad that I have spent my childhood in a way that has helped me to use my gift instead of hindering it. But everything helps a young man to follow his bent; he has an honored place in society, and just because he is a student of one of the learned professions, he ranks above the men who follow other pursuits. I don’t see why it should be a shame and dishonor to a girl who is trying to do the same thing and to be of equal use in the world. God would not give us the same talents if what were right for men were wrong for women.”
- 9 “My dear, it is quite unnatural you see,” said the antagonist, impatiently. “Here you are less than twenty-five years old, and I shall hear of your being married next thing,—at least I hope I shall,—and you will laugh at all this nonsense. A woman’s place is at home. Of course I know that there have been some women physicians who have attained eminence, and some artists, and all that. But I would rather see a daughter of mine take a more retired place. The best service to the public can be done by keeping one’s own house in order and one’s husband comfortable, and by attending to those social responsibilities which come in our way. The mothers of the nation have rights enough and duties enough already, and need not look farther than their own firesides, or wish for the plaudits of an ignorant public.”
- 10 “But if I do not wish to be married, and do not think it right that I should be,” said poor Nan at last. “If I have good reasons against all that, would you have me bury the talent God has given me, and choke down the wish that makes itself a prayer every morning that I may do this work lovingly and well? It is the best way I can see of making myself useful in the world. People must have good health or they will fail of reaching what success and happiness are possible for them; and so many persons might be better and stronger than they are now, which would make their lives very different. I do think if I can help my neighbors in this way it will be a great kindness. I won’t attempt to say that the study of medicine is a proper vocation for women, only that I believe more and more every year that it is the proper study for me. It certainly cannot be the proper vocation of all women to bring up children, so many of them are dead failures at it; and I don’t see why all girls should be thought failures who do not marry. I don’t believe that half those who do marry have any real right to it, at least until people use common sense as much in that most important decision as in lesser ones. Of course we can’t expect to bring about an ideal state of society all at once; but just because we don’t really believe in having the best possible conditions, we make no effort at all toward even better ones. People ought to work with the great laws of nature and not against them.”
- 11 “You don’t know anything about it,” said Mrs. Fraley, who hardly knew what to think of this ready opposition. “You don’t know what you are talking about, Anna. You have neither age nor experience, and it is easy to see you have been associating with very foolish people. I am the last person to say that every marriage is a lucky one; but if you were my daughter I should never consent to your injuring your chances for happiness in this way.”



- 12 Nan could not help stealing a glance at poor Miss Eunice, behind her fragile battlement of the tea-set, and was deeply touched at the glance of sympathy which dimly flickered in the lonely eyes. "I do think, mother, that Anna is right about single women's having some occupation," was timidly suggested. "Of course, I mean those who have no special home duties; I can see that life would not" —
- 13 "Now Eunice," interrupted the commander in chief, "I do wish you could keep an opinion of your own. You are the last person to take up with such ideas. I have no patience with people who don't know their own minds half an hour together."

4. Which words best complete the description of the underlined phrase?

In the context of paragraph 13, the term commander in chief is **most likely** referring to _____ (Nan/ Nancy/ Eunice/ Mrs. Fraley). The connotation of the term is that the speaker _____ (wishes to join the armed services/ is very convincing when she speaks/ recently retired from military service/ has power over the person she is speaking to).



Read the passage. Then answer the question.

Excerpt from *Gulliver's Travels*
Johnathan Swift

Gulliver's Travels is a satire that makes fun of traveling adventures. The novel follows the adventures of Lemuel Gulliver.

