

TABE
ELA-E
PAXEN

Unit-4
Vocabulary and Word Use

Lesson-26
Literal and Non-Literal

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ELA-E-26 Literal and Non-literal

Lesson 26

Literal and Non-literal Meanings

3.L.5.a — Low

The dictionary definition of a word or phrase is its **literal meaning**.

Some words, especially when used in phrases, can have meanings other than what is in the dictionary. For example, a person might say, "I was just pulling your leg!" The person was not actually tugging on your leg. The person is not using the phrase *pulling your leg* literally. It is a phrase that has come to mean "joking with you." That is the **non-literal meaning** of the phrase.

Non-literal meanings can be difficult to figure out sometimes. If you have not heard words used in a certain way, you might have to use context clues to decide what they mean. Here are some common non-literal phrases.

Non-literal phrases	Meaning
back to the drawing board	start over
take steps	perform an action
hang in there	do not give up
under the weather	sick
bent out of shape	upset

Example

Jake said, "Maybe I should tell my cousin that I disagree with him."

Eliza replied, "No, you shouldn't. You don't want to rock the boat."

(In this example, Eliza is not talking about a real boat. Think about the context. Eliza is telling Jake not to cause trouble. Rocking a boat causes trouble because the rocking could tip the boat over. This is why *rock the boat* is a non-literal way of saying *cause trouble*.)

Test Example

1. Read the sentence.

We need to leave very soon, so tell the kids to shake a leg.

What is the meaning of the underlined phrase?

- A. dance
- B. hurry up
- C. exercise
- D. bother each other

B. The speaker mentions that the family needs to leave very soon, so everyone needs to hurry up.

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Practice

1

Read the sentence.

I don't want to buy a new car right now, but mine is on its last legs.

What is the meaning of the underlined phrase?

- A. with me forever
- B. with its last owner
- C. on a long road trip
- D. no longer in good repair

2

Read the sentence.

Dory had butterflies in her stomach, so she took deep calming breaths.

What is the meaning of the underlined phrase?

- A. boredom
- B. excitement
- C. sudden courage
- D. a nervous feeling

3

Read the sentence.

If my daughter wants to be first in her class, she better hit the books.

What is the meaning of the underlined phrase?

- A. study hard
- B. get sneaky
- C. fight her classmates
- D. throw away her books

4

Read the sentence.

I'm in the doghouse for forgetting our anniversary.

What is the meaning of the underlined phrase?

- A. out of money
- B. in trouble
- C. being rewarded
- D. spending time outside

5

Read the sentence.

Ravi didn't get much sleep last night, so this evening, he is ready to hit the hay.

What is the meaning of the underlined phrase?

- A. go out
- B. go to bed
- C. go outside
- D. go to work

6

Read the sentence.

Norah thought she could do all the errands, but she had bitten off more than she could chew.

What is the meaning of the underlined phrase?

- A. spent too much time eating
- B. did more work than anyone else
- C. felt annoyed that nobody was helping
- D. took on more than she could handle

7

Read the sentence.

I thought the test would be hard, but it was a piece of cake.

What is the meaning of the underlined phrase?

- A. easy
- B. difficult
- C. delicious
- D. not very fun

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Practice 26

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3.L.5.a – Low

1

Read the sentences.

I have been working hard since 7:00 a.m. Now that it's 7:00 p.m., I think it's time to call it a day.

What is the meaning of the phrase *call it a day*?

- A. call a friend
- B. start the day
- C. look outside
- D. stop work

2

Read the sentences.

You are clearly very prepared to begin this company project. Thank you for being so on the ball.

What is the meaning of the phrase *on the ball*?

- A. good at sports
- B. aware of what is happening
- C. physically strong
- D. bouncy like a rubber ball

3

Read the sentence.

It is very convenient to visit the library because it is only a stone's throw away from this office.

What is the meaning of the phrase *a stone's throw away*?

- A. very close
- B. broken
- C. in the room
- D. heavy

4

Read the sentences.

I need to talk about my stressful day. Do you think you could lend an ear?

What is the meaning of the phrase *lend an ear*?

- A. loan money
- B. wear earrings
- C. listen
- D. allow

5

Read the sentence.

Amoya was _____ before the job interview, but she felt confident and relaxed when it was finished.

Which non-literal phrase best completes the sentence?

- A. a bundle of nerves
- B. fit as a fiddle
- C. the last straw
- D. the elephant in the room

6

Read the sentence.

