

Meandering Meanings

Extra Background

There are three types of irony: verbal, situational (both covered here) and dramatic.

Suggested Scaffolding

Explain to children that they need to think of things that aren't great, wonderful or enjoyable in order to make these sentences ironic.

Suggested Scaffolding

Literal-minded pupils may find it hard to understand verbal irony. Start pupils off by getting them to think about situations that they might see as negative, and how a positive exclamation would make them ironic.

Suggested Scaffolding

Other examples of situational irony might help here, e.g. a fire at a fire station, or a police officer being arrested.

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Meandering Meanings

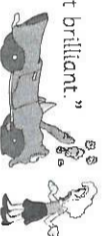
You've probably heard someone say 'no, that's not what I meant', and then explain themselves again more clearly. Sometimes, though, people deliberately don't mean what they say. Let's find out why!

Sometimes people say the opposite of what something really means.

This is called **IRONY**.

"The car's broken down. That's just brilliant."

This is ironic because it's not brilliant at all!



Can you complete these sentences so that they are ironic?

Lucky me, I've lost my purse again.

Oh great, I banged my head.

How wonderful, you've got mud on the carpet.

I love it when my teacher shouts at me.

Now have a go at writing your own ironic sentences about the topics below.

Homework → I've been given three hours of homework tonight.

I cannot wait!

The dentist → I've got to go to the dentist to get a filling — brilliant!

Something can also be ironic in a situation. Here's a poem all about the sea. It contains irony. Try to spot the ironic sentence and underline it.

"Water, water, everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink."

ST Coleridge
"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798)

Why do you think your underlined sentence is ironic?

The sentence says they don't have anything to drink, even though there is water everywhere.

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Pupil Guidance

This is about getting pupils to recognise that irony comes from the contrast — there is water everywhere at sea but the people are still thirsty.

Meandering Meanings — Aims:

- to develop an understanding of what irony is and how it's used
- to consider the purpose and effect of exaggeration and understatement.

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Sometimes people say more than they mean. This is called exaggeration, or **OVERSTATEMENT**.

I had to wait forever for my dad to arrive.

My gran is a million years old.

Can you use exaggeration to complete this sentence?

I'm so hungry I could eat an elephant cold without salt and vinegar.



Do you ever exaggerate?

Why do people exaggerate sometimes?

Writers often exaggerate to make an effect or to get the readers interested in what they are writing.

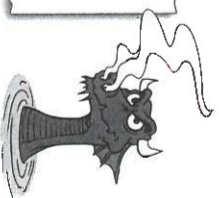
Sometimes people say a lot less than they actually mean. This is called **UNDERSTATEMENT**.

This blizzard is a bit chilly.

A blizzard is usually freezing, rather than just chilly, so this is an understatement.

Can you underline the understatement in this paragraph?

Tia's instructor was very angry. "In the last hour you have managed to burn down half of the huts in the village, collapse all but one of the bridges, and set free a highly dangerous fire-breathing dragon."
"Yes," Tia replied nervously, "Maybe I got a tiny bit carried away."



Why do you think the person in this extract has used understatement?

We lost the match 50-0 — it could have gone better.



I think they said this because it actually went very badly, and they don't really want to admit it.

Describe a time when you have used words and phrases you didn't really mean.

I once said 'I'm so excited I could burst' when I wouldn't actually burst.



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Extension Idea

Children could think of exaggeration starters, e.g. 'I'm so tired I could' and 'I'm so excited I could', then challenge each other to complete them.

Suggested Scaffolding

Many children are told not to exaggerate by parents/carers. Ask them to look at the actual meaning of what is being said — would they really want to eat an elephant?

Pupil Guidance

Pupils should understand that there's a reason why people don't say what they mean, but that this is different from just lying.

Extension Idea

Next time the pupils write a story, ask them to create a character who has a habit of exaggerating. What sort of thing would they say, and what sort of difficulty could this get them into?

