

The Landlady

Teaching Guide with a Figurative Language Focus

Overview: Roald Dahl's "The Landlady" is rich in figurative language. Guide your students through its setting and characters, using the narrative to highlight and analyze the impact of the figurative language.

Notes about reading this story:

- **Inferences:** This story relies heavily on subtle clues. Ensure students are well-versed in making inferences before diving into the narrative.
- **Reading Aloud:** Students often enjoy reading out loud. Consider assigning confident readers to the roles of Billy Weaver and The Landlady, while you handle the narration. Choose those who can clearly project their voice.
- **Background Knowledge:** Introduce the concept of a bed and breakfast before starting. A brief visual tour using Google images can provide students with helpful context.
- **Purpose of this Guide:** Our exploration centers on comprehending the effect of figurative language rather than simply identifying it.

As you read the story, you are going to stop and jot after the figurative language. This will help you model the impact of the figurative language.

Stopping Points:

● After the first paragraph: Doodle

- Point out to students the usage of imagery, hyperbole, and simile in the text.
- Highlight the sentence: "But the air was deadly cold" to showcase hyperbole.
- Draw attention to: "...the wind was like a flat blade of ice on his cheeks" as an example of simile.
- Remind students to incorporate the element of wind in their doodles.
- Ask the question: "Why didn't the author simply write 'it's really cold'?" Anticipate responses such as, "It would be boring," or "It wouldn't show us how cold it actually is!"

● After line 51 (page 1, last paragraph in the first column): Doodle

- Before reading aloud, introduce line 39 with, "Picture this scene as I read..." and then proceed.
- Pause at the end of the paragraph for reflection.
- Explain that this passage is a great example of imagery.
- Instruct students to swiftly sketch their interpretation of the described setting.
- **Pose the question:** "What does the imagery convey about the setting?" Anticipate answers such as, "It's run down," or "It was once a nice area but has since declined."
- **Follow up with:** "What mood is evoked by this description?" Encourage students to share mood words, expecting terms like "uneasy," "sad," or "creepy."

● **After line 79 (page 1, third paragraph of second column): Doodle**

- This is another great example of imagery.
- Instruct students to swiftly sketch their interpretation of the described setting.
- **Pose the question:** “What does the imagery convey about the setting?” Anticipate answers such as, “It’s warm,” or “It’s inviting”
- **Follow up with:** “What mood is evoked by this description?” Encourage students to share mood words, expecting terms like "cozy," or "welcoming”
- **Do a quick poll:** Thumbs up if you would stay there, thumbs down if you would opt for the Bell and Dragon.

● **After line 112 (page 2, first paragraph of the first column): Reaction**

- Have students talk in their groups about the figurative language used in the selection and how it makes them feel about what’s happening.
 - **Personification:** The notice or words on the sign (BED AND BREAKFAST) are described as if they have human-like qualities, specifically eyes. The words are described as "staring at him through the glass, holding him, compelling him." This gives the sense that the words themselves have a power or force over him, even though they are inanimate.
 - **Repetition:** "BED AND BREAKFAST, BED AND BREAKFAST, BED AND BREAKFAST" is repeated to emphasize its hypnotic or compelling effect on the character. This repetition reinforces the idea that the sign is incessantly drawing him in.
 - **Simile:** "Each word was like a large black eye" compares the words to eyes, suggesting they are watching or beckoning him.
- The words on the sign make it seem like it's pulling him in, almost like it's magically making him want to go to the house. It feels a bit creepy and mysterious.

● **After line 198 (page 2, last large paragraph of the second column): Hashtags**

- This section includes an example of a simile that gives the reader a little insight into The Landlady character. “But this dame was a like a jack-in-the-box. He pressed the bell – and out she popped!” It shows the reader that it was like she was watching Weaver and ready for him to press the bell.
- Have students jot hashtags about The Landlady character. You might get hashtags like, #creepy, #toonice, #desperate

● **After line 265 (page 3, first paragraph of the second column): Doodle**

- This is an example of imagery.
- Instruct students to swiftly sketch their interpretation of the setting.

