

ELA: Grade 7, Lesson 12, Figurative Language in “The Railway Train”

Lesson Focus: This lesson focuses on the use of figurative language and extended metaphor in “The Railway Train.”

Practice Focus: Students will analyze figurative language in the poem to construct its meaning.

Objective: Students will use “The Railway Train” to explore how Emily Dickinson uses figurative language to convey meaning and create imagery, and ultimately understand the poem is comparing a train to a horse, and why.

Academic Vocabulary: figurative language [focus term]; peer, shanty, punctual, docile, omnipotent [review terms]

TN Standards: 7.RL.CS.4; 7.L.VAU.5

Teacher Materials:

- The Teacher Packet for ELA, Grade 7, Lesson 12

Student Materials:

- paper, pen, surface to write on
- The Student Packet for ELA, Grade 7, Lesson 12 which can be found on www.tn.gov/education

Teacher Do	Students Do
<p>Opening (1 min)</p> <p>Hello! Welcome to Tennessee’s At Home Learning Series for literacy! Today’s lesson is for all our 7th graders out there, though everyone is welcome to tune in. This lesson is the second in this week’s series.</p> <p>My name is ____ and I’m a ____ grade teacher in Tennessee schools. I’m so excited to be your teacher for this lesson! Welcome to my virtual classroom!</p> <p>If you didn’t see our previous lesson, you can find it at www.tn.gov/education. You can still tune in to today’s lesson if you haven’t seen any of our others. But it might be more fun if you first go back and watch our other lessons, since today we’ll be talking about things we learned previously.</p> <p>Before we get started, to participate fully in our lesson today, you will need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• paper, pen, surface to write on• The Student Packet for ELA, Grade 7, Lesson 12 which can be found on www.tn.gov/education <p>Ok, let’s begin!</p>	<p>Students gather materials for the lesson and prepare to engage with the lesson’s content.</p>
<p>Intro (4 min)</p> <p>Last time, we read a poem by Emily Dickinson. Using your detective reading skills, you found many clues that helped you conclude she was writing about a train. Your writing prompt last time was: How do words and phrases suggest the</p>	<p>Students recall the poem was about a train and they came to that conclusion by finding evidence in the text.</p>

subject of the poem is a train? Let's see how you did. Find your paragraph and reread it to yourself. [Pause.]

Here is an exemplary response. [Show Slide 1.] As I read it, think about how it compares to what you wrote.

"There are many words and phrases that show the movement, parts, and sound of a train in this poem. In the first stanza, the phrase 'feed itself at tanks' shows right away the author is talking about a machine that needs oil or gas to keep going. The phrase, 'lap the miles' shows the speed of the train and the phrase, 'step/Around a pile of mountains' shows how the train can travel easily through mountains. The lines, 'In horrid, hooting stanza' create the sound of the train's whistle. The next line, 'Then chase itself down hill' helps the reader picture the train speeding down the hill. When the author uses the words, 'valleys, mountains, shanties, quarry, and hill,' this helps the reader picture the train traveling for many miles, through many different types of landscapes."

Why is this an exemplary response? [Pause.] First, the student uses complete sentences to respond to the question. Second, she includes quotes from the poem, like "feed itself at tanks" and "horrid, hooting stanza" to support her ideas. Finally, she explains how those quotes help the reader know the subject of the poem is a train. Look over your response again. How many of these things did you do? [Pause.] You may not have said the exact same things, and that's okay, but is your response in complete sentences? [Pause.] Did you use evidence from the text? [Pause.] Did you explain the evidence? [Pause.] If you did, good job!

Today, we will be rereading Emily Dickinson's poem about the train, but we will be reading with a different purpose. Last time, we were like detectives with a magnifying lens searching for clues. Today we are going to use a different lens to look at the poem a little bit differently. This can really help develop a better understanding of what we read, especially poetry, because there is so much meaning packed into very few words.

Now that we know the image in our heads when reading this poem is a train, the lens we will use is the figurative language the poet uses in the poem. We'll use that figurative language to figure out another mystery: what the poem is comparing the train to.

Students listen to an exemplar response to the writing task and reflect on how their work compares to it.

Students prepare to reread the poem to focus on figurative language.