- 1 It seems, that upon the first moment I was discovered sleeping on the ground, after my landing, the emperor had early notice of it by an express; and determined in council, that I should be tied in the manner I have related, (which was done in the night while I slept;) that plenty of meat and drink should be sent to me, and a machine prepared to carry me to the capital city.
- 2 This resolution perhaps may appear very bold and dangerous, and I am confident would not be imitated by any prince in Europe on the like occasion. However, in my opinion, it was extremely prudent, as well as generous: for, supposing these people had endeavoured to kill me with their spears and arrows, while I was asleep, I should certainly have awaked with the first sense of smart, which might so far have roused my rage and strength, as to have enabled me to break the strings wherewith I was tied; after which, as they were not able to make resistance, so they could expect no mercy.
- 3 These people are most excellent mathematicians, and arrived to a great perfection in mechanics, by the countenance and encouragement of the emperor, who is a renowned patron of learning. This prince has several machines fixed on wheels, for the carriage of trees and other great weights. He often builds his largest men of war, whereof some are nine feet long, in the woods where the timber grows, and has them carried on these engines three or four hundred yards to the sea. Five hundred carpenters and engineers were immediately set at work to prepare the greatest engine they had. It was a frame of wood raised three inches from the ground, about seven feet long, and four wide, moving upon twenty-two wheels. The shout I heard was upon the arrival of this engine, which, it seems, set out in four hours after my landing. It was brought parallel to me, as I lay. But the principal difficulty was to raise and place me in this vehicle. Eighty poles, each of one foot high, were erected for this purpose, and very strong cords, of the bigness of packthread, were fastened by hooks to many bandages, which the workmen had girt round my neck, my hands, my body, and my legs. Nine hundred of the strongest men were employed to draw up these cords, by many pulleys fastened on the poles; and thus, in less than three hours, I was raised and slung into the engine, and there tied fast. All this I was told; for, while the operation was performing, I lay in a profound sleep, by the force of that soporiferous medicine infused into my liquor. Fifteen hundred of the emperor's largest horses, each about four inches and a half high, were employed to draw me towards the metropolis, which, as I said, was half a mile distant.
- 4 About four hours after we began our journey, I awaked by a very ridiculous accident; for the carriage being stopped a while, to adjust something that was out of order, two or three of the young natives had the curiosity to see how I looked when I was asleep; they climbed up into the engine, and advancing very softly to my face, one of them, an officer in the guards, put the sharp end of his half-pike a good way up into my left nostril, which tickled my nose like a straw, and made me sneeze violently; whereupon they stole off unperceived, and it was three weeks before I knew the cause of my waking so suddenly. We made a long march the remaining part of the day, and, rested at night with five hundred guards on each side of me, half with torches, and half with bows and arrows, ready to shoot me if I should offer to stir. The next morning at



sun-rise we continued our march, and arrived within two hundred yards of the city gates about noon. The emperor, and all his court, came out to meet us; but his great officers would by no means suffer his majesty to endanger his person by mounting on my body.

- 5 At the place where the carriage stopped there stood an ancient temple, esteemed to be the largest in the whole kingdom; which, having been polluted some years before by an unnatural murder, was, according to the zeal of those people, looked upon as profane, and therefore had been applied to common use, and all the ornaments and furniture carried away. In this edifice it was determined I should lodge. The great gate fronting to the north was about four feet high, and almost two feet wide, through which I could easily creep. On each side of the gate was a small window, not above six inches from the ground: into that on the left side, the king's smith conveyed fourscore and eleven chains, like those that hang to a lady's watch in Europe, and almost this temple, on the other side of the great highway, at twenty feet distance, there was a turret at least five feet high. Here the emperor ascended, with many principal lords of his court, to have an opportunity of viewing me, as I was told, for I could not see them. It was reckoned that above a hundred thousand inhabitants came out of the town upon the same errand; and, in spite of my guards, I believe there could not be fewer than ten thousand at several times, who mounted my body by the help of ladders. But a proclamation was soon issued, to forbid it upon pain of death. When the workmen found it was impossible for me to break loose, they cut all the strings that bound me; whereupon I rose up, with as melancholy a disposition as ever I had in my life. But the noise and astonishment of the people, at seeing me rise and walk, are not to be expressed. The chains that held my left leg were about two yards long, and gave me not only the liberty of walking backwards and forwards in a semicircle, but, being fixed within four inches of the gate, allowed me to creep in, and lie at my full length in the temple as large, which were locked to my left leg with six-and-thirty padlocks.
5. Which words **best** describe the tone created by phrases such as “nine feet long,” “three or four hundred yards,” “twenty-two wheels,” and “four hours” in paragraph 3 of the passage?
- A. fearful
 - B. detached
 - C. scientific
 - D. indecisive
 - E. optimistic

