

Module 8: Voices of Courage During Modernism

Topic 2 Content: Expressions of Language

Introduction

Expressions of Language

Idiom Slang Cliché Euphemism Jargon

Introduction

Click on each of the folder tabs to examine five different expressions of language utilized by authors to add depth and characterization to their writing.



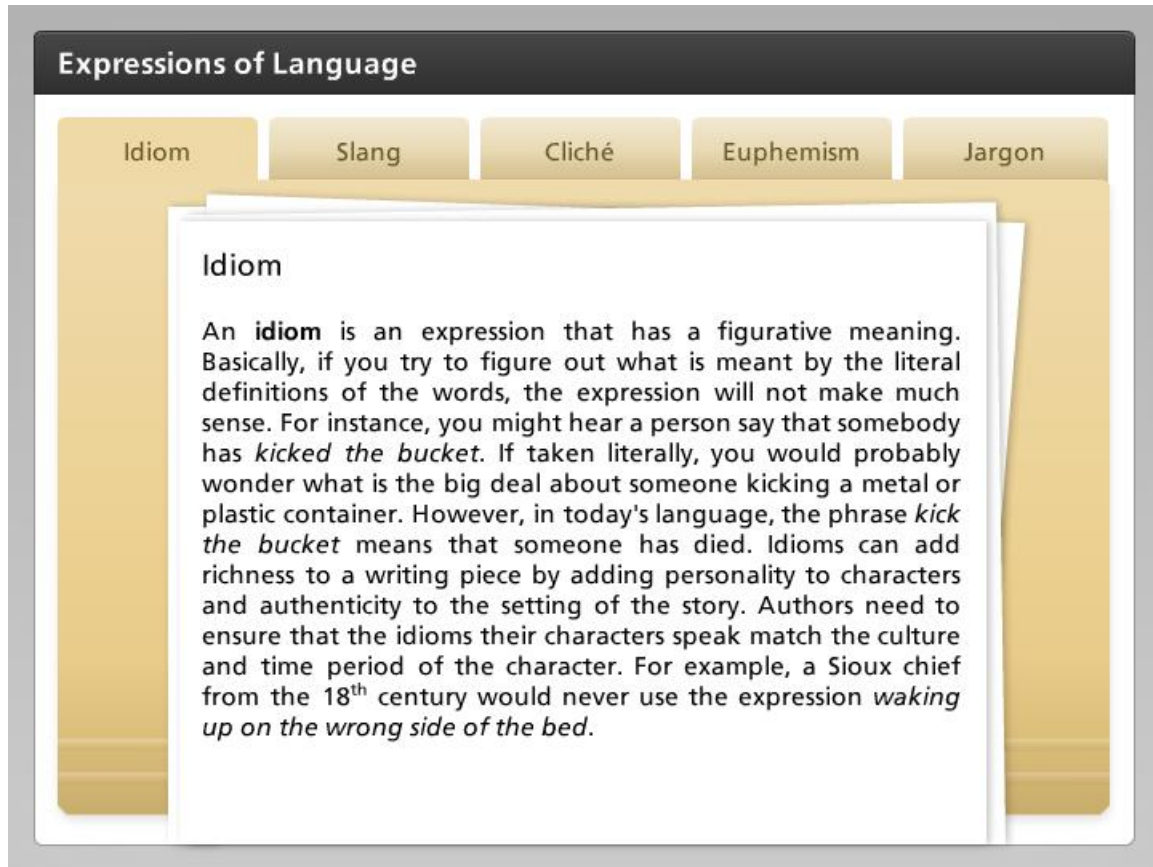
The graphic illustrates the contrast between modern and traditional communication. On the left is a modern smartphone with various app icons, labeled 'cell phone'. On the right is a classic black rotary telephone with a coiled cord, labeled 'rotary phone'.

