

Grade 3 Playlist: Literal vs. Nonliteral Language in Text

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.4*:

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.

Welcome

Often, when people talk, they use phrases that have literal and nonliteral meanings. Some examples are “I watched my friend *bend over backwards* to help another person” and “Yesterday, Zack told me to *chill out*.” By themselves, the phrases have a different meaning from the way they are used in the sentences. The beauty of nonliteral phrases is they can help grab the reader’s attention and make the text more exciting to read. Nonliteral phrases also help keep readers engaged and interested in what is happening. Imagine a story that includes the above examples. It is probably a little more interesting because of them, right?

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- examine the differences between literal and nonliteral phrases.
- find examples of nonliteral phrases in a passage or text.

Review

Key Terms

- The word **literal** means exactly, or done just as it is written.
- The word **nonliteral** means the opposite of literal.
- **Context clues** are nearby words or phrases that can help a reader figure out meaning.

Watch!

To review a bit more about literal and nonliteral phrases, watch this video:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=88&v=ApdOw2JA3GI>

Exploring the Standard

Literal phrases mean exactly what they say, such as directions and recipes. Nonliteral phrases do not mean exactly what they say. It is the job of the reader to figure out the meaning, and there are several ways to go about it. Consider the steps below!



A Closer Look: Identify and Determine the Meaning of Nonliteral Language

When reading a text, there are several steps that a reader can take to make sure that he or she understands what everything means.

Read the entire text carefully and figure out what it is mostly about. Then identify unfamiliar words and phrases. Next, figure out the specific context of the text by looking at nearby words and sentences, paragraphs, etc. Think about what the other words and phrases mean. Think about what the sentence or phrase is describing. Is it describing an event or a character? Is it describing emotions or thoughts?

Then go back to the unfamiliar word or phrase. Based on the context, does this word or phrase mean exactly what it says? For example, read the following sentences.

Yesterday afternoon, I went for a long bike ride. I felt great because I used to be so scared, but now riding is a piece of cake.

How can a reader determine the meaning of the underlined phrase? The reader can ask, “Is the speaker literally saying that riding a bike is a cake or is similar to eating a cake?” No! It does not make sense to compare riding a bike to a cake, so what else can it mean? Well, a lot of people like eating cake, and it is pretty easy to cut a piece of cake. So “piece of cake” is a nonliteral phrase that means something is easy. The reader can consider the overall context of the sentence and how it relates to the underlined phrase. This process leads to the meaning of the nonliteral phrase.

Watch!

Watch this video about an idiom, a type of nonliteral phrase. What is the speaker describing?

- <https://www.opened.com/video/idiom-claymation/74475>

Below are a few excerpts from the book, *The Magic Fishbone* by Charles Dickens. Read each passage carefully and try to find the nonliteral phrases.

Example 1

¹“You are right,” said the old lady, answering his thoughts, “I am the Good Fairy Grandmarina. ²Attend. When you return home to dinner, politely invite the Princess Alicia to have some of the ³salmon you bought just now.”

⁴“It may disagree with her,” said the King.

⁵The old lady became so very angry at this absurd idea, that the King was quite alarmed, and ⁶humbly begged her pardon.

What is this excerpt about? The King is talking to an old lady who wants the King to invite Princess Alicia to dinner. Which phrase seems to not make sense? This would be “It may disagree with her.” This phrase does not make sense because the King is referring to the salmon, but a fish cannot talk! So what is the King really saying? The King means that the fish might make Princess Alicia feel a bit ill.



Teaching Notes: Literal vs. Nonliteral Language in Text

The goal of RL.3.4 is for students to recognize nonliteral phrases. Students should be able to notice the difference between a literal and nonliteral phrase, and identify the meanings of nonliteral phrases. 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.

Activities

1. Students can play a memory/matching game with nonliteral phrases. Page four of the handout found at this link shows a printable activity for young children. For a quiet individual activity or with a partner, students can match the nonliteral phrase to its literal meaning. <http://www.reallygoodstuff.com/images/art/306089.pdf>
2. Play “[Wrap-Around Language Idiom Cards](#).” Pass out a card for each student. (Pass out all cards. Some students may need more than one.) Begin with a random student, and have him/her read their card aloud. Then, the student with the corresponding card gets to answer and read their card aloud. Continue this pattern until you reach the first student again.
3. Allow students to do a Claymation video similar to the one they watched in the playlist. Choose several easy nonliteral phrases for them to animate. Or, allow them to act them out nonliteral phrases and video record the skit.

Writing Prompts

1. Allow students to illustrate idioms. Fold a paper in half and allow children to draw the literal meaning on the top half of the paper and the nonliteral meaning at the bottom of the paper. For example, the idiom, “it’s raining cats and dogs” would have a picture drawn of cats and dogs falling from the sky on the top. It would have a heavy rainstorm and maybe a person standing under an umbrella at the bottom. On the back or bottom of each portion of the paper, allow students to write out the meaning and/or use each idiom in a sentence.
2. Call out a nonliteral phrase. Then, have students write an original sentence using the nonliteral phrase. Add illustrations if necessary. Have students share their responses aloud.

Additional Resources

Consider these additional resources when teaching RL.3.4:

Read Tennessee: this site provides media resources, teaching strategies, lessons, activities, and assessments for RL.3.4:

- http://www.readtennessee.org/teachers/common_core_standards/3rd_grade/reading_literature/r134/r134_activities.aspx

