What Objects Really Mean

Teacher		**Class**	Grade 6
Subject	ELA	**Topic**	Figures of speech
Date		**Room**	
Lesson length	60 minutes	**Country**	United Kingdom

Students learn to interpret figures of speech in context. They discuss personification and sort literal from figurative meaning.

Curriculum links

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

Learning objectives

- Students will interpret personification in context using nearby clues.
- Students will tell literal meaning from figurative meaning in sentences.
- Students will explain the real meaning of figures in own words.

Success criteria

- I can tell if a line is literal or figurative.
- I can name the figure and use clues to tell meaning.
- I can explain the real meaning in my own words.

What students already know

Ask: If I say This bag is heavy, is that exact or picture language? If I say This bag weighs a ton, is that exact? Listen for exact vs exaggeration.

Key words

personification	giving a thing an action only a person can do [4]
metaphor	a comparison between two things without using like or as [3][5]
simile	a comparison between two things using like or as
hyperbole	a big exaggeration on purpose to show feeling [7]
context	the words and situation around a tricky phrase
figurative language	words that create meaning by comparing one thing to another thing [4]

Materials

- Slides 1-5, 7-11 with projector
- Short projected paragraphs for main activity
- Highlighters for each pair
- Notebooks or paper and pencils

Before the lesson

- Load Slides 1-5, 7-11 and test Video clip 3 (0:00–3:56) on slide 8 with sound
- Type the three short paragraphs below so they can be projected large
- Check highlighters and set desks for pair talk

Lesson outline

0–5 min **Starter** 5 min · Whole class

To hook interest and surface ideas about literal and figurative lines.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 1 Words That Paint Pictures and state the goal: interpreting figures of speech in context.
2. Show Slide 2 Which line grabs you with lines The wind whispered through the trees, I have told you a million times!, Her eyes were glistening jewels.
3. Use the hook: Can an alarm clock yell? Can a door groan? Let's figure out what a writer means when objects act like people.
4. Take a quick vote on which line sounds most interesting and ask why.

STUDENTS DO

1. Vote for the most interesting line on Slide 2.
2. Turn and tell a partner why that line stood out.
3. Share one idea with the class.

Say: Today we are detectives with words. Some lines mean exactly what they say. Some lines paint a picture. Our job is to use the context to tell what they really mean.

Ask: Which line sounds most interesting? Why? (Answers vary, listen for noticing strange or impossible pictures like whispering wind or million times.) · Could Her eyes were glistening jewels be exactly true? (No, eyes are not jewels, it compares eyes to jewels to show they are bright [3].)

Check understanding: Thumbs up if you can spot a line that cannot be exactly true. If many are unsure, point to whispered and million times and ask could this really happen.

Support: Let students point to a word that feels strange instead of explaining why. **Stretch:** Ask students to predict what feeling each line gives before we read more.

Use: Slides 1-2

5–17 min **Teaching** 12 min · Whole class

To teach literal vs figurative meaning and model interpreting a metaphor in context.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 3 Big idea: Figures of speech don't mean exactly what they say — context tells you what they mean.
2. Show Slide 4 cards for simile, metaphor, personification and hyperbole and explain each in plain words.
3. Explain that literal language states exactly what something is, while figurative language creates meaning by comparing one thing to another thing [4].
4. Model Slide 5 Think, pair, share with the zoo paragraph using the four steps: read context, check if literal is possible, name the figure, say the real meaning.

STUDENTS DO

1. Listen and track the four steps on fingers.
2. Pair-share what zoo really means and which two clues prove it.
3. Report back the clues: talking and trading snacks.

Say: Literal means exactly true. Figurative uses words in a special way to create an effect [7]. A metaphor constructs an analogy between two things or ideas [3]. We use the words around it to figure out the real meaning.

Worked example: Slide 5 says: Our classroom at lunch was a zoo. Everyone was talking and trading snacks. Step 1 context: lunch, talking, trading snacks. Step 2 literal? A classroom cannot be a real zoo. Step 3 figure: metaphor, classroom compared to zoo without like or as. Step 4 real meaning: the room was noisy, crowded, and busy.

Ask: How do you know zoo does not mean a real zoo here? (Clues everyone was talking and trading snacks show kids in a classroom, not animals.) · What two things are being compared in Her eyes were glistening jewels? (Eyes and jewels, to show eyes are bright and shiny, a metaphor based on comparison [5].)

Check understanding: Use mini whiteboards: write L for literal or F for figurative for Our classroom was on the first floor vs Our classroom was a zoo. Reteach with literal means exactly true [4] if mixed.

Support: Underline the clue words Everyone was talking and trading snacks so students only connect those two clues. **Stretch:** Ask why the writer used zoo instead of writing noisy to show stronger feeling.

Use: Slides 3-5

17–30 min **Guided Practice** 13 min · Whole class

To model how to interpret personification using picture and video.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 7 photo with caption The wind whispered through the trees and ask Can wind really whisper?
2. Play Video clip 3 (0:00–3:56) on Slide 8 Personification in action and tell students to listen for human actions given to things.
3. Think aloud: human action is whispered, wind cannot whisper, feeling is soft and quiet evening.
4. Show how to underline the human action and write the real meaning: blew softly and quietly.

STUDENTS DO

1. Watch and call out each human action they hear in the video.
2. Copy the model: underline whispered and write blew softly and quietly.
3. Pair-share what mood whispered gives versus shouted would give.

Say: Personification gives a human action to something that is not human. Ask yourself: could this really happen? Then look at the mood of the scene to tell what picture it gives.

Worked example: The wind whispered through the trees. Human action: whispered. Could wind whisper like a person? No. Clues: through the trees, evening mood is calm. Real meaning: the wind blew softly and quietly through the trees.

