

Grade 6 Playlist: Interpreting Figures of Speech

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.5.A*:

- Interpret figures of speech (e.g., personification, simile, metaphor, idiom) in context.

Welcome

If someone says, “It’s raining cats and dogs outside,” are cats and dogs really falling from the sky? Most people know that this is a figure of speech; it describes the weather in a nonliteral way. Still, the meaning of a figure of speech by itself is not always clear. Is it pouring rain, just a light drizzle, or completely clear and dry with no rain at all?

However, if someone says, “It’s raining cats and dogs outside, and I forgot my umbrella this morning. I’m going to get drenched!” then the meaning of the phrase might be a little more obvious. When someone uses a figure of speech, the context can make it easier to understand.

Objective

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- interpret figures of speech (such as personification, similes, metaphors, and idioms) in context.

Review

Key Terms

- A **figure of speech** is a phrase in which words do not have their literal, dictionary meaning. It often gives the reader a mental image of something that is being described. Types of figures of speech include:
 - **personification**, or the use of human characteristics to describe nonhuman objects, such as animals, plants, or nonliving things.
 - **simile** and **metaphor**, types of phrases that compare two things that are not alike in order to make readers notice similarities they might not have seen. Similes use the words *like* or *as*; metaphors do not.
 - **idioms**, which are expressions that give words considerably different meanings from their literal definitions.
- The **context** of a word or phrase includes the words and sentences that come before and after it.



Watch!

Watch these music videos to see examples of personification and idioms:

- <https://www.opened.com/video/personification-figurative-language-song-by-melissa/1536641>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPngxOnjKP0>

Exploring the Standard

Read the following two sentences: “The lamp was very bright.” “The lamp was as bright as the sun on a beautiful day.” Which sentence sounds better? Both sentences give the reader the same general idea: the lamp is very bright. But the second sentence sounds much more interesting. It uses a figure of speech called a **simile**.

The second sentence also describes the lamp in a positive way rather than a neutral way. The lamp was not only bright; it was like sunlight “on a beautiful day.” How would the sentence’s impact be different if the word *beautiful* were replaced with *blinding* or *scorching*? Since those are negative words, they would give the reader a less desirable impression than a positive word such as *beautiful* or *pleasant*.

A simile is one of several types of figures of speech that can give the reader a better picture of what is going on in a text by appealing to the five senses—sight (as in the previous example), touch, smell, hearing, and taste. How do the following similes appeal to the senses?

- Her new perfume was as sweet as a field of roses.
- The strawberries were as sweet as honey mixed with sugar.
- When he played his guitar, it sounded like the gentle buzz of honeybees.
- The velvet cloak felt like kittens’ tails against my skin.

In the first two sentences, similes are used to describe how sweet two things are. Depending on the context in which it is used, the adjective *sweet* can effectively describe both taste and smell. The third sentence appeals to the reader’s sense of hearing, while the last sentence targets the reader’s sense of touch.



Teaching Notes: Interpreting Figures of Speech

The goal of L.6.5.A is for students to be able to interpret figures of speech within the context of the text. This module focuses on personification, simile, metaphor, and idiom, and explains how to use context to determine the meaning of these expressions in a text. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classrooms as well as additional resources to peruse and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Figurative Language in Poetry

Poetry is an excellent place to start when studying figurative language in literature. Read this stanza from Robert Frost's poem "My November Guest" to the class:

My Sorrow, when she's here with me,
 Thinks these dark days of autumn rain
Are beautiful as days can be;
She loves the bare, the withered tree;
 ⁵She walks the sodden pasture lane.

Ask students to identify the figures of speech used in this poem. (Frost uses personification to give his sorrow human qualities. Frost refers to his sorrow as female by using the pronoun *she*, and he describes her as "thinking," "loving," and "walking.") Discuss with the class the reasons why Frost might have described the depression he feels in the autumn months this way.

Now read the following lines to the class, from the poem "Hope" by Emily Dickinson:

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune—without the words,
And never stops at all,
 ⁵And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

