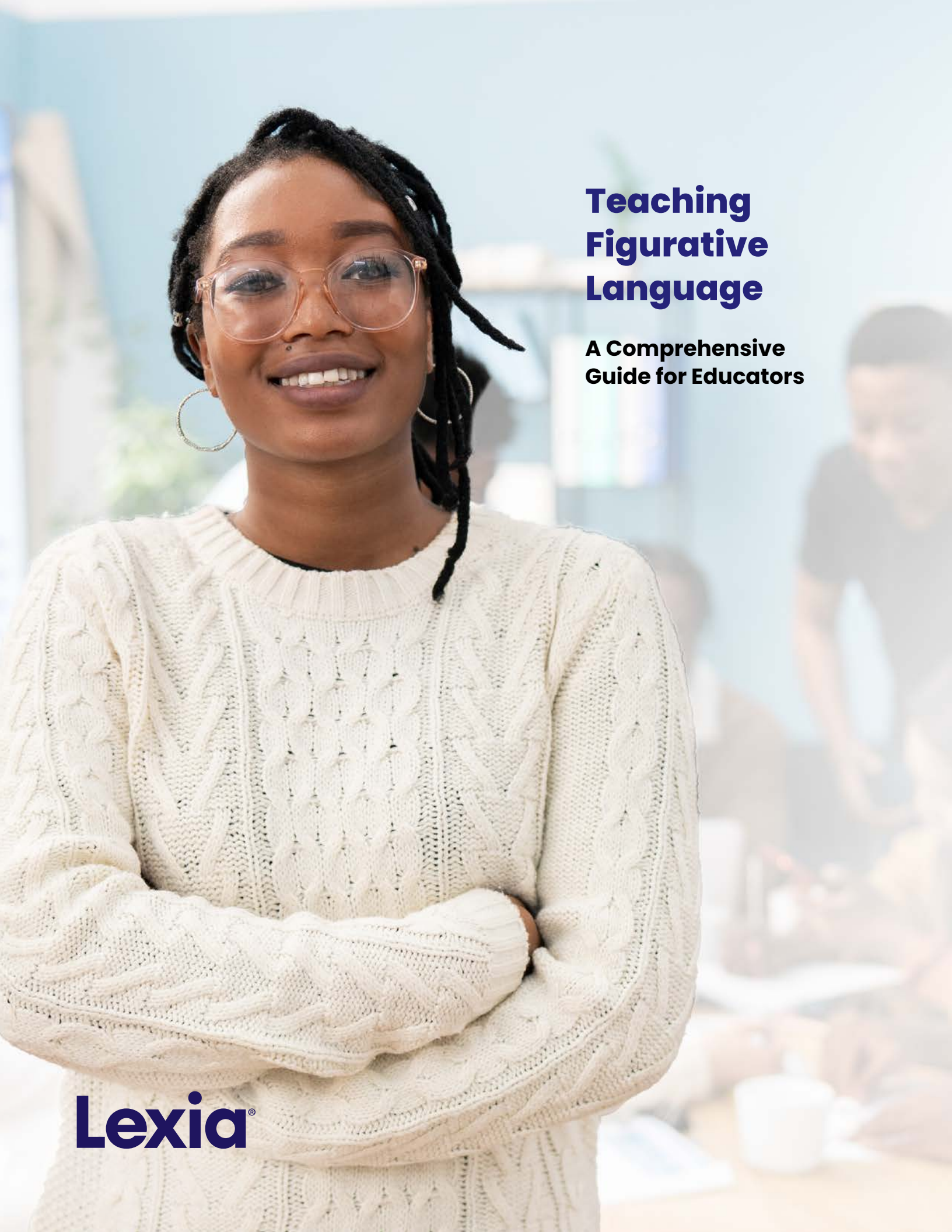




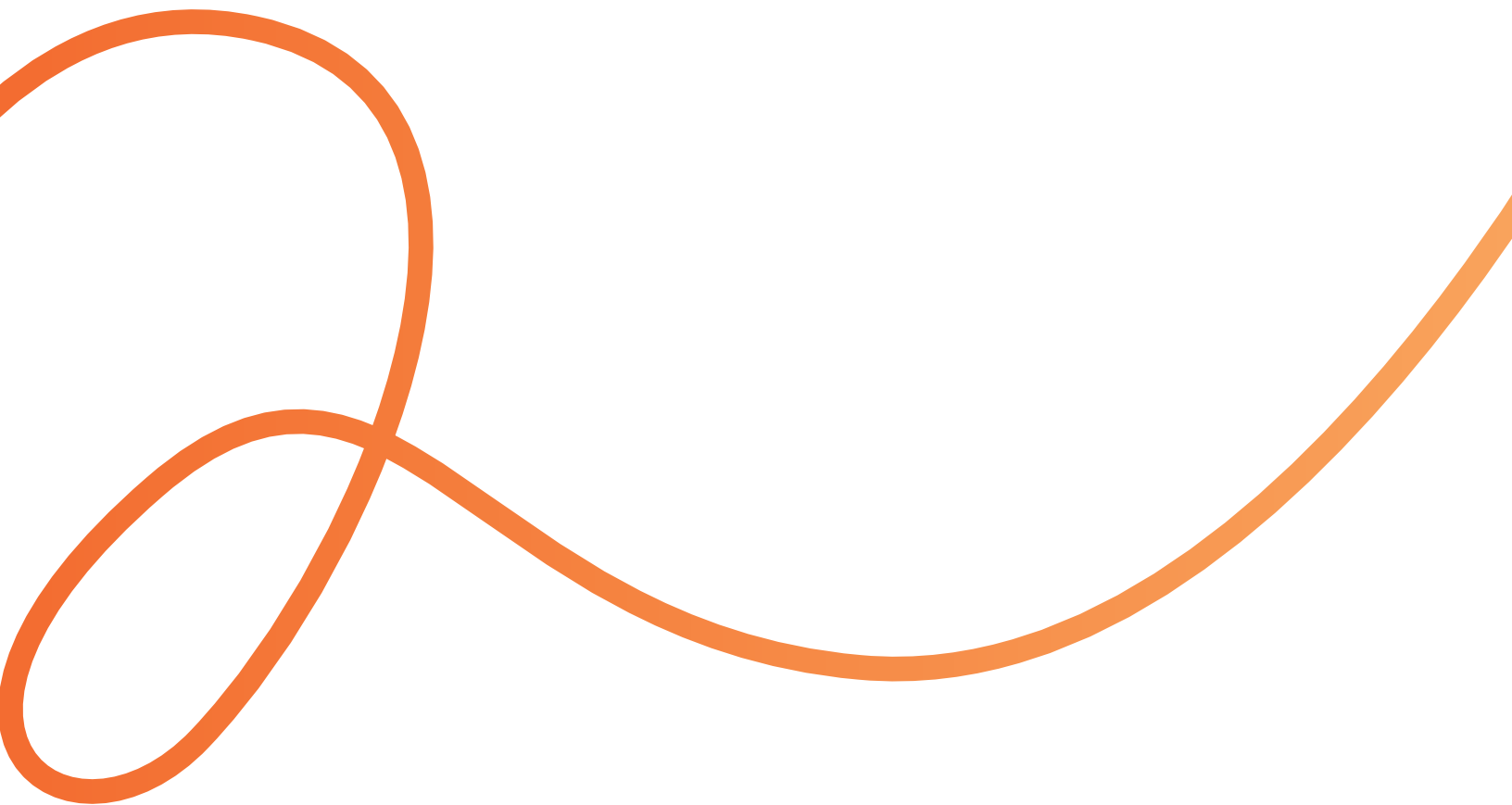
Teaching Figurative Language

**A Comprehensive
Guide for Educators**

Lexia®

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Figurative language helps students see how words can paint pictures in their minds. While they are usually great at understanding exactly what something means (“it’s raining”), they light up when discovering how language can be more playful and creative (“the sky is sobbing”).

As teachers, you see students discover these “aha!” moments—when they start using similes in their writing or spot metaphors in their favorite books. Each student makes these connections in their own way and time, which makes those breakthrough moments feel extra special.



