Grade 8: Reading Benchmark

Figurative Language

8.R.3.1: Analyze how figurative language contributes to meaning and explain examples of symbolism in text(s).

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Benchmark Introduction



Benchmark:

Analyze how figurative language and/or symbol(s) contribute to a text’s meaning.

Definition of Figurative Language

Figurative language expresses something other than the literal, or actual, meaning of the words.

Examples of Figurative Language

Some figurative language uses comparison:

- **Simile:** A simile is a comparison between two different things that uses “like” or “as” to express a quality they have in common.
  Example: Joe is *as busy as a bee*.

- **Metaphor:** A metaphor is a comparison between two different things to express a quality they have in common. Unlike a simile, a metaphor doesn’t use “like” or “as.”
  Example: Shawna *is a night owl*.

Examples of Figurative Language

More figurative language that uses comparison:

- **Personification:** Personification gives human qualities to something that isn't human.
  Example: It is best to answer when opportunity knocks.

- **Idiom:** A cultural expression that cannot be understood from the meanings of its separate words but must be learned as a whole.
  Example: It's raining cats and dogs.

Examples of Figurative Language

Some figurative language uses emphasis:

- **Hyperbole:** Exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally.

  Example: Rafael waited in line for ages.

- **Meiosis:** Using underemphasis in order to achieve a greater effect; understatement.

  Example: "There's nothing like a quick sail across the pond!" exclaimed the young woman after her cruise across the Atlantic Ocean.

Definition of Symbol

A **symbol** is a person, place, or thing that represents something else or an abstract idea.

Example: A national flag is a symbol for a country.

Symbolism refers to an author's use of symbols to represent certain ideas or qualities.

> Example: In the essay, "My Mother's Garden" by Kaitlyn Greenidge, the destruction of the garden by the housing authority is a symbol of the obstacles members of impoverished communities often face when trying to make even small improvements to their quality of life.

Examples of how figurative language and symbolism contribute to meaning

"It was the first of a long series of such outrages, of which I was doomed to be a witness and a participant. It struck me with awful force. It was the **blood-stained gate**, the **entrance to the hell of slavery**, through which I was about to pass." (*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*)

Douglass uses **figurative language** (a metaphor) to convey his meaning: seeing his aunt attacked was Douglass's initiation into the horrors of slavery.

Examples of how figurative language and symbolism contribute to meaning

“After everyone had gone, my mother said to me, ‘You want to be the same as American girls on the outside.’ She handed me an early gift. It was a miniskirt in beige tweed. ‘But inside you must always be Chinese. You must be proud you are different. Your only shame is to have shame.’ ” (“Fish Cheeks” by Amy Tan)

In Tan’s story, the daughter feels torn between her American and Chinese identities. Tan uses the gift of the miniskirt as a **symbol** to highlight the meaning of the mother’s message: she wants her daughter to understand that she can embrace both of her identities.

Benchmark Skill Routine



How to analyze the roles of figurative language and symbolism in conveying meaning

Read closely, highlight, and annotate any language that isn't literal and/or could be an example of symbolism.

Notice:

- Similes, metaphors, personification
- Detailed descriptions of people, places, or things that seem to be associated with something else

How to analyze the roles of figurative language and symbolism in conveying meaning

Consider:

What feelings or ideas are suggested by the figurative language and/or symbols?

How to analyze the roles of figurative language and symbolism in conveying meaning

Think about how figurative language and symbols convey meaning in this text.

Remember

1. Read closely, highlight, and annotate any language that isn't literal and/or could be an example of symbolism.
2. Consider: What feelings or ideas are suggested by the figurative language and/or symbols?
3. Think about how figurative language and symbols convey meaning in this text.

Benchmark in Action: Example of how to analyze the roles of figurative language and symbolism in conveying meaning



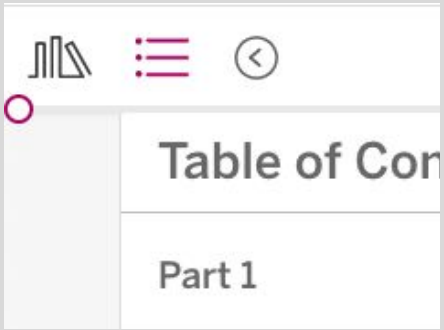
Get ready to read two passages in *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman.



