

Pizza Counting - The Cat and the Whale

Grade 3 | California teacher-facing edition

REGIONAL STANDARD

RL.3.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.

WHY THIS LESSON QUALIFIES

Students explain both the literal wording and the intended meaning of text-supported expressions, directly distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.

Source

California Department of Education - California Common Core State Standards: English Language Arts

Production status

APPROVED - HIGH confidence. Canonical lesson pages follow unchanged. The standard is printed only on this regional edition.

Verified for production 2026-09-07

ELA SKILL LESSON · GRADE 3

Pizza Counting

The Cat and the Whale

TIME	20 minutes full · 10 minutes short
PRIMARY SKILL	Distinguish literal wording from intended meaning
OBJECTIVE	Explain the literal picture and intended meaning of two text-supported expressions, then identify the clue that supports each interpretation.
STUDENT EVIDENCE	Two literal/nonliteral comparisons plus text-based support.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION	How do we know an expression means more than its literal words?
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Before teaching

Read or play the complete book before the timed lesson. Mark the two expressions that the book itself gives enough information to interpret.

Materials:	The book; Student Evidence page; pencil.
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Mark these moments: “the cat is out of the bag” · “a whale of an appetite”

Lesson sequence

3 min	Literal first For “the cat is out of the bag,” picture the words literally before discussing the intended meaning.
5 min	Use the book’s clue Identify the definition or sentence information that shows the expression means a secret or surprise has been revealed.
6 min	Try the whale Contrast a literal whale image with the intended meaning of a very large appetite. Use the comparison itself as support.
6 min	Prove the interpretation Complete both rows and point to the specific clue that makes the nonliteral reading reasonable.

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ELA SKILL LESSON · TEACHER SUPPORT · GRADE 3

Pizza Counting

The Cat and the Whale

Access routes	
SOLO	Complete both literal/intended-meaning rows and cite the supporting clue for each.
SUPPORTED	Draw or say the literal picture first. Then use: “It really means ____ because the book says/shows ____.”

LISTENING	Replay the two expressions and nearby context. Give the literal picture and intended meaning orally.
EXTEND	Find another expression in a familiar text and explain what evidence prevents a literal reading.

Teacher guidance

Assess only expressions the book itself supports. Do not require outside cultural knowledge. “As American as apple pie” can be discussed as enrichment if students know it, but it is not part of the assessed task.

Assessment

- Explains the literal picture for both expressions.
- Explains the intended meaning for both expressions.
- Uses book context or comparison as evidence.
- Recognizes that a literal reading does not fit the intended message.

Short route · 15 minutes 3 min - cat expression. 3 min - whale expression. 4 min - complete one evidence explanation.

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STUDENT EVIDENCE · GRADE 3

Pizza Counting

Literal Words, Intended Meaning

Name _____ Date _____ For each expression, tell what the words picture literally and what the expression means in the book. Then show the clue that supports your interpretation.

THE CAT IS OUT OF THE BAG Literal picture / intended meaning / clue from the book

A WHALE OF AN APPETITE

Literal picture / intended meaning / clue from the book

EXIT CHECK

I know one expression is not literal because _____.

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The Cat and the Whale

Strong response

“The cat is out of the bag” literally pictures a cat leaving a bag, but in context means a secret or surprise has been revealed; the book supplies the meaning. “A whale of an appetite” literally suggests a whale-sized appetite, but means a very large appetite; the size comparison supports the interpretation.

Expected evidence

- Cat: literal cat leaving a bag vs. secret/surprise revealed.
- Whale: literal whale-sized picture vs. very large appetite.
- Evidence comes from the book's definition, nearby context, or comparison.

Watch for

- Bringing in the apple-pie expression as required evidence.
- Giving a synonym without explaining why the literal reading does not fit.

Independent success

The student accurately explains both expressions and identifies text-based support for at least one interpretation.

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