Splendid Similes

Extra Background

Some similes seem clichéd now, e.g. 'cold as ice', 'my love's like a red, red rose', but were fresh and inventive when they were originally created.

Extension Idea

Children could use the 'word cloud' method to create similes. Write a word in the centre, e.g. 'silly'. Then surround it with all the ideas that go with the word. Change and rearrange these to create similes for different ways of being 'silly'.

Pupil Guidance

Pupils should think about whether younger children would interpret their similes literally.

Pupil Guidance

This passage has similes in every sentence so that pupils can see how they work. Ask pupils whether you would want this many in a short text, or whether you would be better mixing them with metaphor, e.g. 'The cat, an empress in her finery, padded past...'

Splendid Similes



A simile is a way of describing something by comparing it to something else. Similes use the words 'like' or 'as'.
as sweet as a fresh strawberry sharp like a shark's tooth



Step 1
Think of an adjective to describe each picture.

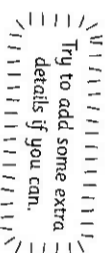
powerful	→	a storm	→	a volcano erupting
bright	→	a parrot	→	a scarf
soggy	→	a wet sponge	→	muddy ground



Step 2
Think of some other things that could be described with this word.



Step 3
Now use some of your answers from above to write your own similes. You'll need to use the word 'as' or 'like'.



Try to add some extra details if you can.

The rocket is powerful like a volcano erupting.
The rainbow is as bright as a jungle parrot.
Jim was as soggy as a wet sponge.

Do you think a younger child would understand your similes?
Read the passage below. What do these similes suggest to you about the dog?

The dog was like a shadow in the corner of the room. The cat padded past, like an empress in her finery. The dog covered under a chair, like a beetle under a rock.

The similes make me think that the dog is quiet and frightened, and not very brave about confronting the cat. It would sooner run and hide.

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Splendid Similes — Aims:

- to get pupils to understand how a simile is formed
- to allow pupils to practise creating similes of their own for a variety of purposes
- to enable pupils to create more complex similes.

Suggested Scaffolding

This is a trickier concept (descriptions that seem to defeat the point of the simile), but they focus the reader's attention on specific aspects of the thing described, whilst bringing in other associations. To help children, you could change the second clause from this example and ask them how the meaning has been altered e.g. '...like dust, easy to ignore and easier to clean away.'

Suggested Scaffolding

Encourage the pupils to think of improbable or unworkable things (e.g. a chocolate teapot) and then write a simile around the idea they've had.

Extension Idea

Ask the pupils to create a set of similes for different moods (funny similes, scary similes, beautiful similes), and make them into a display.

Similes can be made better by adding extra details to them. Can you improve these similes?
as fit as an athlete → as fit as an athlete at the Athletics Championships
as agile as a monkey → as agile as a monkey swinging through the trees
unstable like jelly → unstable like a jelly melting in summer sunshine

Sometimes similes go on to tell you exactly which bits of something they are referring to.

A good book is like a good chair — cosy and welcoming at any time of day.

The writer could just say 'a good book is cosy and welcoming...'; but they describe the chair instead so we really imagine being comfortable too.

What does this simile make you think about the inspectors?

"The inspectors were like dust — everywhere and unwanted."

It makes me think they are not very nice people, and they might be a bit dishonest or mean, because dust isn't clean.

Similes can be made funny by comparing things to their opposites.

Simone was as welcome as a cat at a dog's birthday party!

This is a funny way of saying Simone was unwelcome.



Can you think of a funny simile for these things?

Something that isn't quiet → It is as quiet as a New Year's Eve fireworks display.

Something that isn't useful → This is as useful as an ice-cube armchair in the Sahara desert.

Something that isn't tasty → This is as tasty as a twelve-month-old ham sandwich.

How can similes make your writing better?

Similes can improve my descriptions, add more details and can also be used to make a funny point.



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Pupil Guidance

All pupils should understand how similes work, but the more able can also mention adding details and humorous elements.

