

## Grade 3 Playlist: Literal vs. Nonliteral Meanings in Context

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.3.5.A*:

- Distinguish the literal and nonliteral meanings of words and phrases in context (e.g., *take steps*).

### Welcome

“I’m so nervous!” said Alexandra. “I have butterflies in my stomach!”

Did Alexandra eat butterflies for lunch? Did she swallow a few when she was playing outside? No. Alexandra is using language with a nonliteral meaning. What if Alexandra said, “My stomach is tied up in knots”? This example of nonliteral language has a similar meaning. Alexandra’s stomach is not full of butterflies or tied up in knots. Instead, she is just describing how she feels by using phrases that do not mean exactly what they say.

### Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- tell the difference between literal and nonliteral phrases.
- determine the meaning of nonliteral and literal phrases in context.

### Review

#### Key Terms

- The **literal meaning** of words and phrases is its exact definition. The words have their usual meaning.
- The **nonliteral meaning** of words and phrases is an exaggerated or figurative definition.

### Exploring the Standard

**Literal** phrases are based on the dictionary meanings of words. The meaning of the phrase comes from the meanings of the individual words. In contrast, **nonliteral** phrases use words in a creative way. The meaning of the phrase goes beyond the meanings of the individual words. Sometimes people use the term *figurative* to describe nonliteral phrases. Writers often use nonliteral language to emphasize something. They may also use it to create an image in the reader’s mind.

### Watch!

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

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1H8KKXyQr4E>



Read the example sentences below. These sentences use literal language.

**Henrietta does not move very quickly.**  
 “When I finished that race, my legs were very sore and tired!”  
 Reading that book aloud was very simple.

The meaning of each sentence is clear. However, the sentences are not very interesting. They all use the word *very* to try to emphasize an idea, but they do not create a strong image in the reader’s mind. Now read the sentences below, which use nonliteral language. The nonliteral phrases are underlined. How do these phrases change the sentences?

**Henrietta moves as slow as molasses.**  
 “When I finished that race, my legs were on fire!”  
 Reading that book aloud was a piece of cake.

Each nonliteral phrase replaces a literal phrase from the first set of sentences. This chart explains each expression in more detail.

Literal Phrase	Nonliteral Phrase	Effect of Nonliteral Language
does not move very quickly	as slow as molasses	A reader might imagine someone moving as slowly as a thick syrup dripping from a spoon.
were very sore and tired	were on fire	A reader might imagine a runner’s legs actually burning, which makes the pain seem more real.
very simple	a piece of cake	A reader might imagine eating a piece of cake, which is an easy and enjoyable thing to do.

Notice that the meanings of the literal and nonliteral phrases are very similar. However, the nonliteral phrases help to describe something in a more interesting way.

### Practice!

Practice telling the difference between literal and nonliteral language in this game. Click on the Literal or Nonliteral bucket for each phrase given.

- <http://www.brainrush.com/lesson/play/literal-vs-nonliteral-language>



## Teaching Notes: Literal vs. Nonliteral Meanings in Context

The goal of L.3.5.A is for students to distinguish the literal and nonliteral meanings of words and phrases in context. 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.

### Activity

1. Keep a running tally of how many nonliteral phrases your class uses in a day. Try to use nonliteral phrases all day with your students and see if they “catch” the phrases being used in everyday language. Examples like “It’s as cold as a freezer out there!” or “Take it easy!” or “between a rock and a hard place” can all be slipped into conversation with students. Challenge students to use as many nonliteral phrases as they can on a certain day.

### Writing Prompt

Use greeting cards as a way to show emotion in a nonliteral way. Have students choose someone to give a card to. Then, have them use a nonliteral phrase on the outside of the card (for example, “I’m through the roof that you’re my friend” or “Your friendship is as good as gold”). Then, on the inside, have students write their feelings on the card, explaining what the nonliteral phrase on the front means.

### Additional Resources

Consider these additional resources when teaching L.3.5.A:

- **Teaching Idioms:** In this lesson, students identify idioms and draw pictures to illustrate them. Students also compile idioms into an idiom book:  
<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/figurative-language-teaching-idioms-254.html>
- **Idioms in Children’s Books:** This site lists children’s books that are useful for teaching idioms:  
<http://www.the-best-childrens-books.org/teaching-idioms.html>

