

Lesson
7

Story Vocabulary: Figurative and Connotative Meanings

RL.8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts. **(See grade 8 Language standards 4–6 for additional expectations.) CA**

L.8.6 Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.



Understand the Standards

Authors communicate their meaning to readers in both direct and indirect ways. By paying close attention to an author’s use of language, you can get a better understanding of what the author wants to say.



Words may have literal or figurative meanings. The **literal** meaning of a word is the meaning you find in a dictionary. The **figurative** meaning is a more imaginative use of the word. Authors use language figuratively to create an image that will stand out in the reader’s mind. Similes and metaphors are examples of figurative language. To understand the figurative meaning of a word or phrase, you need to think carefully about the language and why the author uses it.

Words to Know

literal
figurative
denotation
connotation

Examples:

Literal: *The Thanksgiving turkey was roasting in the oven.*
(The turkey was literally cooking in the oven.)

Figurative: *My friends and I were roasting on the beach.*
My friends and I felt like turkeys in an oven. (simile)
(Implied meaning: The sun was so hot that they felt as though they were being cooked.)

Literal: *The hippopotamus at the zoo weighs more than a ton.*
(The hippo literally weighs over 2,000 pounds.)

Figurative: *I can’t move the bookcase because it weighs a ton!*
This bookcase weighs as much as a hippopotamus! (simile)
(Implied meaning: The bookcase is so heavy that it might as well weigh 2,000 pounds.)

Words also have denotations and connotations. The **denotation** of a word is its literal meaning. The **connotation** of a word is its suggested meaning—the feeling it leaves readers with.

Examples:

Jason is careful with his money. → *Careful* has a positive connotation.

Jason is stingy with his money. → *Stingy* has a negative connotation.

An eager crowd of people surrounded the mayor. → The phrase *eager crowd* has a neutral or positive connotation.

An impatient mob of people surrounded the mayor. → The phrase *impatient mob* has a negative connotation.



Guided Instruction

As you read a literary work, notice the author’s use of figurative language. What images are created? Also pay attention to the connotation of words. Keep in mind that authors have a reason for choosing the words and phrases they do. Read the excerpt and answer the questions in the margin. Then answer the questions that follow.

Pablo’s Workplace

Pablo had been employed at Whitmore Electronics for over two years, and he had long ago reached the conclusion that at least half of his coworkers must be runaways from a circus. How else could anyone explain the odd behavior of these clowns? Take Jack, for instance, who sat at the desk behind him. Jack liked to jog to the office every day, despite the fact that he’d arrive as hot and sticky as a melted candy bar. Jack had a solution to this problem, though. He would empty a jug of water over his head before going into the office. He would arrive every morning at his desk, soaking wet. Jack acted as though this were perfectly normal behavior in a business office.

Then there was Teresa, a bright and cheerful young woman who was crazy about the color green. Teresa wore green shirts and green dresses and even green shoes. Some days she wore so much green that she resembled a large lizard. Still, Teresa’s appearance was not as peculiar as Jodi’s. Jodi spiked her short hair with mousse, giving her a wild porcupine look. She wore blindingly silver jewelry—bracelets, necklaces, earrings—which jingled and jangled as she walked. Everyone could hear Jodi coming from fifty feet away.

A few desks down from Jodi sat “Ha-Ha” Harry, a nickname he had acquired within two weeks of coming to work at Whitmore. Harry loved to tell, and retell, jokes and stories to anyone and everyone who would listen. Harry thought his yarns were hysterically funny, and he would laugh and laugh as he told them. Unfortunately, most of his listener victims did not share Harry’s sense of humor, and they had to suffer through his endless tales and then laugh politely when at last he had finished.

Guided Questions

Underline examples of figurative language.

In paragraph 2, what animals are Pablo’s coworkers compared to? How does this help you imagine their appearance?

In a small group, discuss and answer these questions about the passage.

1. Find two examples of the figurative use of language in the passage and explain their meaning.

2. In the second paragraph, how do the connotations of the words *crazy* and *blindingly* add to the descriptions?

3. In the last paragraph, how does the use of the words *victim* and *suffer* help to create a negative image of “Ha-Ha” Harry?



On Your Own

Read the passage. Pay particular attention to the use of figurative language. Notice how it helps to create images in your mind.



The Demby House

The huge old Demby house had been boarded up for years. Townspeople weren't exactly sure who owned the place now, but that really didn't matter much, since no one with the sense of a two-year-old would want to live there. Even before the entire Demby family mysteriously vanished, leaving behind nothing but a few dark stains and several blurry photographs, rumors had spread about ghosts and evil spirits haunting the house.

Looking at the monster of a house—from a safe distance, of course—observers found it easy to believe such tales. The whole place was a tragedy of neglect. The house had a peeling skin of dark and lifeless gray paint. Half of the shutters had fallen off, while the other half swung back and forth in the wind like bodies swaying on a gallows. All the windows were broken, every single one, and the faint light of the moon cast disturbing shadows on the bare inside walls.

Then there were the sounds. On quiet nights, more than one person had claimed to hear forlorn wails and howls coming from deep inside the house. They were sounds no animal would make, creepy enough to petrify young children and eerie enough to frighten even the bravest adults. Whatever might be lurking inside the Demby house, people agreed, it was not happy.

When Billy Harte suggested to his best friend Mike that they spend a night in the Demby house, Mike looked at him as though he had proposed dining on earthworms.

“You’re not chicken, are you?” Billy challenged him.

“You’re not *sane*, are you?” Mike responded.

Chuckling, Billy replied, “Don’t tell me you actually believe in ghosts?”

“I believe in the Demby family,” Mike answered. “And no one knows what became of any of them.”

“Maybe if we spend the night there,” Billy said, “we can find out.”

Complete the following activities based on the passage.

- 1 Identify two examples of the figurative use of language in the passage. Explain their meaning.

- 2 In the second paragraph, the author writes: “the faint light of the moon cast disturbing shadows on the bare inside walls.” Rewrite this sentence using language that gives a positive or neutral connotation.

- 3 Which sentence from the passage contains an example of the figurative use of language?

- A “Then there were the sounds.”
- B “The whole place was a tragedy of neglect.”
- C “The huge old Demby house had been boarded up for years.”
- D “‘You’re not *sane*, are you?’ Mike responded.”

- 4 Each of the following words from the passage has a negative connotation except
- A forlorn.
 - B lurking.
 - C disturbing.
 - D chuckling.
- 5 In your own words, restate the meaning of this sentence from the first paragraph: "... no one with the sense of a two-year-old would want to live there."

- 6 What does the author mean when he writes in paragraph 4 "Mike looked at him as though he had proposed dining on earthworms"?

- Elevate** 7 **The house had a peeling skin of dark and lifeless gray paint. Half of the shutters had fallen off, while the other half swung back and forth in the wind like bodies swaying on a gallows.**

On a separate sheet of paper, discuss how the author's use of figurative language and connotation gives meaning to these sentences. Be specific. Then discuss how the effect would change had the author not used figurative language.