Marvellous Metaphors

Extra Background

The word 'metaphor' comes from a Greek verb 'metapherein' which means 'to transfer'. A metaphor directly transfers characteristics of one thing to the subject of the metaphor. It is more direct than a simile.

Pupil Guidance

Pupils should be careful with metaphors. Shakespeare didn't mean that Juliet was a giant, flaming ball of gas — he expected his readers to use a shared understanding of the beauty and warmth of the Sun when translating his metaphor.

Extension Idea

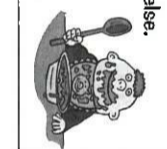
Get pupils to think of some funny ways to create metaphors, e.g. 'My friend's a lion!' 'What, brave and kingy?' 'No, scruffy, full of fleas, and with very bad breath!'

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Marvellous Metaphors



A metaphor is a way of describing something by saying it's something else. Lena's brother is a pig when he eats. This isn't true, but it tells you what Lena's brother is like when he eats.



The writer William Shakespeare was a master of metaphor. Read this one from his play 'Romeo and Juliet'. Here, Romeo is talking about his love for Juliet.

"It is the east, and Juliet is the sun."

Why do you think he calls Juliet 'the sun'?

Juliet might be bright and warm like the Sun.

Use the words below to write some metaphors about people. Try to use three different colours in each sentence.

- at school
- uncle
- monster
- on holiday
- at home
- angel
- friend
- livewire
- dragon
- on the pitch
- when hungry
- nightmare
- gorilla
- teacher
- on the piano
- mum

My sister is an angel at school.
 My uncle is a gorilla on the pitch. Mum's a monster from a nightmare. My friend is a dragon when hungry. My teacher is a livewire on the piano.

Can you write a metaphor about this picture?

Mary is a roaring engine in church.



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Suggested Scaffolding

We often use animals in metaphors. Ask the pupils to think of characteristics of animals — snakes can be sneaky, koalas can be cuddly, monkeys can be cheeky — and then use them in metaphors.

Marvellous Metaphors — Aims:

- to get pupils to understand how metaphors are used and how they are different from similes
- to assist pupils in learning how metaphors can be understood
- to allow pupils to play with metaphors in order to enrich their descriptive writing.

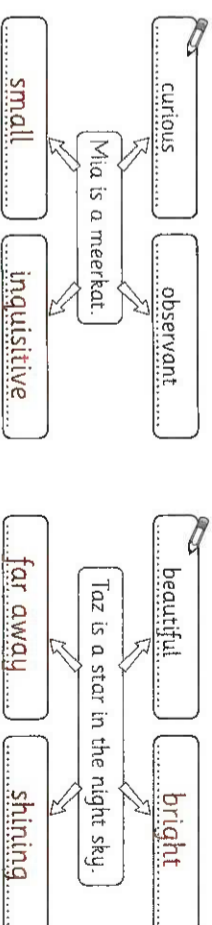
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Metaphors can describe more than one feature at a time. Both of the metaphors below suggest that the wind is quiet, but they tell you something else as well.

The wind was a gentle whisper. This metaphor also suggests the wind is calm and peaceful...

The wind was a whimpering cry. ...but this one suggests it is also sad, or even spooky.

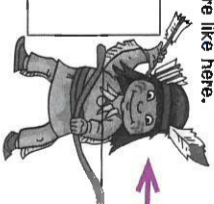
What do these metaphors suggest to you?



Are your answers different to other people's? If so, does it mean one of you is wrong?

Think about a character you like from a book or film. Write about what they're like here.

I like the character Dorothy in 'The Wonderful Wizard of Oz'. She is a leader, she cheers people up and she is brave.



Can you write some metaphors about them, based on your ideas above? Try to choose metaphors that fit more than one of their characteristics.

They are Dorothy is a light in a sea of darkness. Dorothy is a breath of fresh air. Dorothy is a lioness.

Read out your metaphors to a friend. What do they think the character is like?

I think I will use metaphors to...

make my descriptions better and paint a detailed picture of my characters in my reader's mind.