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Idiom



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Idiom

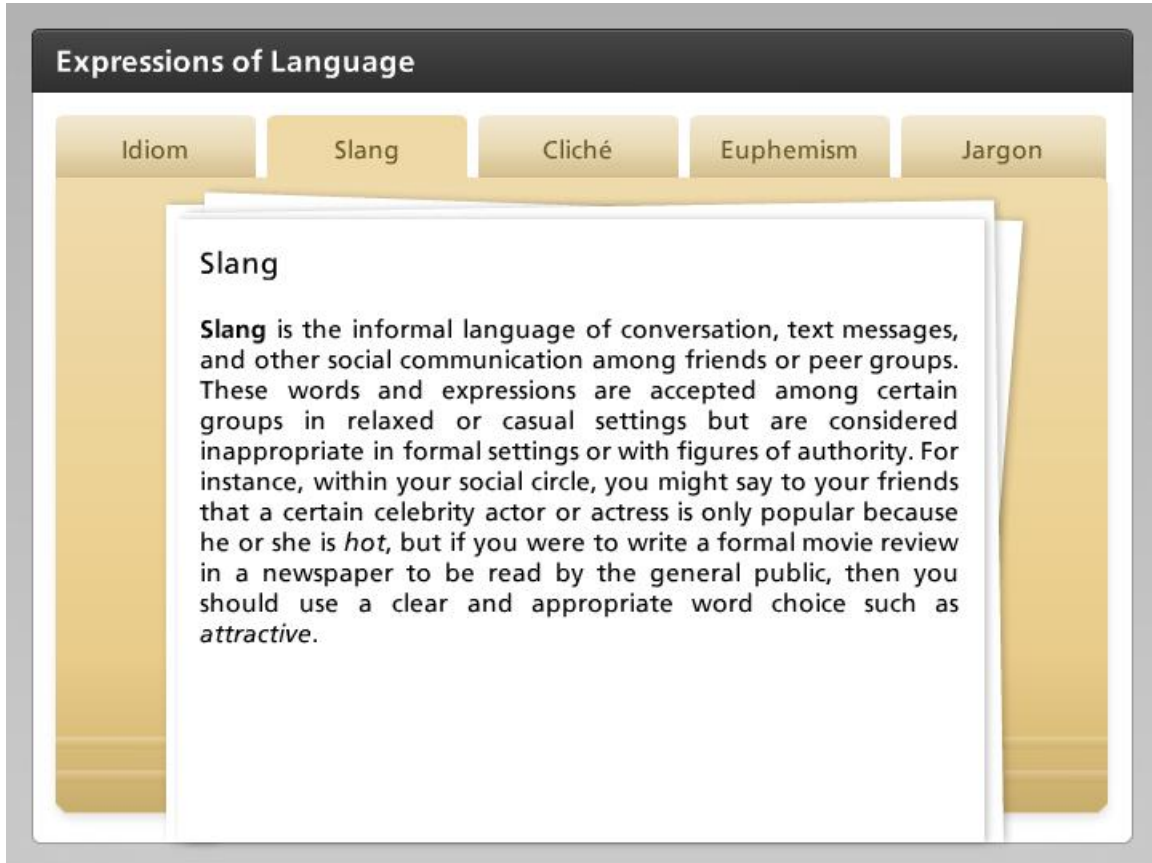
An **idiom** is an expression that has a figurative meaning. Basically, if you try to figure out what is meant by the literal definitions of the words, the expression will not make much sense. For instance, you might hear a person say that somebody has *kicked the bucket*. If taken literally, you would probably wonder what is the big deal about someone kicking a metal or plastic container. However, in today's language, the phrase *kick the bucket* means that someone has died. Idioms can add richness to a writing piece by adding personality to characters and authenticity to the setting of the story. Authors need to ensure that the idioms their characters speak match the culture and time period of the character. For example, a Sioux chief from the 18th century would never use the expression *waking up on the wrong side of the bed*.

