

Lesson 12 Part 1: Introduction

Determining Word Meanings

CCSS

RL.7.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings . . .

Theme: *The City and the Country*

Here's a question you've probably asked: "What does that word mean?" You can usually answer it by looking up the word in a dictionary. But words and phrases have meanings beyond their dictionary definitions—specifically, connotative and figurative meanings.

The **connotative meaning** of a word or phrase is the feeling it tends to produce. Think about three words people often use to describe big cities: *lively*, *crammed*, and *busy*. A *lively* city sounds like a fun place to be. A *crammed* city sounds like it might be uncomfortable. And a *busy* city doesn't sound either fun or uncomfortable—it just sounds like a city, nothing more. *Lively* has a good connotation, *crammed* a bad one, and *busy* a neutral one.

Authors also use **figurative language** to express ideas or experiences vividly. A common type of figurative language involves making an imaginative comparison—finding an unusual way that two different things seem to be alike. You can understand most figurative language by identifying what is compared and thinking about the effect of the comparison.

Read the passage. As you do, notice any imaginative comparisons the author makes.

As I stood atop the mighty skyscraper, a gentle breeze wrapped its arms around me. Down below, the people were as small as ants, and the cars were toys making their way through a miniature city. Muffled sounds floated up like balloons, the wind murmured softly, and a bird called from somewhere in the distance.

The chart below contains examples of figurative language from the passage. Study the first row, then complete the empty sections.

Example	What Is Compared	Effect of Comparison
"a gentle breeze wrapped its arms around me"	a breeze and a person's arms	to make the breeze seem calming and pleasant, like a hug
"the cars were toys"	cars and toys	
"muffled sounds floated up like balloons"		

So the question "What does that word mean?" is a little more interesting than it might seem. Reading becomes richer when you pay attention to these other, "extra" meanings.



Read the beginning of a poem that describes the speaker's view of London as viewed from a bridge.

Genre: Lyric Poem

Composed Upon Westminster Bridge by William Wordsworth

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

(continued)

Explore how to answer this question: *"How does the speaker use figurative language to make comparisons, and what is the effect?"*

Think about what connection the speaker makes between a garment (a piece of clothing) and the beauty of the morning. What do these two unlike things have in common? Also think about how the speaker personifies the city, or gives it human-like qualities.

Use what you know about figurative language to complete the chart below.

Example	What Is Compared	Effect of Comparison
"This City now doth, like a garment, wear The beauty of the morning;"		

On the lines below, explain what the speaker's use of language tells you about his feelings for the city. Support your ideas with specific details from the poem.



Close Reading

Circle the words in the poem with positive connotations. How do they build on the positive feelings created in the first stanza?

Hint

Look back at the words you circled. What do they suggest about the speaker's feelings?

Continue reading the poem. Use the Close Reading and the Hint to help you answer the question

(continued from page 122)

Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

Circle the correct answer.

Based on the connotations of words such as *splendour*, *calm*, and *sweet*, what is the speaker's attitude toward the view of London in the morning?

- A** He admires the peace and beauty of the city scene.
- B** He prefers city sights to the valleys and hills of the country.
- C** He wishes that the river would flow quietly through the city.
- D** He hopes that the heart of the city will remain still and silent.



Show Your Thinking

Explain how the speaker's description of the houses conveys his feelings about the city scene.



With a partner, discuss the final two lines of the poem. What might the speaker mean by using the phrase "mighty heart"?



Read the following poem excerpt. Use the Study Buddy and Close Reading to guide your reading.

Genre: Lyric Poem



As I read, I'm going to think about how the speaker uses language in creative ways to convey thoughts and feelings about city and country life. I'll look for examples of figurative language and words with connotations, such as "weather-wise."

Close Reading

What words does the speaker use to describe life in the country?

Underline these terms and write a **plus** or **minus** sign next to them to show whether they have positive or negative connotations.

Does the speaker prefer city or country life? Draw a **box** around descriptive words and phrases that indicate his feelings about the city.

from "At Loafing-Holt"

by Paul Laurence Dunbar

- Since I left the city's heat
For this sylvan, cool retreat,
High upon the hill-side here
Where the air is clean and clear,
5 I have lost the urban ways.
Mine are calm and tranquil days,
Sloping lawns of green are mine,
Clustered treasures of the vine;
Long forgotten plants I know,
10 Where the best wild berries grow,
Where the greens and grasses sprout,
When the elders blossom out.
Now I am grown weather-wise
With the lore of winds and skies.
15 Mine the song whose soft refrain
Is the sigh of summer rain.
Seek you where the woods are cool,
Would you know the shady pool
Where, throughout the lazy day,
20 Speckled beauties drowse or play?
Would you find in rest or peace
Sorrow's permanent release?—
Leave the city, grim and gray,
Come with me, ah, come away.
25 Do you fear the winter chill,
Deep of snow upon the hill?
'Tis a mantle, kind and warm,
Shielding tender shoots from harm.
Do you dread the ice-clad streams,—
30 They are mirrors for your dreams.