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Extension Idea

Ask the pupils to create a set of metaphors specifically for evil, dangerous or nasty characters so they can use them when they write.

Extension Idea

Read the start of 'The Highwayman' by Alfred Noyes. Ask the pupils how these metaphors make them imagine the wind and the moon.

Pupil Guidance

Different answers should be encouraged, and the point should be made that nobody is wrong.

Suggested Scaffolding

Ask pupils to draw a quick sketch of their character and annotate it with words describing them. By each word, have them put the name of an animal or thing which shares those characteristics. They can use these to create their metaphors.

Pupil Guidance

Pupils don't have to use a character they like — they can use a character they dislike if they prefer, which may be easier to create a metaphor.

Incredible Idioms

- Incredible Idioms — Aims:**
- to get pupils to understand what an idiom is
 - to get pupils to recognise how idioms are created and when they are used
 - to point out to pupils that idioms are best used sparingly, and should not be overused.

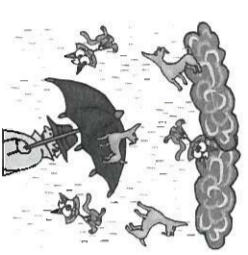
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Incredible Idioms

Idioms are phrases that don't mean exactly what they say, but that's OK because lots of people recognise and use them. Idioms only really mean something special to speakers of that language — once they've translated, they can lose their meaning.



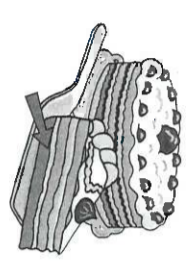
Here are some pictures of idioms. Can you work out what they are, and find out what they mean?



"That'll happen when p i g s f l y!"
 This idiom means something that's very unlikely to happen.



"It's raining c a t s and d o g s."
 This idiom means it's raining really heavily.



"This is a p l e a s e of c a k e."
 This idiom means it's very easy.

It's a good idea not to use idioms too often. Why do you think you should be careful when using idioms?

Do you think people learning English as a second language would understand idioms? Explain your answer.

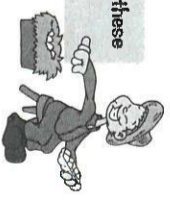
No because if you translate the words literally, you still won't get the meaning of the idiom.

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Suggested Scaffolding
 If pupils are struggling to think of an answer, give them some idioms from other languages and see if they can understand their meaning. For example, 'it's a carrot' (Korean for 'it's obvious') or 'to hang noodles on his ears' (Russian for 'to tell lies/talk nonsense').

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Lots of idioms are bits of advice, passed down over time. Try to guess what these idioms mean, then ask a friend what they thought. Do your answers match?

"Don't put all your eggs in one basket."
 I think this means don't rely too much on one thing.
 My friend thinks it means having two baskets will make them easier to carry.

The same! Pretty close Way off!

"Don't judge a book by its cover."
 I think this means don't judge people or things too soon.
 My friend thinks it means some books have exciting covers but are boring.

The same! Pretty close Way off!

Can you think of any other idioms that give advice?

The idioms below have been around for a long time. What do the orange words have in common?

I'm all at sea.

(I'm very confused.)

Don't beat around the bush.

(Get to the point.)

I'm over the moon.

(I'm delighted.)

He's barking up the wrong tree.

(He's got the wrong idea.)

They are all to do with nature, or something you can see.

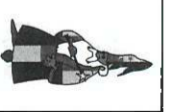
Why do you think idioms like these are still used today, even though they're from a long time ago?

They are about things that we still have all around us today.

Can you think of any other idioms?

What's your favourite idiom from these two pages, and why?

I like 'when pigs fly' because I find it funny to imagine pigs floating in the sky.



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Pupil Guidance
 Children may answer 'yes', reasoning that you could teach someone what an idiom means. It may be worth drawing their attention to the 'no' reasoning also.

Suggested Scaffolding
 Give pupils the idioms with an accompanying illustration. See if this helps them understand what it means.

Pupil Guidance
 Answers might include 'don't bite off more than you can chew' and 'let sleeping dogs lie'.