Ask: What human action is described and what is the real meaning? (Whispered; real meaning the wind moved softly and quietly, not loud.) · How does whispered change the feeling of the scene? (It feels calm and quiet, because figurative language creates meaning by comparing one thing to another thing [4].)

Check understanding: Cold-call two pairs to state the human action and real meaning. If they say wind talked, restate that it compares wind to a person whispering to show soft sound.

Support: Offer two plain choices: A) blew softly and quietly B) blew hard and loud, and ask which fits whisper.
Stretch: Ask what would change if whispered was swapped for groaned or shouted.

Use: Slides 7-8, Video clip 3 (0:00–3:56)

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30–50 min **Main Activity** 20 min · Pairs

To interpret personification in context in pairs and explain the real meaning.

YOU DO

1. Project these three paragraphs: 1) The wind whispered through the trees outside the school doors. Leaves shook a little. We pulled our jackets closer. 2) My backpack clung to my shoulders on the stairs. It was packed with heavy books. I had to stop and shift it. 3) The hallway lights stared down at us. The hall was bright and quiet before the first bell. Nobody talked.
2. Show Slide 10 How to interpret it mindmap: Read the context, Who says it, What is happening, Literal or impossible, What feeling is shown, Which figure fits.
3. Direct pairs to read, highlight the human action, circle two context clues, and write the real meaning for each paragraph.
4. Circulate, prompt with could this really happen and what picture does it give in this place and moment.

STUDENTS DO

1. Read each paragraph together, highlight the human action and circle two clues.
2. Discuss what feeling or picture it gives about the object in that place and moment.
3. Write one sentence for each: the real meaning in context.

Say: Read the whole paragraph, not just one line. Highlight what the object is doing like a person. Circle the clues around it. Then write what it really means right there. A figure of speech uses words in a special way to create an effect [7].

Worked example: Paragraph 2 model: Human action: clung. Can a backpack cling like a person holding on? No, so it is personification. Clues: packed with heavy books, had to stop and shift it. Real meaning: the backpack felt very heavy and pressed hard on shoulders on the stairs.

Ask: What does stared mean for the hallway lights in paragraph 3? (The lights shone brightly down and made the hall feel watched and quiet, not that lights have eyes.) · Which clues tell you what clung really means? (Packed with heavy books and had to stop and shift it show weight and pressure.)

Check understanding: Pairs trade sentences and check if the meaning fits all circled clues. Pull class together if meanings ignore context and remodel one paragraph.

Support: Provide a choice of two plain meanings for each line, for example stared means A) shone brightly down B) closed its eyes. **Stretch:** Have students explain what changes if the human action is swapped for a different one, like stared to blinked.

Use: Slide 10

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50–60 min **Plenary** 10 min · Whole class

To check interpreting of personification and review literal vs figurative.

YOU DO

1. Show Slide 11 Exit ticket: Interpret this: The hallway yawned before us.
2. Ask students to write figure type and real meaning plus One thing I learned and One question.
3. Collect and read two strong answers aloud, naming human action, clues, and real meaning.
4. Restate big idea: figures do not mean exactly what they say, context tells meaning.

STUDENTS DO

1. Write exit ticket on paper on their own.
2. Share learning and question with a partner if time allows.
3. Hand in exit ticket.

Say: Look at the whole sentence. Ask if a hallway can really yawn. Use the feeling of a long, open, empty hall to write what it really means in your own words.

Worked example: The hallway yawned before us. Human action: yawned. Hallway cannot yawn. Real meaning: the hallway stretched long and open ahead of us and felt empty and a little tired or boring. Figure: personification.

Ask: What figure is yawned and what is the real meaning? (Personification; the hall looked long, wide open, and empty ahead.) · How is hyperbole like I have told you a million times different from literal? (It is not meant to be true, it is meant to show feeling like frustration [7].)

Check understanding: Read exit tickets for correct figure and context-based meaning. Plan reteach on circling clues if many miss the real meaning.

Support: Allow sentence frame: This is personification. It really means the hallway looked ___. **Stretch:** Ask students to add what clue proves the exaggeration or human action is impossible.

Use: Slide 11

Common mistakes

Mistake	How to spot it	How to fix it
Taking the figure as exactly true, like wind really talked	Student draws or writes talking wind with a mouth	Ask could this really happen, then replace with real action: blew softly, because literal states exactly what it is [4].
Naming any comparison as personification	Student calls Her eyes were glistening jewels personification	Ask if a human action is given to a thing; if not, test for metaphor as analogy between two things [3].
Ignoring context clues and giving a memorized meaning	Same meaning for whispered in a storm and a calm night	Require circling two nearby clues and explaining meaning right there in that scene [4].

Support

- Provide a choice of two plain meanings for each personification line
- Pre-underline the human action and clue words for students who need help
- Use sentence frames for the real meaning in context

Stretch

- Have students explain what changes if the human action is swapped for a different one
- Have students explain why the writer used the figurative version instead of the literal version
- Have students explain how meaning would change in a different mood or place

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For the LSE or teaching assistant

Sit with pairs needing reading support, help highlight the human action first, then read the two circled clues aloud and scribe their real-meaning sentence if needed.

Check for understanding

Question	Answer
The hallway yawned before us. What figure is this and what does it really mean?	Personification; the hallway stretched long and open ahead and felt empty.
My backpack weighs a ton. Literal or figurative? What does it really mean?	Figurative hyperbole; it is very heavy, not 2000 pounds, it exaggerates to show feeling [7].
Lunch line moved like a snail. What figure and real meaning?	Simile with like; the line moved very slowly.

Homework

Find one object acting like a person at home or school and write what it really means.

Sources

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