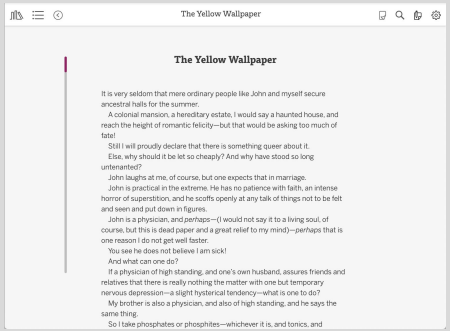
1. Open the Library app.



2. Type “The Yellow Wallpaper” into the search bar.



3. Click on the title of the book to open it.



4. Read paragraphs 27–35.

The Yellow Wallpaper

Context for Passage 1

In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the narrator's husband diagnoses her with a nervous condition after the birth of a child and insists that she isolate herself from friends and family and stop working. The narrator disagrees with her husband's advice, but she keeps quiet for fear he will be disappointed and will send her to a harsher doctor. In this passage, she describes the room where she will spend much of her time alone and idle.

Read paragraphs 27–35 in *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

As you read...

- look for language that isn't literal and/or could be an example of symbolism.
- consider what feelings or ideas the figurative language and/or symbols suggest.
- think about how figurative language and symbols convey meaning in this text.

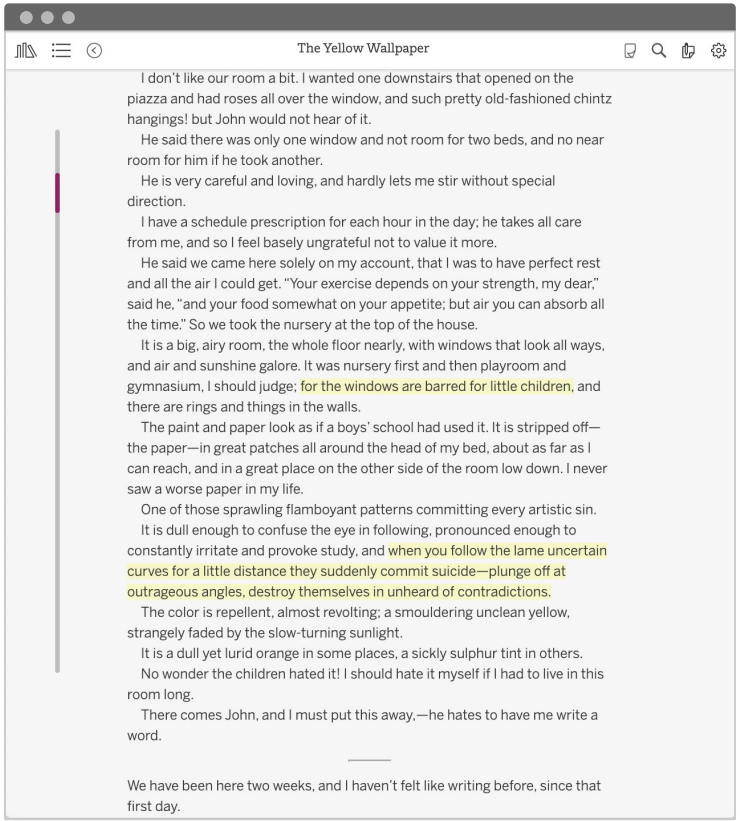
Practice Step 1

Read closely, highlight, and annotate any language that isn't literal and/or could be an example of symbolism.

Notice:

- Similes, metaphors, personification, etc.
- Detailed descriptions of people, places, or things that seem to be associated with something else

Practice Step 1


The Yellow Wallpaper

I don't like our room a bit. I wanted one downstairs that opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty old-fashioned chintz hangings! but John would not hear of it.

He said there was only one window and not room for two beds, and no near room for him if he took another.

He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction.

I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all care from me, and so I feel basely ungrateful not to value it more.

He said we came here solely on my account, that I was to have perfect rest and all the air I could get. "Your exercise depends on your strength, my dear," said he, "and your food somewhat on your appetite; but air you can absorb all the time." So we took the nursery at the top of the house.

It is a big, airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore. It was nursery first and then playroom and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls.

