

Introduction

Figurative language is an important part of student communication and is embedded throughout general conversations, classroom discussions, and literature. A study by Kerbel and Grunwell (1997) revealed that teachers use an average of 1.73 idioms per minute. This puts students who have language impairments at a distinct disadvantage in the classroom, as they find it difficult to use context to understand implied meanings (Rinaldi, 2000). When students cannot recognize figurative expressions, when they cannot comprehend intended meaning from context, and when they don't ask for clarification, they miss a significant portion of the meaningful dialogue that occurs in their daily lives. This can mean the difference between academic success and failure.

Students with language impairments need specific instruction to understand and use figurative language (RCSLT, 2005). *Figurative Language Card Games* provides a fun, motivating format to help these students understand others and communicate more effectively by teaching them to recognize and interpret implied meanings for the following types of figurative language:

- Idioms — expressions that mean something other than the literal meanings of their individual words. Students who do not understand idioms often misinterpret the speaker's meaning and may respond in a manner which is off-topic or inappropriate.
- Indirect Language — a statement or a question that implies a different meaning. Students who have difficulty interpreting indirect language often think someone is asking their opinion or making a general statement.
- Similes — direct comparisons of two unlike things that are often introduced by the words *like* or *as*
- Metaphors — implied comparisons of two unlike things that do not use *like* or *as*

Figurative Language Card Games is made up of four decks of playing cards—two decks of idioms, one deck of indirect language phrases, and one deck of similes and metaphors. Each deck contains 52 suited cards. Each card holds a short, narrative passage which

includes a figurative language phrase. Students use context clues within a passage to help them answer a multiple-choice question that addresses the meaning of the targeted phrase. Students will enjoy self-checking their answers by using the decoder.

The cards can easily be adapted to meet the individual needs of each student. Use the decks individually, or select cards from different decks to create a customized card deck that includes all of the figurative language forms. In addition to playing the games, you may also use the cards for drills and practice activities with your students. Track your students' progress by using the Data Collection Sheet on pages 10-12.

We hope you and your students enjoy the time you spend together playing these games. Have fun!

Ellen and Sharlet

Kerbel, D., & Grunwell P. (1997). Idioms in the classroom: An investigation of language unit and mainstream teachers' use of idioms. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 13(2), 113-123.

Rinaldi, W. (2000). Pragmatic comprehension in secondary school-aged students with specific developmental language disorder. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 35, 1-29.

Royal College of Speech & Language Therapists. (2005). *RCSLT clinical guidelines*. London: RCSLT.

Strategies

Some additional activities that encourage development of figurative language include:

- Have your students look for examples of figurative language in books, comic strips, newspaper advertisements, and TV commercials. Ask them to keep a journal of these expressions, log each phrase's meaning, and use the phrase in a sentence.
- When working one-on-one with your students, use "click or clunk" to check the student's comprehension and interpretation of figurative language phrases. When the student encounters a phrase that has a non-literal meaning, ask him what he thinks it means. If the student's response makes sense, it "clicks."

If his response doesn't make sense, it "clunks." Use any incorrect answer as a teaching opportunity.

- Pose similes and metaphors as questions to generate student thinking. For example, ask, "How is a cloud like a pillow?" "How can a tire be like a pancake?" or "How is solving a mystery like putting together a jigsaw puzzle?"
- Have your students make a list of figurative language expressions and brainstorm possible meanings for each expression.
- Coach your students to consider a speaker's facial expression and body language to help them determine implied meanings.

How to Play

Game 1: War

Players: 2

Object: to accumulate the most cards

Setting Up

Choose one or more decks of cards. Shuffle the cards and divide them evenly between the two players. Each player places his stack of cards facedown in front of him.

Playing the Game

Each player simultaneously flips over his top card and places it faceup on the table. The player who turns over the card with the highest point value must answer the questions on both cards. If the player gives an incorrect response, he places the corresponding card on a "no-win" pile. If he answers a question correctly, he keeps the corresponding card. If both players turn over cards that have the same value, each player attempts to answer the question on his own card. If he is correct, he keeps the card. If he is incorrect, the card goes on the "no-win" pile. The player who has the most cards at the end of the game or at the end of a predetermined amount of time is the winner.

Variation

If a player does not answer a question correctly, you can allow the other player to "steal" the card by giving the correct answer.