- **Pose the question:** “What does the imagery show about the setting?” Anticipate answers such as, “It’s inviting,” or “It’s cozy.”
- **Follow up with:** “What mood is evoked by this description?” Encourage students to share mood words, expecting terms like "warm," or "inviting."
- **At the end: Your Choice**
 - There were a couple of examples of figurative language from where we left off last time to the end.
 - Students will work on their table groups to find one example and do a jot about the impact of the figurative language. They can do doodles, hashtags, or reactions.
 - Possible Examples:
 - **Idiom:** "That rings a bell." This phrase is used to indicate that something sounds familiar but one can't quite remember the specifics.
 - **Metaphor:** "Each word was like a large black eye staring at him through the glass..." The words in the book are likened to eyes, emphasizing their attention-grabbing nature.
 - **Simile:** "She was holding it well out in front of her, and rather high up, as though the tray were a pair of reins on a frisky horse." The tea-tray is likened to reins, painting a picture of the landlady's movement and posture.
 - **Sensory Imagery:** "Now and again, he caught a whiff of a peculiar smell..." The specific smells are described in a way that evokes memories and sensations in the reader.
 - **Idiom:** "In one ear and out the other." This phrase is used to indicate forgetfulness or not paying attention.
 - **Metaphor:** "There is nothing more tantalising than a thing like this which lingers just outside the borders of one’s memory." The idea of a forgotten memory is likened to an object sitting just out of reach.
 - **Simile:** "His skin was just like a baby’s." The comparison is used to emphasize the smoothness and youthfulness of Mr. Temple's skin.
 - **Dramatic Irony:** Billy's realization about the dog and the parrot, coupled with the almond taste in the tea, indicates the landlady's possible nefarious actions, though Billy remains unaware.
 - **Foreshadowing:** "The tea tasted faintly of bitter almonds..." Bitter almonds are commonly associated with the taste of cyanide, a deadly poison. This hints at a sinister undertone and suggests a potential danger to Billy.
 - **Metaphor:** "I stuff all my little pets myself when they pass away." The phrase "pets" is a metaphor comparing the young boys to her household pets.
 - These elements contribute to the increasingly eerie and tense mood of the story. The repeated references to the previous boarders and the growing realization about the nature of the pets in the house combine to create a sense of unease and suspense.

After you read the play, put students in partners. Students will work together to write a multiple choice question about the meaning or impact of one of the examples of figurative language in the text.

- **Directions:**

- You can assign each group a different example of figurative language or have them select one on their own.
- Provide them with the question stems-
 - What is the impact of the following example of figurative language, _____?"
 - "What is the meaning of _____ (example of figurative language) as it is used on paragraph ____?"
- Students can select a question stem and write their question using their example of figurative language from the text, and write answer options. Stress to your students that all of the answer options need to make sense.
- Have students submit their questions digitally. You can copy and paste them into a Quizizz to play tomorrow.

After the question activity, students will answer the essay question independently- How does Roald Dahl's utilization of figurative language in "The Landlady" contribute to the reader's understanding of the story's setting characters?

Sample response from a middle school student

In Roald Dahl's story "The Landlady", figurative language plays a big role in helping us picture the setting and understand the characters better. The story is kind of mysterious, and the author uses descriptive words to make the story feel more alive and kinda spooky.

For example, when the main character Billy first sees the Bed and Breakfast, the sign "Bed and Breakfast" seems to be like "large black eyes staring at him." This isn't literally happening, but it feels like the sign is hypnotizing him to enter the house. This tells us that there might be something off or strange about the place.

The landlady herself is described in ways that make her seem friendly on the outside but maybe a little weird or creepy. Like when Billy says that she "appeared to be slightly off her rocker." This doesn't mean she's actually sitting on a broken chair, but that she seems a bit crazy. Another time, she is described as "holding [the tea-tray] well out in front of her, and rather high up, as though the tray were a pair of reins on a frisky horse." This makes her seem like she's trying to control something wild, even though it's just tea.

Lastly, the setting is described in ways that are comforting but also kinda eerie. The room Billy sees has "a bright fire burning" and "a pretty little dachshund" sleeping, which seems cozy. But then there are hints that things aren't right. Like the animals in the house that seem alive but aren't. When Billy touches the dachshund, it's "hard and cold," which is really creepy!

In conclusion, in "The Landlady", figurative language is used a lot to help us feel the mystery and get to know the setting and characters. It makes the story more fun to read and also a lot more intense.

Sample Grading Rubric:

Introduction (1 point)

- Provides a clear introduction to the story and the purpose of the essay.

Understanding of Figurative Language (3 points)

- Demonstrates a clear understanding of what figurative language is.

Use of Examples from the Text (2 points)

- Provides specific examples of figurative language from "The Landlady."
- Explains how each example is a form of figurative language (e.g., metaphor, simile, personification) and the deeper meaning.

Analysis of Setting Using Figurative Language (1 point)

- Explains how figurative language helps the reader visualize or feel the setting.

Analysis of Characters Using Figurative Language (1 point)

- Describes how the author uses figurative language to give insights into the characters, especially the landlady.

Connection to Overall Mood (1 point)

- Discusses how the figurative language contributes to the story's overall mood or theme.

Conclusion (1 point)

- Summarizes the main points of the essay and provides closure.

Grammar and Mechanics (1 point)

- Uses correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling throughout.

Name: _____

Date: _____

"The Landlady" Essay

Prompt:

How does Roald Dahl's utilization of figurative language in "The Landlady" contribute to the reader's understanding of the story's setting characters?

Lined area for writing the essay response.