<p>We will begin with me showing you what that looks like, and then there will be time for you to practice on your own with my support. Finally, I will assign you independent work you can complete after the video ends.</p>	
<p>Teacher Model/Read-Aloud (10 min)</p> <p>Students, let's first make sure we all understand what the term "figurative language" means. Have you ever heard or read someone describe something and you thought to yourself, "Wow! That's a really interesting way to say that!" [Pause.] Or, have you heard phrases like "time is money" or "he is blind as a bat" or "Someone has a bee in her bonnet?" [Pause.] Chances are, you knew the person didn't really mean that time is the same thing as money or that the person is actually blind, or that the woman really had a bee in her hat. These were just more colorful ways to convey ideas. You know "time is money" just means that time is valuable, so don't waste it; if someone is "blind as a bat," it just means they didn't notice something the speaker thought was obvious. You can just picture in your head that person with a bee in her bonnet would be really worried or angry about something and keeps thinking about it.</p> <p>Figurative language is just a special form of writing that makes interesting comparisons to make the reader think about a topic in new ways. It often paints a vivid picture in the reader's mind.</p> <p>[Show Slide 2] Let's look at the figurative language in Dickinson's poem. Let's reread the first stanza.</p> <p>[Be sure to read the first 3 stanzas of the poem with a clear <i>da-DUM, da-DUM</i> rhythm since it is written in iambic pentameter.]</p> <p>I like to see it lap the miles, And lick the valleys up, And stop to feed itself at tanks; And then, prodigious, step</p> <p>What is the author comparing the train to in this stanza? [Pause.] How do you know? [Pause.] Write down your ideas. [Pause.] Yes, Dickinson is comparing the train to an eager animal that likes to "lick the valleys up." The animal seems to be fast when it "laps the miles" and independent because Dickinson says that it "stops to feed itself at tanks."</p> <p>Have you ever thought about a train as an animal? [Pause.] What kind of animal could a train be? [Pause.] Write down</p>	<p>Students follow along, comprehending the text. They use teacher think-alouds and tips (e.g., definitions of words) to support their comprehension, and they think or write as directed in response to prompts and questions.</p> <p>Students will understand that figurative language is a way to make reading and writing more interesting by making stronger images in our minds.</p> <p>Students listen as teacher reads the first two stanzas. Then they participate by thinking and responding in writing to the teacher's questions.</p>

your thoughts. [Pause.] Save those thoughts—we'll come back to them later.

[Show Slide 3.]

**Around a pile of mountains,
And, supercilious, peer
In shanties by the sides of roads;
And then a quarry pare**

What does the phrase “peer into shanties” tell us about the train’s actions? [Pause.] Remember what “peer” means? [Pause.] Right, it means to look closely. And “shanties”? [Pause.] Right, run-down homes. What part of the train could be peering into the shanties? [Pause.] Write down your thoughts. [Pause.] What did you write? I thought maybe the train’s headlights are shining into the shanties. Have you ever had a car’s or train’s headlights shine into your window at night? [Pause.] It’s startling, isn’t it?

How would the meaning be different if Dickinson had just said, “looks into shanties?” [Pause.] What meaning does her word choice “peers” add to this phrase? [Pause.] What in the text makes you think that? [Pause.] Record your ideas. [Pause.] Were you thinking about how “peer” means to look closely? [Pause.] Dickinson could be using this line to help the reader imagine the headlights of the train staring into the homes of people. Sounds kind of rude, doesn’t it?

But there may be more than one way to look at this line. What else might Dickinson mean? [Pause.] She could also just be trying to describe the train as curious, wondering what’s going on in the people’s homes. Maybe the train is even lonely!

Now, why do you think Dickinson decided to use the word “shanties” instead of just “homes?” [Pause.] Record your ideas. [Pause.] That makes sense. She’s telling us these are not the homes of wealthy people— that these homes near the railroad she’s telling us about were poor.

Why does that matter? [Pause.] Write down how it makes you think about the train peering into these homes. [Pause.] I thought it made the poem sadder, because the people may be powerless to stop the train from peering into their homes. Dickinson might be saying that fancy homes would not be next to these noisy trains because the rich people who own them may not have let the railroad be built near them, but people who are poorer might not have the same power.

<p>Guided Practice (12 min) [Show Slide 4.] Let's reread the third stanza.</p> <p>To fit its sides, and crawl between, Complaining all the while In horrid, hooting stanza; Then chase itself down hill</p> <p>What imagery and sounds does the author create through the lines, "Complaining all the while/in horrid, hooting stanza; /Then chase itself down the hill?" [Pause.] Why might Dickinson be saying the train is complaining? [Pause.] What is she trying to say? [Pause] Yes, she could be saying the train is complaining because it is blowing its whistle to get attention. Some of you may have noticed in the first line, the train is crawling through a space, maybe a tunnel, which might be fairly tight for a train. It's dark in a tunnel, so maybe that is why the train hoots very loudly to let people know it's coming out of the tunnel, even if it is still moving slowly.</p> <p>What image comes to mind for you in the last line – "Then chase itself down the hill?" [Pause.] The word "chase" certainly makes it sound like a game, so maybe Dickinson is comparing a train to children and saying the train is a pretty new mode of transportation—young, like a child—which it was during her lifetime in the 1800s, even though we don't think of it as being new anymore today. "Chase itself down the hill" also creates the image of the different cars of the train and how they follow each other, almost like a roller coaster.</p> <p>[Show Slide 5.] Now, let's look at the entire poem. Remember when you wrote down what kind of animal you thought the train might be? [Pause.] How many of you wrote that it might be like a horse? [Pause.] Now, we're going to be looking for words and phrases in the poem that suggest the train is a horse.</p> <p>Look first at the last stanza. What words in that stanza specifically show you the animal is a horse as opposed to another animal? [Pause.] Write them down. [Pause.] Did you write down "neigh" and "stable"? [Pause.] If you remembered from the previous lesson that "Boanerges" is a type of horse, did you write that word down too? [Pause.]</p> <p>Now, consider what words or phrases from the first three stanzas sharpen your image of the animal as a horse? Now</p>	<p>Students follow along and think and act as instructed, gradually gaining confidence and competence.</p> <p>Students will understand how Dickinson has skillfully used figurative language to compare a train to a horse.</p> <p>Students write down words from the last stanza that specifically show the animal is a horse.</p>
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you can record your response to the question: What words or phrases in the poem indicate the author is comparing the train to a horse? [Pause.] Write 3-4 sentences to explain how these words show the comparison to a horse. [Pause for a longer time for writing.] Ready? [Pause.] Was your response something like this?

