Words Mean What?

Sort phrases by what they really mean.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.5a "Distinguish the literal and nonliteral meanings of words and phrases in context (e.g., take steps)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

LITERAL MEANING

The words mean exactly what they say. It can really happen.

The kitten slept on the warm rug.

NONLITERAL MEANING

The words mean something different from the exact words. The phrase helps create a picture or feeling.

After the test, Maya was on cloud nine.

1 SORT

8 items

Circle the tag for each item, then choose two items and explain how you knew each answer.

1.	The baby cried because she was hungry.	LITERAL NONLITERAL
2.	My backpack weighs a ton.	LITERAL NONLITERAL
3.	Jordan has a frog in his throat, so his voice sounds scratchy.	LITERAL NONLITERAL
4.	We planted seeds in the garden.	LITERAL NONLITERAL
5.	Dad told me to hold my horses and wait.	LITERAL NONLITERAL
6.	The dog wagged its tail at the door.	LITERAL NONLITERAL
7.	Lena used a spoon to stir the soup.	LITERAL NONLITERAL
8.	When the bell rang, the class hit the books.	LITERAL NONLITERAL

2 PROVE IT

Explain your thinking

Pick two items from Part 1. For each one, tell how you knew where it belonged.

ITEM # _____ **HOW I KNEW** _____

ITEM # _____ **HOW I KNEW** _____

3 MAKE YOUR OWN

One of each

Write one new literal example and one new nonliteral example.

LITERAL _____

NONLITERAL _____

CHALLENGE

Write a sentence with a nonliteral phrase, then write what the phrase means.

ANSWER KEY

Words Mean What?

GRADE 3 · L.3.5a

PART 1 · SORT

#	ITEM	CATEGORY	WHY
1	The baby cried because she was hungry.	**LITERAL**	The baby is actually crying and hungry.
2	My backpack weighs a ton.	**NONLITERAL**	The backpack is very heavy, but it does not truly weigh a ton.
3	Jordan has a frog in his throat, so his voice sounds scratchy.	**NONLITERAL**	Jordan does not have a real frog in his throat. The phrase means his voice is rough.
4	We planted seeds in the garden.	**LITERAL**	The class can actually plant seeds in a garden.
5	Dad told me to hold my horses and wait.	**NONLITERAL**	The phrase means to wait, not to hold real horses.
6	The dog wagged its tail at the door.	**LITERAL**	A dog can actually wag its tail.
7	Lena used a spoon to stir the soup.	**LITERAL**	Lena can actually stir soup with a spoon.
8	When the bell rang, the class hit the books.	**NONLITERAL**	The class began to study. They did not strike books.

PART 2 · PROVE IT

Accept any explanation that names the deciding feature from the rule box for the chosen item.

PART 3 · MAKE YOUR OWN (SAMPLE ANSWERS)

- **LITERAL**: The rain splashed against the window.
- **NONLITERAL**: Nico's joke cracked me up.

Challenge: Before the race, I had butterflies in my stomach. I felt nervous.

For Part 2, accept explanations that tell whether the words could happen exactly as stated or explain the phrase's different meaning. For the challenge, accept any accurate nonliteral phrase and a matching explanation.