

Using PictoPuns in the Classroom

A short, discussion-first lesson for exploring idioms, compound phrases, double meanings, and figurative language through original visual puzzles.

Learning goals

Students will identify familiar phrases from visual clues, separate literal and figurative meanings, explain their reasoning aloud, and use selected phrases in original sentences.

Recommended group

Ages 10 and up, English-language learners at intermediate level or above, families, tutoring groups, and mixed-ability classes. The poster works with individuals, pairs, or teams.

What you need

Display or print the PictoPuns classroom poster. Keep the answer sheet hidden. Give each student or team paper for twelve guesses. No account, app, or additional equipment is required.

25-minute lesson

Time	Activity
3 min	Model one puzzle. Ask what is literally visible before anyone guesses the phrase.
8 min	Pairs solve the poster. Require one written reason for each guess, even when uncertain.
8 min	Reveal answers one at a time. Discuss the literal picture, everyday meaning, and alternative wording.
4 min	Students choose two phrases and write new example sentences that show the figurative meaning.
2 min	Exit ticket: draw or describe a new visual interpretation of a familiar phrase.

Discussion prompts

What detail unlocked the answer? Which word has two meanings? Does the picture show the literal meaning, the figurative meaning, or both? Could another phrase fit the same image? How would you redesign the puzzle to make it clearer without making it obvious?

Extensions and differentiation

Support English-language learners

Read each clue aloud, allow students to describe the picture before naming the phrase, and provide the first word when needed. After the reveal, have students match the phrase to a plain-language definition and act out an example.

Increase the challenge

Hide the written clues, set a short collaborative timer, ask for two plausible wrong answers, or require students to explain why the final answer fits better than their alternatives.

Creative follow-up

Students select a safe classroom phrase, sketch a literal interpretation, test it on classmates, and revise it after observing which details caused confusion. This mirrors the real PictoPuns process: illustrate, test, listen, and refine.

Assessment

Look for reasoning rather than speed. A strong response names the phrase, identifies the visual evidence, states the figurative meaning in plain language, and uses the phrase naturally in a new sentence.

Picture pun, rebus, or dingbat?

These labels overlap, but they are not identical. A picture pun uses an image to exploit a word or phrase with more than one interpretation. A rebus combines images, letters, or symbols to represent words or a message. A dingbat puzzle often depends on the size, placement, or repetition of written words. PictoPuns mainly uses illustrated literal interpretations of familiar phrases and idioms.

Safe classroom use

The included poster uses only family-safe puzzles selected from Pocket Party's original catalogue. Adult and pop-culture packs are not included. Review any additional online puzzle before assigning it to younger students.

Free classroom puzzles and daily play: web.pocketparty.app/game/pictopuns