Understanding the Challenge of Figurative Language

Figurative language invites learners on a mental journey to explore both literal and metaphorical meanings. While juggling these two levels of meaning can be tricky, especially for young minds still developing abstract thinking skills, it’s remarkable to watch students make these connections.

Students in diverse classrooms bring unique cultural perspectives to understanding figurative expressions. This can lead to misunderstandings, but it also opens up opportunities for sharing different interpretations and learning from one another.

Students often struggle with figurative language because it requires them to:

- Think abstractly about concrete concepts
- Recognize the difference between literal and non-literal meanings
- Apply cultural and contextual knowledge
- Make creative connections between unlike things



Core Teaching Approaches

1 Concrete to Abstract Learning

The journey from concrete to abstract thinking is a leap in cognitive development. When teaching figurative language, start with tangible, physical examples before moving to more abstract concepts. This helps students build strong mental models.

This also allows students to anchor new figurative expressions to familiar experiences and objects, making abstract figurative language more accessible and memorable.

Transform abstract figurative concepts into understanding by:

- Starting with familiar comparisons from students' daily lives
- Using visual aids to illustrate figurative relationships
- Creating physical demonstrations of metaphorical concepts



2 Progressive Skill Building

Just like learning to ride a bike, understanding figurative language happens step by step. We start with the basics and gradually add new skills. First, students learn simple comparisons, then move on to more creative ways of expressing ideas. Ensure students feel confident with each step before moving to the next level, helping everyone grow at their own pace.

Build comprehension through systematic exposure:

- Prefix and suffix identification
- Root word recognition
- Word family connections
- Meaning-based decoding

3 Interactive Engagement

When students participate in activities to learn figurative language, they understand the concept in a new way. Moving around, creating examples, and working with classmates help the ideas stick in their minds differently. It's like the difference between watching someone bake cookies and getting your hands in the dough—you learn more by doing. Learning becomes fun and memorable when students experience language through different activities.

5 Creative Activities To Teach Figurative Language

The following activities make learning memorable through active participation:

- **Creating visual representations:** Students draw or sketch figurative expressions like “raining cats and dogs” to compare literal versus metaphorical meanings. This helps make abstract language more concrete.
- **Role-playing figurative expressions:** Students act out expressions like “biting off more than I can chew” through skits or charades. This physical engagement helps them better understand and remember the meanings.
- **Collaborative meaning-making activities:** Students work in groups to interpret expressions, share cultural perspectives, and create new metaphors. This social approach reveals how figurative language can have different meanings based on context.
- **Real-world connection activities:** Students find examples of figurative language in headlines, song lyrics, and everyday conversations. This shows them how these expressions are used naturally in communication, not just in academic settings.



1 The Great Language Detective Agency

In this activity, give each student their own “Detective Case File” and set them loose on books, poems, and stories. Their mission? Spot sneaky similes, mysterious metaphors, and other clever word tricks hiding in plain sight.

When they crack the case and find figurative language in action, they can log their evidence in their case files. It’s like a treasure hunt, but instead of gold, they’re discovering golden phrases that make writing sparkle.

They search through:

- Picture books and children’s stories
- Poetry collections
- Magazine articles
- Comic books
- Short stories



Learners identify different types of figurative language (metaphors, similes, personification) and create a “detective’s notebook” explaining how each example adds meaning to the text.

2 Visualization Station

Help students see language in a new way. This creative activity transforms abstract expressions into concrete visual representations, making figurative language memorable and fun. Students bring figurative language to life through art.

They can:

- Draw what “raining cats and dogs” looks like versus actual rain
- Create comics showing literal versus figurative meanings
- Design digital presentations that compare different interpretations
- Build miniature scenes showing expressions in action

3 Language Theater

Get students moving and grooving with language! This activity turns your classroom into a stage where figurative expressions come alive through movement and drama. Students act out expressions to understand them better.