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Slang



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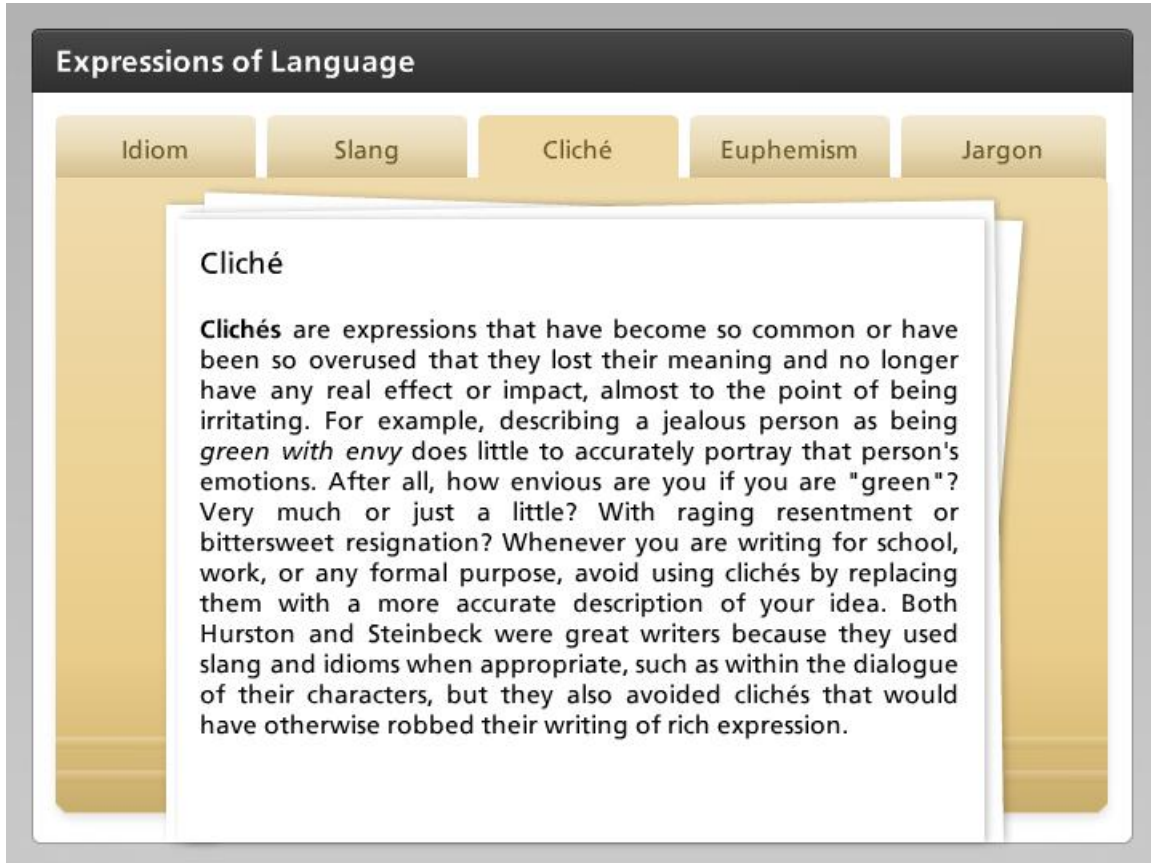
Slang is the informal language of conversation, text messages, and other social communication among friends or peer groups. These words and expressions are accepted among certain groups in relaxed or casual settings but are considered inappropriate in formal settings or with figures of authority. For instance, within your social circle, you might say to your friends that a certain celebrity actor or actress is only popular because he or she is *hot*, but if you were to write a formal movie review in a newspaper to be read by the general public, then you should use a clear and appropriate word choice such as *attractive*.