The paint and paper look as if a boys' school had used it. It is stripped off—the paper—in great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the room low down. I never saw a worse paper in my life.

One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin.

It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions.

The color is repellent, almost revolting; a smouldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight.

It is a dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly sulphur tint in others.

No wonder the children hated it! I should hate it myself if I had to live in this room long.

There comes John, and I must put this away,—he hates to have me write a word.

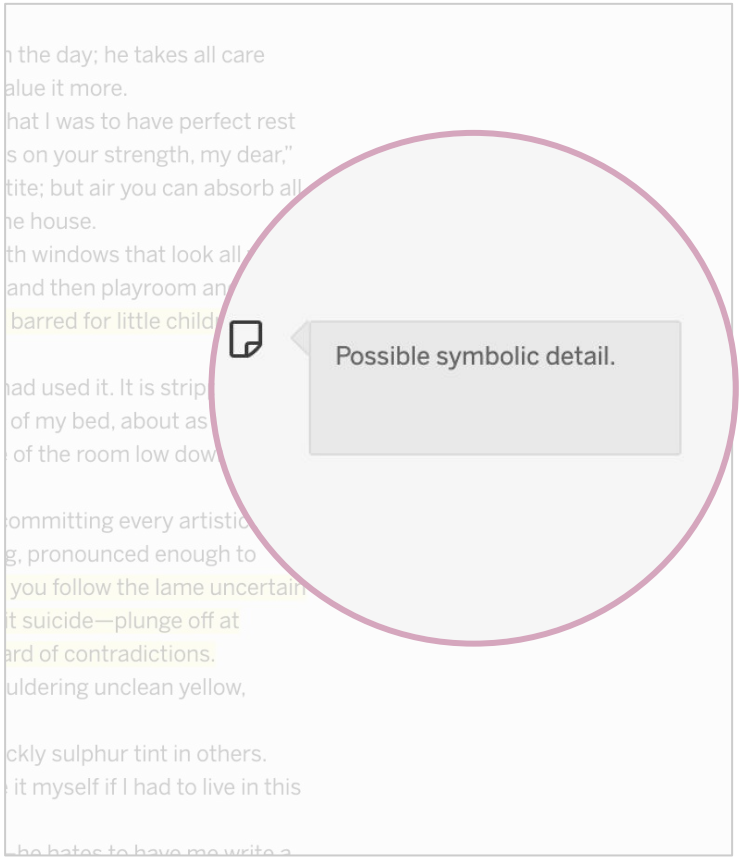
We have been here two weeks, and I haven't felt like writing before, since that first day.

Highlight any language that isn't literal and/or could be an example of symbolism.

"for the windows are barred for little children"

"when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions"

Practice Step 1



Annotate to identify each highlight as a type of figurative language or possible symbolic detail.

Possible symbolic detail.

Personification and possible symbolic detail.

Practice Step 2

Consider:

What feelings or ideas are suggested by the figurative language and/or symbols?

Practice Step 2 Examples:

"for the windows are barred for little children" (par. 32)

- This phrase makes readers think of a jail. This symbol could be connected to the narrator because she doesn't want to be there but is trapped because of her husband's directions.

"when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions" (par. 35)

- This description uses personification when the design plunges and destroys itself. The narrator's description suggests that she finds it very hideous and upsetting.
- This description may be symbolic because it connects to the narrator's unhappy state of mind.

Practice Step 3

Think about how figurative language and symbols convey meaning in this text.

Practice Step 3 Example:

In this passage, the narrator is describing the room that her husband has confined her to. The narrator's language reveals that she views the room as a sort of prison. The author uses personification to convey the idea that the room she is trapped in is dangerous and threatening; even the wallpaper feels miserable and wants to escape. Throughout the passage, the narrator's description of the room becomes symbolic of her own situation and frame of mind.

Remember

1. Read closely, highlight, and annotate any language that isn't literal and/or could be an example of symbolism.
2. Consider: What feelings or ideas are suggested by the figurative language and/or symbols?
3. Think about how figurative language and symbols convey meaning in this text.

