

Quills Up

TIME	30 minutes full · 15 minutes short
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PRIMARY SKILL	Explain figurative meaning from a recurring image
OBJECTIVE	Separate the literal image of raised porcupine quills from the figurative way that image is used to describe a person’s guarded or defensive state, then rewrite the figurative use plainly.
STUDENT EVIDENCE	A two-column record of literal image and human situation, plus a plain-language rewrite of the figurative phrase.
ESSENTIAL QUESTION	How can a literal animal image help a reader understand what is happening inside a person?

Before teaching

Read or play the complete book before the timed lesson. Keep the book available so claims and evidence can be checked against the text. Book-specific targets: Compare literal raised porcupine quills with the boy’s guarded reaction to the woman on the train.

Materials:	the book, Student Evidence page, pencil.
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Lesson sequence

TIME	TEACHING MOVE
4 min	Establish the literal image State what raised quills mean for the animal in the book.
6 min	Find the human moment Identify the scene where the image is applied to a person.

7 min	Map the shared meaning List what the animal image and the person's response have in common.
8 min	Rewrite plainly Replace the figurative phrase with direct language about the person's state.
5 min	Explain why the image works Say what the figurative version adds beyond the plain rewrite.

ELA SKILL LESSON · TEACHER SUPPORT

Soapstone Porcupine

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Access routes

SOLO	Use the book independently to complete the evidence page. Require book-based support for the reasoning.
SUPPORTED	Pause at the key evidence moments. Rephrase the task orally, then have students point to or record evidence before explaining.
LISTENING	Use narration and illustrations. Ask the same book-specific questions orally and accept pointing, choosing between evidence already visible in the book, drawing, or an oral explanation. Do not require teacher-invented answer choices.
EXTEND	Apply the same reasoning move to a second moment in the book or ask students to explain why a tempting alternative is weaker.

Teacher guidance

Do not define figurative language as words “used against their meaning.” Here the literal image remains active: its defensive function is what makes the figurative use intelligible.

Book-specific answer anchors

- Literal porcupine quills rise as a defensive response. In the human scene, the porcupine image is transferred to the boy's guarded state.

- A plain-language rewrite can say he becomes guarded, braced or defensive around the woman on the train.
- Do not reduce the phrase to 'angry.' The useful part of the image is protection/defence: he is mentally putting his quills up.

Assessment

- Literal and figurative uses are separated.
- The shared defensive/guarded meaning is explained.
- The plain-language rewrite preserves the relevant meaning without copying the image.

Short route · 15 minutes

3 min - name/model the skill. 8 min - gather the minimum evidence required on the student page. 4 min - explain the answer and verify it against the book.

Watch for

Calling the phrase figurative without being able to explain the literal image it draws on or rewrite the human meaning plainly.

Source note

Extracted and audited as a standalone from the ELA unit The Words They Use. No regional standards are attached to this standalone skill lesson.

STUDENT EVIDENCE · GRADES 2-3

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Name _____ Date _____ A two-column record of literal image and human situation, plus a plain-language rewrite of the figurative phrase.

LITERAL IMAGE

HUMAN MOMENT

WHAT THEY SHARE

PLAIN-LANGUAGE REWRITE

WHY THE IMAGE WORKS

EXIT CHECK

How can a literal animal image help a reader understand what is happening inside a person?

TEACHER KEY · GRADES 2-3

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Book-specific answer anchors

- Literal porcupine quills rise as a defensive response. In the human scene, the porcupine image is transferred to the boy's guarded state.
- A plain-language rewrite can say he becomes guarded, braced or defensive around the woman on the train.
- Do not reduce the phrase to 'angry.' The useful part of the image is protection/defence: he is mentally putting his quills up.

Expected student evidence

- Literal and figurative uses are separated.
- The shared defensive/guarded meaning is explained.
- The plain-language rewrite preserves the relevant meaning without copying the image.

Watch for

Calling the phrase figurative without being able to explain the literal image it draws on or rewrite the human meaning plainly.

Independent success

The student completes the required evidence product, uses the named book-specific evidence above, and can explain the reasoning move without relying only on recall or a teacher-supplied answer.

Unit source

The Words They Use · Soapstone Porcupine by Jeff Pinkney