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Cliché



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Cliché

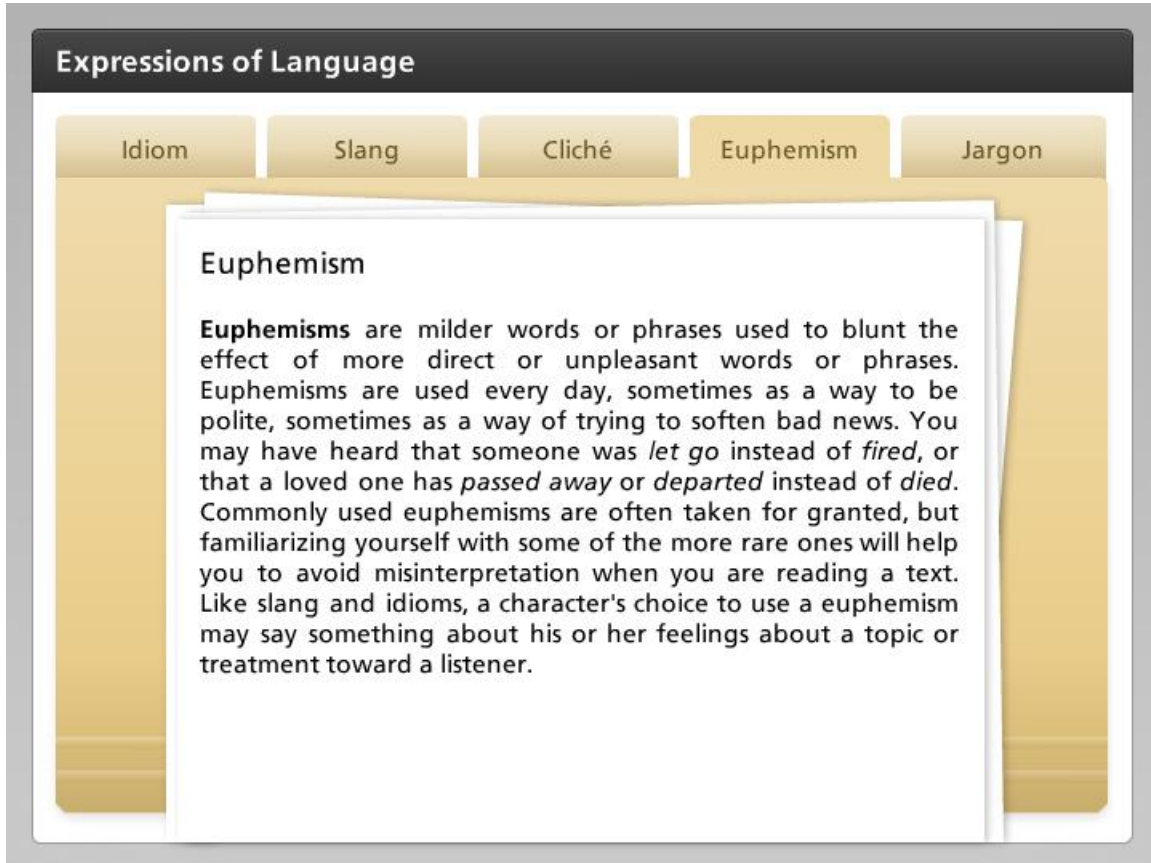
Clichés are expressions that have become so common or have been so overused that they lost their meaning and no longer have any real effect or impact, almost to the point of being irritating. For example, describing a jealous person as being *green with envy* does little to accurately portray that person's emotions. After all, how envious are you if you are "green"? Very much or just a little? With raging resentment or bittersweet resignation? Whenever you are writing for school, work, or any formal purpose, avoid using clichés by replacing them with a more accurate description of your idea. Both Hurston and Steinbeck were great writers because they used slang and idioms when appropriate, such as within the dialogue of their characters, but they also avoided clichés that would have otherwise robbed their writing of rich expression.

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Euphemism



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Idiom Slang Cliché **Euphemism** Jargon

