Figurative Language

What is figurative language?

**Figurative language**—language that uses figures of speech to create images of what something looks, sounds, or feels like

It is different from literal language because literal language means exactly what it says.

One common form of figurative language is when you describe something by **comparing** it to something else. These are called **similes** and **metaphors**.

**Simile**—a comparison that uses "like" or "as"

ex: She runs like a cheetah.

**Metaphor**—a comparison that does not use "like" or "as"

ex: The alligator's teeth are white daggers.

When you come across a simile or a metaphor, it is important that you stop and **consider** the **comparison** that is being made. To do so, look at the **second** item in the comparison and consider its **characteristics**. Then, apply these characteristics to the **first** item in the comparison. Finally, based on the characteristics, decide what the author is trying to **point** or **call** to the reader.
Practice:

Consider the information we just discussed and look at this quote from *Bud, Not Buddy*:

“All the kids watched the woman as she moved along the line, her high-heeled shoes sounding like little firecrackers going off on the wooden floor.”

How does Bud describe the woman’s walk in this excerpt?

He uses a simile to compare her shoes to firecrackers going off on the wooden floor.

What does the comparison show?

Firecrackers are loud and explosive. Bud is saying that the sound of the woman’s shoes is loud and explosive.

Bud’s use of figurative language is a deliberate choice on the part of the author and therefore, worth reading closely. The use of figurative language is helpful because it helps reveal the meaning of a scene. In this example, the simile helps the reader understand Bud’s point of view about the woman. The simile helps the reader to make an inference about Bud’s point of view.

What inference can we make about Bud’s feelings based on his use of figurative language in this excerpt?

We can infer that Bud sees the woman in a negative way. Her walk is not soft; it is forceful and loud. This shows that Bud sees her as scary and intimidating, not caring and gentle.