Literal vs. Nonliteral Meanings

3rd–5th Grade

Objectives

CCSS Language/Vocabulary Acquisition and Use:
L.3.5.a, L.4.5.b

• Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and
  nuances in word meanings:
  a. Distinguish the literal and nonliteral meanings of
  words and phrases in context (e.g., take steps).
• Demonstrate understanding of figurative language,
  word relationships and nuances in word meanings:
  b. Recognize and explain the meaning of common
     idioms.

Materials Needed

• Amelia Bedelia by Peggy Parish
• Chart paper [TA3385] and marker or chalkboard and
  chalk or document camera
• Illustrating Idioms page
• Wrap-Around Language Idiom cards and answer key
• Markers [DD338] or Crayons [VX818]
• Best-Buy Scissors [TS547]

Products with item numbers are available at LakeshoreLearning.com.

Before You Begin

1. Explain to students that words or phrases can have literal or nonliteral meanings. Tell them that a nonliteral
   meaning is when a phrase means something other than the exact words in it. Explain that authors sometimes
   use nonliteral meanings in their writing as a way to make a comparison or an exaggerated statement about
   something. For example, an author writing that someone is a “night owl” is really saying that this person is
   awake and active at night (nonliteral meaning) rather than stating that the person turns into an animal at
   night (literal meaning).

2. Tell students that you are going to read the story Amelia Bedelia by Peggy Parish. Ask students to actively
   listen for the idioms, or nonliteral phrases, that are used in the story.

Introduction

1. Begin reading aloud to the class Amelia Bedelia by Peggy Parish.

2. As you read, pause to point out one or two forms of figurative language (e.g., “change the towels” on p. 16 or
   “draw the drapes” on p. 25) that cause confusion for Amelia. Ask students to explain and describe what they
   really mean, as opposed to Amelia’s literal interpretation of the phrases.

3. Before you continue with the story, ask students to pay special attention to some of the other forms of
   figurative language in the story as Amelia encounters them.
Procedure

1. Invite students to identify a few of the remaining idioms, or nonliteral phrases, that Amelia encountered in the story.

2. Write these idioms on a chart, chalkboard or document camera for students to see. Then, next to each phrase, ask students to help you write the actual meaning of the phrase.

3. Ask students if they have ever heard someone say, “That was a piece of cake!” or “It’s raining cats and dogs out there!” Explain that these expressions are also idioms, which have figurative, rather than literal, meanings. Add these expressions to the list and invite students to offer explanations about their figurative meanings. (For example, “a piece of cake” means “easy” or “easily accomplished,” and “raining cats and dogs” means “strong and heavy rain.”)

4. Invite students to add to your list of idioms by asking them to think of nonliteral expressions they have heard at home, on television shows or in daily conversations with friends.

5. As students offer their examples, add them to the class list on the chart or chalkboard until you have 10-15 examples or more. Keep the list on display so students can learn and practice the idioms on their own.

Independent Practice

1. Give each student a copy of the Illustrating Idioms page and encourage students to choose an idiom from the class list to illustrate. For example, explain that for “raining cats and dogs,” they might show a picture of cats and dogs falling from the sky onto umbrellas!

2. Encourage students to write a simple explanation for the practical meaning of their phrase. For example, “it costs an arm and a leg” really means “it costs a lot of money.”

3. Display the finished products on a bulletin board or in a class book titled “Interesting Idioms,” “Understanding Idioms” or “What Are We Really Trying to Say?”

Learning Extension

1. For additional practice, invite students to join in this all-class participation game with idioms!

2. Print and cut out the Wrap-Around Language Idiom cards for each student. (You may need to give some students more than one card if there are cards left over.)

3. Students take turns calling out their card (“I have…” ) and asking for the next card by reading the meaning of a new idiom (“Who has…?”). The student with the corresponding idiom responds. The game continues until all cards have been played and all idioms have been read. (An answer key is provided for the teacher, or to help with game play for students who may be struggling.)
Illustrating Idioms

Idiom: ________________________________

What it really means: ________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

©Lakeshore learning.com
Idioms

I have really easy.