Euphemism

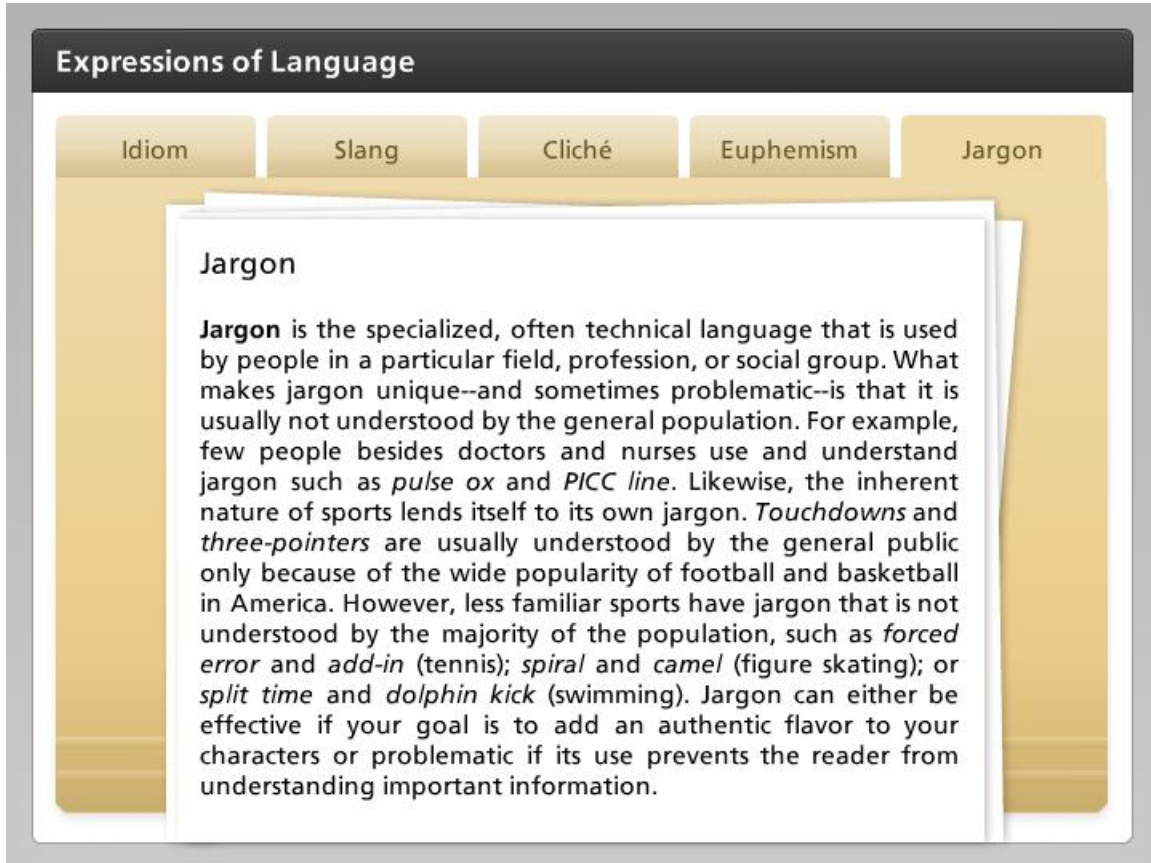
Euphemisms are milder words or phrases used to blunt the effect of more direct or unpleasant words or phrases. Euphemisms are used every day, sometimes as a way to be polite, sometimes as a way of trying to soften bad news. You may have heard that someone was *let go* instead of *fired*, or that a loved one has *passed away* or *departed* instead of *died*. Commonly used euphemisms are often taken for granted, but familiarizing yourself with some of the more rare ones will help you to avoid misinterpretation when you are reading a text. Like slang and idioms, a character's choice to use a euphemism may say something about his or her feelings about a topic or treatment toward a listener.

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Jargon



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Jargon

Jargon is the specialized, often technical language that is used by people in a particular field, profession, or social group. What makes jargon unique—and sometimes problematic—is that it is usually not understood by the general population. For example, few people besides doctors and nurses use and understand jargon such as *pulse ox* and *PICC line*. Likewise, the inherent nature of sports lends itself to its own jargon. *Touchdowns* and *three-pointers* are usually understood by the general public only because of the wide popularity of football and basketball in America. However, less familiar sports have jargon that is not understood by the majority of the population, such as *forced error* and *add-in* (tennis); *spiral* and *camel* (figure skating); or *split time* and *dolphin kick* (swimming). Jargon can either be effective if your goal is to add an authentic flavor to your characters or problematic if its use prevents the reader from understanding important information.

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