Hints

Circle the word *lore* in the poem. What is its usual meaning?

Which phrase points out how life in the country has changed him?

Look back at the words and phrases you marked in Close Reading. What do their connotations suggest about the speaker's feelings?

Use the Hints on this page to help you answer the questions.

- 1 Which sentence best describes what the speaker means in these lines:
"Now I am grown weather-wise/With the lore of winds and skies"?
 - A Living in the woods in the wind and under the skies has made the speaker grow wiser.
 - B The speaker can "read" the wind and skies in order to predict the weather.
 - C The speaker warns that country life is not for everyone because the winds and weather are harsh.
 - D The speaker studies the weather and writes stories about how the wind and skies change.
- 2 Which line or lines from the poem best signals the change the speaker has noticed in himself since he moved to the country?
 - A "I have lost the urban ways."
 - B "Sloping lawns of green are mine . . ."
 - C "Long forgotten plants I know . . ."
 - D "Mine the song . . . is the sigh of summer rain."
- 3 Explain how the speaker uses both connotative and figurative language to show how he likes the country more than the city. Include at least two examples from the poem to support your response.



Read the poem. Then answer the questions that follow.

Man and Nature in New York and Kansas

by Martha Baird

- Have you ever seen the fields of wheat, nothing but
wheat, from here to the horizon?
Ah, then, you have missed something.
I remember the wheat in Lane County, Kansas—
- 5 Named for James H. Lane, “Jim Lane, of Kansas,”
 a hero at the time of “bleeding Kansas”¹, a brave
 man who worked hard and took chances so that
 no human being should be owned by any other
 human being in Kansas.
- 10 So Lane County, Kansas, is named for him,
 And I remember the wheat fields there.
 Let me tell you how it was.
 The earth is even, west of Dighton,
 And the road is straight.
- 15 On both sides, there is the wheat,
 As far as you can see; And it waves
 In the wind.
 The heads of the wheat are heavy
 And the stems are slim.
- 20 The heads have a deeper color than the stems,
 Deeper green in spring, Deeper amber later.
 And so there is waving green,
 Or waving amber,
 Mile on mile.
- 25 The sky is blue and wide and bright,
 And the wheat waves under it.
 I remember the wheat, and I hear the wheat saying:
 “See what nature and man can do!
 See what nature and man can do!
- 30 Be happy,
 We are the wheat.”

¹ **bleeding Kansas:** a series of violent incidents in the Kansas Territory from 1854 to 1861 over the issue of whether Kansas would join the Union as a slave state or a free state



- Have you ever seen the high buildings of Manhattan,
near sundown, on a cold, gray day?
Ah, then, you have missed something.
- 35 Let me tell you how it is.
Walk down Lexington Avenue Towards 57th Street,
And look to the west.
Look up and see
The Great tall buildings,
- 40 The cold stone buildings,
High against the sky.
Look! The great stone buildings are pink!
The setting sun is making them rosy!
They are solid and rosy,
- 45 And give forth light.
The gray sky is confused and scurrying;
It is rosy too, in spite of itself.
The proud gorgeous buildings
Love the light
- 50 They love the sun for making them rosy,
Showing what they can be.
Busy people go about their business,
Eyes on the ground,
While the proud gorgeous buildings say with the
- 55 wheat fields:
"See what nature and man can do!
See what nature and man can do!
Be happy,
We are the rosy buildings and the wheat."

1

Which sentence from the poem signals the connection between New York and Kansas?

- A** "And I remember the wheat fields there."
B "See what nature and man can do!"
C "The setting sun is making them rosy."
D "Let me tell you how it was."

Answer Form

- 1 (A) (B) (C) (D)
2 (A) (B) (C) (D)
3 (A) (B) (C) (D)

**Number
Correct**

3



2

Read lines 46–47 from the poem.

The gray sky is confused and scurrying;
It is rosy in spite of itself.

What is the meaning of the figurative language used in these lines?

- A** The gray sky moves quickly back and forth in a very confused way.
- B** The gray sky seems to be hiding behind buildings so people can no longer see it.
- C** The gray sky reveals a developing a storm system that will soon bring rain.
- D** The gray sky has clouds moving across it, reflecting light from the setting sun.

3

Read lines 48–49 from the poem.

The proud gorgeous buildings
Love the light

Based on the connotations of the words in these lines, what is the speaker’s attitude toward the buildings?

- A** The speaker admires the buildings’ beauty and power.
- B** The speaker sees the buildings as cold stone structures.
- C** The speaker prefers natural creations like waves of wheat.
- D** The speaker feels that they, like humans, enjoy sunlight.

4

Explain how the speaker uses both connotative and figurative language to express her feelings about how people and nature work together. Include at least **two** examples from the poem to support your response.



Self Check

Go back and see what you can check off on the Self Check on page 119.