Idi thought he had solved the wiring problem in the building, but after seeing even more lights go out, he had to go back to square one.

What is the meaning of the phrase *go back to square one*?

- A. draw a square
- B. start over
- C. count up from the number one
- D. stop thinking about it

7

Read the sentence.

I wish I had taken my mother's advice to hit the sack early last night because now I can't stop yawning.

What is the meaning of the phrase *hit the sack*?

- A. eat a large meal
- B. hit someone
- C. go to bed
- D. learn to farm

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- 8 Read the sentence.
I was anxious about learning to drive, but my brother assured me that it would be _____.
- Which non-literal phrase best completes the sentence?
- A. a long story short
 - B. a perfect storm
 - C. a walk in the park
 - D. a wild goose chase

- 9 Read the sentence.
I heard through the grapevine that the coffee shop on the corner will be hiring new employees soon.
- What is the meaning of the phrase *through the grapevine*?
- A. in a dream
 - B. while drinking wine
 - C. in a bunch of grapes
 - D. from other people

- 10 Read the sentence.
I won't twist your arm, but I hope you'll come to lunch with us.
- What is the meaning of the phrase *twist your arm*?
- A. pressure you
 - B. tattoo your arm
 - C. dance with you
 - D. join the military

- 11 Read the sentence.
Some people will fly off the handle instead of staying calm.
- What is the meaning of the phrase *fly off the handle*?
- A. swat flies
 - B. react cautiously
 - C. fly away
 - D. lose control

- 12 Read the sentence.
I did not go to work today because I was feeling under the weather.
- What is the meaning of the phrase *under the weather*?
- A. happy
 - B. irritated
 - C. sick
 - D. wet

- 13 Read the sentence.
I was on cloud nine after I heard the good news.
- What is the meaning of the phrase *on cloud nine*?
- A. very sad
 - B. very happy
 - C. very cloudy
 - D. very angry

- 14 Read the sentences.
I'm so glad we had a chance to meet today. Please don't be a stranger.
- What is the meaning of the phrase *don't be a stranger*?
- A. take acting lessons
 - B. move to a new place
 - C. be in contact soon
 - D. be careful around strangers

- 15 Read the sentence.
I can't afford to move because money doesn't grow on trees.
- What is the meaning of the phrase *money doesn't grow on trees*?
- A. money is not easy to get
 - B. trees are expensive
 - C. money is green
 - D. trees grow deep roots

- 16 Read the sentences.
My supervisor is an inspiration to me. I hope to follow in her footsteps.
- What is the meaning of the phrase *follow in her footsteps*?
- A. be extremely different
 - B. travel to somewhere interesting
 - C. walk loudly
 - D. achieve similar accomplishments

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(3.L.5.a)

1. D. The speaker might have to buy a new car if the old one stops working.
2. D. A person who was nervous would need to take calming breaths.
3. A. To be first in a class, a student has to study hard, spending a lot of time with books.
4. B. Forgetting an anniversary could make a loved one upset with you.
5. B. If Ravi didn't get much sleep, he's probably in the mood to get to bed early.
6. D. Norah thought that she could handle all the tasks but found she was wrong. She planned to do more than she could.
7. A. The opposite of *hard* is *easy*.

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Practice 26

Literal and Non-Literal Meanings

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(3.L.5.a)

1. D. After 12 hours, the speaker feels it is time to stop working.
2. B. To be *on the ball* means “to be aware of or prepared for what is happening.”
3. A. In this case, visualizing the non-literal phrase may be helpful; a stone can be thrown a little way, but not terribly far.
4. C. To *lend an ear* means “to listen.”
5. A. A *bundle of nerves* is a non-literal phrase that means “someone who is very nervous”; the clue in the phrase is the word *nerves*.
6. B. To *go back to square one* means “to start over,” just like in a game where someone has to return to the start.
7. C. *Hit the sack* is a non-literal phrase that means “go to bed.”
8. C. A *walk in the park* is a non-literal phrase that means “easy.”
9. D. To hear something *through the grapevine* means from other people or indirectly.
10. A. The phrase *twist your arm* means “to pressure or persuade.”
11. D. The sentence includes a clue phrase: “instead of staying calm.” This indicates that some people do not stay calm but instead lose control.
12. C. The phrase *under the weather* means “sick.”
13. B. The phrase *on cloud nine* means “very happy.”
14. C. The speaker is expressing a desire to be in contact again soon.
15. A. The speaker knows that money is not easy to get.
16. D. To *follow in someone’s footsteps* means “to do as he or she has done.”