Who has the meaning of “I’m all ears”?

I have listening carefully.

Who has the meaning of “the bee’s knees”?

I have completely wonderful.

Who has the meaning of “beating around the bush”?

I have avoiding a direct answer.

Who has the meaning of “biting off more than you can chew”?
I have taking on too much responsibility.

Who has the meaning of “getting on my nerves”?

I have irritating me.

Who has the meaning of “go with the flow”?

I have take things as they come.

Who has the meaning of “make up your mind”?

I have decide what to do.

Who has the meaning of “easy does it”? 
I have been very careful.

Who has the meaning of "over the top"?

I have beyond reasonable limits.

Who has the meaning of "cut it out"?

I have to stop doing that.

Who has the meaning of "costs an arm and a leg"?

I have a very expensive.

Who has the meaning of "by the book"?
I have according to the rules.

Who has the meaning of “face the music”? 

I have accept the consequences.

Who has the meaning of “hit the books”? 

I have study.

Who has the meaning of “hard-headed”? 

I have stubborn.

Who has the meaning of “having your hands full”? 

©Lakeshore www.lakeshorelearning.com
I have very busy.

Who has the meaning of "hit the sack"?

I have go to bed.

Who has the meaning of "keep an eye out"?

I have be watchful for.

Who has the meaning of "lend a hand"?

I have help out.

Who has the meaning of "fender bender"?
I have minor car accident.

Who has the meaning of "on the dot"?

I have at an exact time.

Who has the meaning of "step on it"?

I have go faster.

Who has the meaning of "take it easy"?

I have relax.

Who has the meaning of "under the weather"?
I have sick.

Who has the meaning of “let the cat out of the bag”?

I have reveal a secret.

Who has the meaning of “once in a blue moon”?

I have not very often.

Who has the meaning of “rings a bell”?

I have sounds familiar.

Who has the meaning of “tie the knot”?
I have get married.
Who has the meaning of “between a rock and a hard place”?

I have in a difficult situation.
Who has the meaning of “over the moon”?

I have very happy.
Who has the meaning of “run of the mill”?

I have ordinary.
Who has the meaning of “true blue”? 
Idioms

I have loyal.

Who has the meaning of “fancy-free”?

I have without worry.

Who has the meaning of “all thumbs”?

I have clumsy.

Who has the meaning of “piece of cake”?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’m all ears</td>
<td>listening carefully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the bee’s knees</td>
<td>completely wonderful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beating around the bush</td>
<td>avoiding a direct answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biting off more than you can chew</td>
<td>taking on too much responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>getting on my nerves</td>
<td>irritating me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go with the flow</td>
<td>take things as they come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make up your mind</td>
<td>decide what to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>easy does it</td>
<td>be very careful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over the top</td>
<td>beyond reasonable limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cut it out</td>
<td>stop doing that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>costs an arm and a leg</td>
<td>very expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by the book</td>
<td>according to the rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>face the music</td>
<td>accept the consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hit the books</td>
<td>study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hard-headed</td>
<td>stubborn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>having your hands full</td>
<td>very busy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hit the sack</td>
<td>go to bed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>keep an eye out</td>
<td>be watchful for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lend a hand</td>
<td>help out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fender bender</td>
<td>minor car accident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the dot</td>
<td>at an exact time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>step on it</td>
<td>go faster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take it easy</td>
<td>relax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under the weather</td>
<td>sick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>let the cat out of the bag</td>
<td>reveal a secret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>once in a blue moon</td>
<td>not very often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rings a bell</td>
<td>sounds familiar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tie the knot</td>
<td>get married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between a rock and a hard place</td>
<td>in a difficult situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over the moon</td>
<td>very happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>run of the mill</td>
<td>ordinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>true blue</td>
<td>loyal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fancy-free</td>
<td>without worry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all thumbs</td>
<td>clumsy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>piece of cake</td>
<td>really easy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>