

Teaching Notes: Impact of Figurative Language on Meaning and Tone

The goal of RL.11.12.4 is for students to understand and be able to explain how **specific word choice** affects the **meaning** and **tone** of the text. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classroom as well as additional resources to peruse and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Activities:

1. Pick a grade-appropriate fictional text that has five to eight examples of figurative language. As a class, read the excerpt. Then, ask students to volunteer to identify examples of figurative language and how they affect the overall text.
2. Assign each student a tone that they should convey in an original poem. Then instruct students to share their poems with the class. Students will try to identify the tone of the poem and use supporting details to defend their response.

Writing Prompt

1. Instruct students to analyze the figurative language in a grade-appropriate short story. Students should answer the following question in an essay: How does the figurative language throughout the story build on itself to help convey the meaning of the story?

Answer Key

and a head like a hammer	Simile; this example of figurative language helps to make the horse seem intimidating.
there was more of the lurking devil in him than in any young filly in the country.	Metaphor, metonymy; this example shows there is something sinister about the horse.
Still he must have had fire and mettle in his day	Metaphor; this shows that the horse was once energetic.

it breathed forth an atmosphere of dreams and fancies infecting all the land	Personification; the contagion is given human-like qualities, which creates a sense of fear.
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.	Descriptive language; the choice of words creates a ghostly, terrifying vision.
was often heard to shriek on winter nights before a storm,	Descriptive language; the choice of words create a ghostly, terrifying vision.



Applying the Standard

This section of the playlist is meant to give students the opportunity to practice the skills they have acquired throughout the playlist. Using the passage included in this section, revisit the previous discussion starters and use them as a guide for how to work through this passage. Students should be given less guidance as they work through the passage but they should be encouraged to share their observations and insights with the class. This will allow them to engage more fully with the material while practicing how to analyze a passage through a thorough consideration of the author's stylistic and narrative choices.

Additional Resources

Consider this additional resource when teaching RL.11-12.4:

This resource goes over a few examples of figurative language and provides worksheets that students can then complete:

- <http://www.ereadingworksheets.com/figurative-language/>



Self-Check: RL.11-12.4

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

Stimuli ID and/or Title	ELA_G11_STIM0002
Passage Title	“Where I Lived, and What I Lived For”
Author	Henry David Thoreau
Word Count	642
Lexile	1610L

“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.

Item ID	ELA_G11_MCQ_WN02284
DOK level	3
Answer Choice Rationale 1	While there is a sense of peace in this passage, this particularly section creates something quite different.
Answer Choice Rationale 2	The mist is being personified, but that does not create an impression of doubt. The narrator seems to be quite interested in it.
Answer Choice Rationale 3	Key. The narrator is personifying mist and comparing it to ghosts, creating a feeling of supernatural wonder.
Answer Choice Rationale 4	The mist is being personified, but that does not emphasize a sense of great sadness. The narrator seems to be quite interested in it.



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

Item ID	ELA_G11_MCQ_WN02283
DOK level	1
Answer Choice Rationale 1	There is nothing to suggest that “hewn” means pretty.
Answer Choice Rationale 2	Key. The narrator is describing his home. Therefore, the flowers are in his home; therefore, they most likely have been brought in from outside and snipped to fit in a vase.
Answer Choice Rationale 3	Flowers aren’t installed.
Answer Choice Rationale 4	The word “studs” point to the size, not “hewn.”

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.

Item ID	ELA_G11_MCQ_WN02282
DOK level	2
Answer Choice Rationale 1	“From hand to hand” means a lot of people used the boat.
Answer Choice Rationale 2	There is no evidence to support this.
Answer Choice Rationale 3	Key. “Has gone down the stream of time” suggests that the boat has been around a long time. The author also states that the boat passed “from hand to hand,” meaning a lot of people owned it. Therefore, a boat that has been around a long time and has been used by a lot of people eventually becomes too worn out to function properly.
Answer Choice Rationale 4	We don’t know what the narrator did with the boat.



Read the passage. Then answer the question.

Stimuli ID and/or Title	ELA_STIM00455
Passage Title	Excerpt from <i>A Country Doctor</i>
Author	Sarah Orne Jewett
Word Count	1354
Lexile	1110L

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).

Item ID	ELA_RL.11-12.4_DRD_Q553
DOK level	2
Key/correct answer	The term <u>commander in chief</u> is referring to Mrs. Fraley. The connotation of the term is that Mrs. Fraley has power over her daughter Eunice because she is interrupting Eunice and telling her not to share her own opinion. In addition, the rest of the passage demonstrates that Mrs. Fraley likes to try to assert power over others.



Read the passage. Then answer the question.

Stimuli ID and/or Title	ELA_STIM00389
Passage Title	<i>Gulliver's Travels</i>
Author	Johnathan Swift
Word Count	1062
Lexile	1300L

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

Item ID	ELA_RL.11-12.4_MCQ_Q575
DOK level	2
Key/correct answer	<p>The words create a scientific tone because they use numbers and units of measurement to describe what is happening.</p> <p>The words create a detached tone because Gulliver is telling about how he is being transported without emotion, almost as if it is happening to someone else.</p>

