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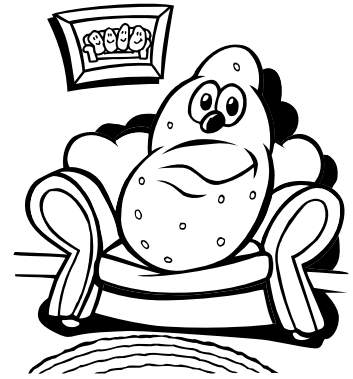
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Types of Figurative Language

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We use *figurative language* to describe an object, person, or situation by comparing it to or with something else. For example, "She is as pretty as a picture" describes or compares a pretty girl to a beautiful piece of art. Figurative language is simply a way to add color and depth to what is otherwise a bland statement, "She is pretty." Students who have language difficulties may struggle to compare items or situations that have no real connection to each other (e.g., girl/picture). Some of these students may even challenge the statement and argue, "I've seen art that is ugly. She is probably ugly!"



Figurative Language Definitions and Examples

Simile – A simile (*sim-uh-lee*) uses the words "like" or "as" to compare two explicitly unlike things as being similar. The sentence "Mom is *as busy as a bee*" paints a mental picture of Mom swarming around *like* a bee when she's busy. "Our old cat moves around *like* molasses in wintertime" means that the cat moves around like thick, slow-moving molasses.

Metaphor – A metaphor (*met-uh-fawr, -fer*) suggests something or someone actually *becomes* or *is* something else. "Dad *is a bear* when he's mad." "The children *were angry hornets* before eating lunch." Metaphors use more specific words like *is, are, was, or were* to paint a mental picture of Dad actually being a mad bear, and the hungry children being angry hornets before getting something to eat! There is no "like" or "as" in comparing the two.

Personification – Personification (*per-son-uh-fi-kay-shuh-n*) gives animals or inanimate objects human-like characteristics. "The *soft voice of the waterfall* serenaded me to sleep." In this sentence, the waterfall has been given the human characteristic of having a "soft voice" that "serenades" or sings the writer to sleep. "My dog, Bitsy, *counted the minutes* until her next meal." This suggests that Bitsy knows how to count like a human.

Onomatopoeia – Onomatopoeia (*on-uh-mat-uh-pee-uh*) is a word that describes a *natural sound or the sound made by an object or a certain action*. Dad lit the fuse, and "POW!" the firecracker exploded. A horrible "Crash!" sounded as the vase hit the floor. Remember the "Zoom!" "Zap!" "Pow!" on the old TV shows? These are onomatopoeias.

Hyperbole – A hyperbole (*hy-pur-buh-lee*) is a statement so exaggerated that no one believes it to be true. "Dad drank *a million gallons* of water after his run." We all know that this is not possible. The exaggeration of a million gallons is simply for

emphasis to describe the large quantity of water Dad actually drank. "I know I changed the baby's diaper *a thousand times* today" is another example of a ridiculous exaggeration.

Idiom – An idiom (*id-ee-uh-m*) is an expression whose meaning is not predictable from the usual meanings of the words that make it up, as in "He's a *couch potato*," or "Hold your horses." Idioms do not present "like" characteristics to other things as in other forms of figurative language. One needs the context of the sentence to help understand the idiom.



Clichés – Clichés are statements that have been heard so often that their once colorful play on words has become expected and stale. For example, "Birds of a feather flock together." "A rolling stone gathers no moss." "Every cloud has a silver lining." "Many hands make light work." Many times you will hear, "Well, you know what they say..." which will usually be followed by a cliché like the ones listed above. Then the person to whom the cliché was directed may follow up with the questions, "Who are *they*" anyway? What do *they* know?"

Figurative language is simply a colorful way to express an otherwise boring statement. You can see how very young children, children with special needs or language deficits, or ESL (English as a Second Language) students may have trouble understanding these types of expressions. When your child has trouble understanding **figurative language**, help your child see the comparisons or descriptions of **objects, people, or ideas presented as being like or taking on the characteristics of something that is completely different.**

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