Dickinson seems to be comparing the train to an animal, a horse, throughout the poem. For example, she uses the phrases ‘lap the miles,’ ‘lick the valleys up,’ and ‘stop to feed itself at tanks’ that make sense in describing a horse running, drinking, and eating. The reader can also picture a horse stepping over mountains, or crossing mountains with riders. But it isn’t until the last stanza that we know with certainty Dickinson is comparing the train with a horse because the stanza uses words such as ‘neigh’ and ‘stay in stables.’

So the poem is comparing the train to a horse. But it’s not saying they’re exactly the same—in fact, it might be saying the train is like a horse but more powerful. Let’s look for evidence that this is its message.

What words or phrases in the poem support the idea that the train is a more powerful technology than the horse? [Pause.] Let’s reread the final stanza. [Show Slide 6.]

And neigh like Boanerges;
Then, punctual as a star,
Stop-docile and omnipotent-
At its own stable door.

Do you remember what punctual means? [Pause.] That’s right! To be on time. What does “punctual as a star mean?” [Pause.] Yes, literally, it means on time like a star is, but that doesn’t quite make sense. What is it about a star that is punctual? [Pause.] Maybe it means the stars always appear at night? Like the North Star is always in the same place.

So, how does this phrase show a train is more powerful technology than a horse? [Pause.] Good thinking! Trains have powerful engines that won’t get tired like a horse, so trains will probably be on time to their destinations since they don’t need to take breaks like horses! Oh, you noticed something else? [Pause.] Yes, the stanza does say the train stops “at the stable door.” What is the stable door for the train? [Pause.] Yes, it could be the train station or the train yard.

<p>What about the phrase “docile and omnipotent?” What does docile mean? [Pause.] Yes, it means easily managed, or obedient. What is the meaning of “omnipotent?” [Pause.] Right, it means all-powerful. So the train is both docile and omnipotent. They are words that don’t seem to go together. What do you think the author means here? [Pause] You are on fire today! Yes, the train can be docile because it doesn’t have a mind of its own like a horse does, and horses can sometimes be stubborn or hard to control. So the train engineer can drive it, but we still have to remember the train is a large and powerful machine.</p> <p>Now you are ready to write your response to the main question: What words or phrases in the poem support the idea that the train is a more powerful technology than the horse? Write down your answer in one to three complete sentences. [Pause longer to allow students to write a more extended response.]</p>	<p>Students write 3-4 sentences to explain how the words/phrases in the poem show the comparison to a horse.</p>
<p><u>Independent Work</u> (3 min) [Show Slide 7.] For independent practice today, please write a paragraph responding to this question. Why does the author compare the train to a horse rather than just describing it more literally? [Pause.] Write down the question so you can answer it after the video is over. I’ll say it once more: Why does the author compare the train to a horse rather than just describing it more literally? [Pause to let students write the question.] You’ll want to use evidence from the text in your response, so look at the full poem again. [Pause.] Write down the words and phrases you’d like to use to answer the question. [Pause.] I have some suggestions. [Point to each phrase on the slide as you say it, and pause in between phrases to let students write.] Lap the miles. [Pause.] Lick the valleys up. [Pause.] Feed itself at tanks. [Pause.] Take a moment to jot down any other words and phrases you’d like to use to explain why the author compares the train to a horse. [Pause.]</p>	<p>Students write a paragraph about why Dickinson uses the extended metaphor of a horse to describe a train.</p> <p>Students write down words or phrases from the poem they want to use in their response.</p>
<p><u>Closing</u> (30 seconds) I enjoyed working on unpacking the figurative language in Dickinson’s poem with you today! Thank you for inviting me into your home. I look forward to seeing you in our next lesson in Tennessee’s At Home Learning Series! Bye!</p>	