

Words With Weight

Interpret figurative language and its effect in a civic debate.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.5a "Interpret figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze their role in the text."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each figure of speech, including euphemisms, oxymorons, and metaphors. In the margin, write what each phrase means in context and how it shapes a speaker's or listener's response.

The Station Vote

- ① On the evening the town council met about the abandoned train station, Mara stood across the street with her grandfather. The building's clock had stopped at 6:12, yet its cracked face seemed to watch the crowd. "They call it a fixer-upper," Grandfather said, "but that is a polite coat for a place with a leaking roof and rotted floors." Inside, residents argued beneath a banner that read, SAVE OUR STATION. Mara noticed that the station was not merely old. It was a locked memory, holding the departures and reunions that had shaped the town.
- ② Council members described the proposed demolition as "retiring the structure," a phrase that made removal sound gentle and deserved. Then the treasurer presented a budget adjustment, explaining that the town would end several youth programs to pay for a parking lot. Mara felt a deafening silence spread through the room. No one shouted, but every lowered face showed alarm. Her grandfather gripped the old timetable in his pocket. The paper was thin as a leaf, yet it carried the weight of an anchor, pulling him toward the years when he had arrived home from military service.
- ③ During public comment, a developer promised "new life" for the block, while a former conductor called the station "a sleeping giant." Mara understood that neither speaker meant the words literally. New life meant shops, apartments, and tax revenue. The sleeping giant suggested that the station still had power, even while unused. When the vote ended in favor of preservation, the mayor called the result a bittersweet victory. The town had saved a landmark, but it still needed money for repairs. Outside, Mara heard the first raindrops tap the roof, a small drumbeat beginning a longer conversation.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What does Grandfather mean when he calls "fixer-upper" a "polite coat"? Why does he use that metaphor?

2 What does each euphemism, "retiring the structure" and "budget adjustment," refer to? How do these phrases change the sound of the actions?

3 Why is "deafening silence" an oxymoron? What does it reveal about the people in the room?

4 How do "new life" and "a sleeping giant" present different views of the station and its neighborhood?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write 3 to 4 sentences about a fictional community decision. Use one euphemism and one oxymoron, and make the surrounding context show what each phrase means and how it influences the audience.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline each figure of speech, including euphemisms, oxymorons, and metaphors. In the margin, write what each phrase means in context and how it shapes a speaker's or listener's response. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What does Grandfather mean when he calls “fixer-upper” a “polite coat”? Why does he use that metaphor?	He means “fixer-upper” covers up the station's serious damage. The metaphor shows his skepticism about using a pleasant label for a decaying building.
2	What does each euphemism, “retiring the structure” and “budget adjustment,” refer to? How do these phrases change the sound of the actions?	“Retiring the structure” means demolishing the station, and “budget adjustment” means ending youth programs to fund a parking lot. Both phrases make harmful or difficult actions sound gentler and more neutral.
3	Why is “deafening silence” an oxymoron? What does it reveal about the people in the room?	Something cannot literally be both silent and deafening. The oxymoron shows that the residents' unspoken alarm feels powerful despite the lack of noise.
4	How do “new life” and “a sleeping giant” present different views of the station and its neighborhood?	“New life” presents redevelopment as bringing businesses, apartments, and revenue. “A sleeping giant” presents the unused station as still powerful and valuable, supporting preservation.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At the meeting, the principal called the plan to close the art room a “space reallocation,” making the loss sound orderly instead of painful. A deafening hush filled the room as students realized their classes would disappear. The gentle label tried to reduce opposition, while the oxymoron showed the group's strong but unspoken distress.

Accept equivalent interpretations that use passage evidence and explain both meaning and effect. For the open response, accept varied community situations if the student uses a clear euphemism, a genuine oxymoron, and contextual explanation of each.