

Determining Word Meanings

LAFS

7.RL.2.4: 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"?