For example:

- Tiptoeing carefully, looking nervous or hesitant to demonstrate “walking on eggshells”
- Racing across the room to demonstrate “quick as lightning”
- Acting out kindness to represent a “heart of gold”
- Floating and dancing to show “floating on air”



4 Make It Personal

Encourage creativity by having students become language inventors! This activity helps students understand figurative language by creating expressions based on personal experiences. Students create their examples by:

- Comparing their favorite foods to other things (“as sweet as...”)
- Writing weather metaphors (“the wind danced”)
- Giving life to objects (“my phone is exhausted”)
- Making up new sayings for everyday situations

5 Advertise It!

Students create their own ads, sports commentary, or news headlines using figurative language:

- Write a fake commercial using hyperbole and persuasive language
- Invent sports commentary with similes and metaphors
- Create news headlines or press releases for a new book or movie, using alliteration or personification



Supporting Diverse Learners

Every student approaches figurative language with different background knowledge, learning styles, and linguistic experiences. A differentiated approach ensures all students can access and master these critical literacy skills.

By providing multiple pathways to understanding, teachers can meet the needs of diverse learners while maintaining high expectations for all.

Differentiation Strategies

Effective differentiation in figurative language instruction recognizes that students come to the classroom with varying language experiences, cultural backgrounds, and learning preferences.

Educators can ensure all students have opportunities to succeed by providing multiple entry points and paths to mastery. These strategies can be mixed and matched based on individual student needs and classroom dynamics.

- Provide visual supports
- Offer sentence frames
- Use native language examples
- Allow multiple expression methods
- Adjust complexity levels
- Provide extended practice time

Early Intervention Approaches

Observing how students grasp figurative language early on helps teachers give extra support right when needed. Through monitoring student progression, teachers can tell the difference between students needing more time to grasp these concepts and those needing extra help learning in different ways.

Getting this support early helps students stay confident and keep up with their reading rather than falling behind or feeling frustrated.

Monitor for students who:

- Consistently interpret expressions literally
- Struggle to generate examples
- Have difficulty explaining meanings
- Show limited understanding of the context



Technology Integration With Lexia PowerUp Literacy

Digital tools and resources enhance the teaching and learning of figurative language. **Lexia® PowerUp Literacy®** offers comprehensive support for figurative language instruction through adaptive technology and systematic progress monitoring.

The program's engaging activities and immediate feedback mechanisms help students develop stronger comprehension skills at their own pace.



Enhance instruction through:

- Interactive digital activities within PowerUp's comprehension strand
- Virtual visualization tools and multimedia presentations
- Systematic progress tracking through Lexia's assessment tools
- Personalized learning paths that adapt to student performance
- Data-driven insights for targeted instruction
- Access to supplementary Lexia Lessons® for additional support

PowerUp's technology integration features:

- Real-time progress monitoring, engaging online content, and data-driven action plans
- **Embedded Assessment** and 180 unique placement profiles start students exactly where they need to be based on their abilities

For optimal results, combine PowerUp's digital resources with traditional classroom instruction to create a blended learning environment that supports all learners.



Moving Forward

Learning to understand and use figurative language is like developing any other skill—it takes time and practice to see improvement. When educators use research-based teaching methods and adjust their approach to fit different students' needs, everyone makes meaningful progress.

As students become more comfortable with figurative language, they become better readers, more creative writers, and stronger thinkers in all subjects.

Success with figurative language requires:

- Consistent practice opportunities
- Real-world applications
- Scaffolded instruction
- Engaging activities
- Regular assessment
- Targeted support

Discover how to use these research-backed approaches and **PowerUp** to develop students' strong figurative language skills.

Lexia®

Lexia®, a Cambium Learning® Group brand, is transforming literacy education, driving change in 1 of every 3 school districts across the United States. For more than 40 years, Lexia has been a thought leader in literacy education, delivering award-winning, research-based solutions grounded in the science of reading. With a full spectrum of offerings, including professional learning, curriculum, and embedded assessment tools, Lexia provides educators with Structured Literacy solutions that are proven effective and designed to drive meaningful literacy outcomes. By empowering educators with unparalleled ease of use and the knowledge and tools they need, Lexia helps more students unlock their potential to read, write, and speak with confidence. For more information, visit lexialearning.com.