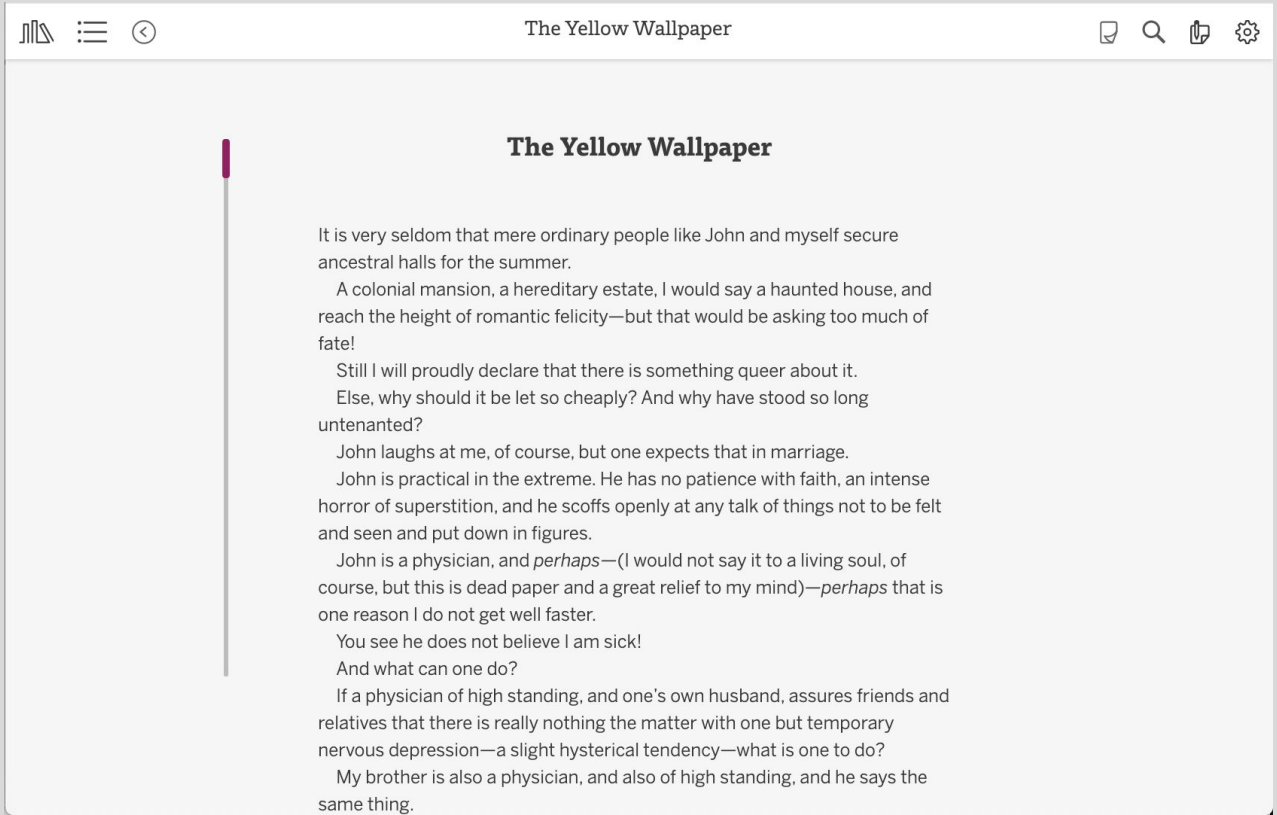
Independent Practice



Benchmark:

Analyze how figurative language and/or symbol(s) contribute to a text’s meaning.

Now read paragraphs 121–125 and 153–157 in *The Yellow Wallpaper*.



The Yellow Wallpaper

Context for Passage 2

The narrator becomes increasingly preoccupied with the wallpaper in her room. After her husband rebuffs her pleas to allow her to go home, she begins to sense that there is more to the pattern than she previously believed.

Practice reading to analyze how figurative language and symbolism contribute to meaning

Step 1
Read closely, highlight, and annotate any language that isn't literal and/or could be an example of symbolism.

Step 2
Consider what feelings or ideas the figurative language and/or symbols suggest.

Step 3
Think about how figurative language and symbols convey meaning in this text.

Check for Understanding



Share and Discuss

1. What language does the author include that isn’t literal and/or could be an example of symbolism?

Share and Discuss

2. What feelings or ideas are suggested by the figurative language and/or symbols?

Share and Discuss

3. Explain how the figurative language and symbols in this text convey meaning.