Pupil Guidance
 Pupils may interpret this question differently, and write something like 'they have been handed down over time so they have become very common.'

Pupil Guidance
 Other common idioms include 'break a leg', 'I smell a rat' and 'put your foot in it'.

Extension Idea
 Let the pupils experiment with creating some idioms of their own. Then allow them to share them with the rest of the class.

Perfect Personification

Extra Background
 Personification features in many poems. Seasons and weather are commonly personified, as are attributes such as evil, beauty, justice and kindness.

Suggested Scaffolding
 If pupils struggle with the specifics of this metaphor, try replacing it with something similar, e.g. 'It was the early afternoon of a stormy day with fierce winds howling at the shutters.'

Extension Idea
 Get pupils to look in their reading books to find their own examples of personification. They could make posters of them for the classroom.

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Perfect Personification



People are full of feelings. They laugh, they cry, they get excited — and sometimes they get cross. People act in different ways too — rushing, dawdling, snoozing and snoring. When you write about something as if it's a person, it's called **personification**.

Look at the examples of personification below. What words would you use to describe each of the movements? Fill in the gaps, and then complete an example of your own.

slow	heavy	jumpy	light, gentle
the clouds trudged across the sky		the snowflakes danced in the air	
the stream skipped on its way	happy	the ocean gnawed at the beach	hungry
playful		fierce	

Here is another example of personification.

It was the early afternoon of a sunshiny day with little winds playing hide-and-seek in it.
 K. Mansfield, 'How Pearl Button Was Kidnapped' (1912)

What does this example of personification make you think of?

This makes me think the wind is playful, or childlike.

Can you write two more sentences using personification to show how the wind can feel and sound?

Little winds playing hide-and-seek.
 The wind murmured in her ear.
 The wind bellowed through the hallway when she opened the door.

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Pupil Guidance

Using personification like this is also an effective way to show how your character feels about something (in this case, the wind). In the first example here, the wind is gentle. In the second, it is loud and aggressive.

- Perfect Personification — Aims:**
- to get pupils to recognise that personification gives human characteristics to non-human things
 - to assist pupils in using personification in descriptive writing.

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Read the extract below. The author is describing the woods.

The woods are whispering between themselves. As the cold wind blows between their branches, they shrug and dance, sending a flurry of needles to the forest floor. I lie here silently, but the knots in the trunks watch me with wooden eyes.

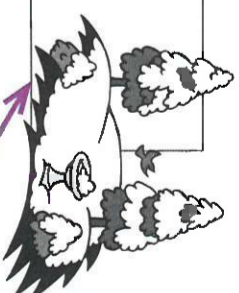
Can you spot the examples of personification used in the text? Write them down here.

The woods are whispering / they shrug and dance / the knots in the trunks watch me with wooden eyes

Why do you think writers might use personification?

Personification is brilliant for describing nature. What sort of things can you see and hear in winter?

frozen skies, pale colours, lots of greys and purples, hear a loud wind, you feel chilled and you have frozen fingers and toes. The wind is cold and sharp.



Now write a short description of winter using personification.

Sharp-toothed winter rooms the icy land.
 She is wearing pale snowflakes edged with lacy frost.
 Crowned with icicles, she weaves her cruel spells all around.

What have you learnt about personification?

Personification gives human characteristics and feelings to non-human things and objects.

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Pupil Guidance

Pupils should understand that personification is another type of figurative language. Some may also mention why it is useful.

Suggested Scaffolding

If pupils struggle with this task, ask them to look for the verbs and see if these lead them to examples of personification (e.g. 'whispering', 'shrug', 'dance' and 'watch').

Pupil Guidance

Answers might include 'to help make their descriptions better'.

Suggested Scaffolding

Pupils may find it easier to draw their idea first and then annotate it with suitable descriptive words.

Extension Idea

In this description, winter is a cruel person, perhaps an enchantress or witch. Ask pupils to continue the description with her looks, movement, actions and companions. They could try and write a poem too.