

Lesson 9: The Building Blocks of Language

Chapter 2 — Lesson 9: Emphasis

SAY IT — This lesson focuses on voice pointing.

The Words Stay the Same. What Does the Voice Add?

Teacher Introduction

Lesson 9 returns to a core Building Blocks idea: language can be worked with. Earlier lessons approached words through compounds, syllables, roots, history, and meaning. This lesson keeps the investigative habit but changes the object. Now the class asks what happens when the written words stay the same and the speaker's voice makes one part stand forward.

THE WORDS STAY THE SAME.

WHAT DOES THE VOICE ADD?

The Teacher's Deeper Handle

When a speaker says, I never said I ate your cookie, then says, I never said I ate your cookie, the word your has not changed definition. The speaker has changed the focus. The voice points the listener toward one part of the sentence and invites a contrast: your cookie—as opposed to whose?

Teacher handle: emphasis makes part of what we say stand out. Child-facing image: your voice can point.

Lesson Purpose

Students listen for emphasis, identify which word stands out, mark it visually, move the mark, compare readings, and use emphasis deliberately. The goal is not one official interpretation for every stressed word. The stronger question is: What stood out, and what does that make the listener think the speaker is pointing out?

Lesson 9 — Emphasis Sentence Set

1. Don't leave that there.
2. I am not eating my oats.
3. I love apple pie.
4. That little horse runs fast.
5. I never said I ate your cookie.

The first four form the instructional ladder. The fifth is the culminating game.

Emphasis Ladder — Teacher Comparison Bank

Teacher note: In each example, only one deliberate thing changes: the emphasis moves. The words and word order stay the same. The expected result is that a different part of the sentence becomes prominent and invites a different contrast. These examples are teacher handles, not fixed translations. Let students listen and respond before supplying an explanation.

1. Don't Leave That There.

Emphasis	What comes forward	Contrast it opens	One possible listener thought
<u>Don't</u> leave that there.	the prohibition	don't vs. do	"Whatever you do, do not leave it there."
Don't <u>leave</u> that there.	the action	leave vs. move, take, or hold	"You can do something with it—just don't leave it."
Don't leave <u>that</u> there.	the object	that vs. something else	"That particular thing is the problem."
Don't leave that <u>there</u> .	the location	there vs. somewhere else	"You can leave it somewhere—just not there."

Teacher demonstration: the voice can point toward the instruction, the action, the object, or the place. Physical pointing can reinforce the vocal pointing.

2. I Am Not Eating My Oats.

Emphasis	What comes forward	Contrast it opens	One possible listener thought
<u>I</u> am not eating my oats.	who is involved	me vs. somebody else	"I'm not eating them. Maybe somebody else is."
I am <u>not</u> eating my oats.	the denial	not vs. the accusation that I am	"No. I really am not eating them."
I am not <u>eating</u> my oats.	the action	eating vs. doing something else	"I'm doing something with the oats, but I'm not eating them."
I am not eating <u>my</u> oats.	ownership	my oats vs. somebody else's	"I may be eating oats—but they aren't mine."
I am not eating my <u>oats</u> .	the food	oats vs. another food	"I'm eating something, but it isn't my oats."

Teacher demonstration: this sentence adds humor and performance. It helps students hear how the same denial can sound like a defense against different invisible accusations. Ask: "What invisible question does this version sound like it is answering?"

3. I Love Apple Pie.

Emphasis	What comes forward	Contrast it opens	One possible listener thought
I <u>love</u> apple pie.	who loves it	me vs. somebody else	"Maybe other people don't—but I do."
I <u>love</u> apple pie.	the strength of feeling	love vs. merely like	"I don't just like apple pie. I really love it."
I love <u>apple</u> pie.	the kind or flavor	apple vs. another kind of pie	"Apple is the kind of pie I love."
I love apple <u>pie</u> .	the form of apple food	pie vs. cake, crisp, or another apple dish	"It's apple pie I love—not every apple food."

Teacher demonstration: this is the clean laboratory sentence. Because the vocabulary is easy, students can focus almost entirely on emphasis. This is a good place to ask: "Can you make me hear the underline without yelling?"

4. That Little Horse Runs Fast.

Emphasis	What comes forward	Contrast it opens	One possible listener thought
<u>That</u> little horse runs fast.	which horse	that one vs. another one	"That horse over there is the one I mean."
That <u>little</u> horse runs fast.	the horse's size	little vs. larger	"Look how fast that small horse can run."
That little <u>horse</u> runs fast.	the animal	horse vs. another animal	"It's the horse—not the other animal—that runs fast."
That little horse <u>runs</u> fast.	the action	runs vs. walks or trots	"Running is what it does fast."
That little horse runs <u>fast</u> .	the speed	fast vs. slow or ordinary speed	"That horse can really move."

Teacher demonstration: this sentence gives the class more information to hold at once. The voice can point toward which one, size, animal, action, or quality of action while lightly carrying the horse thread forward.

5. I Never Said I Ate Your Cookie.

Emphasis	What comes forward	Contrast it opens	One possible listener thought
I <u>never</u> said I ate your cookie.	who said it	me vs. somebody else	"I didn't say it. Maybe somebody else did."
I <u>never</u> said I ate your cookie.	the absolute denial	never vs. ever	"Not once. I never said that."
I never <u>said</u> I ate your cookie.	the act of saying	saying vs. doing or implying	"Maybe I ate it. I just never said I did."
I never said I <u>ate</u> your cookie.	who supposedly ate it	me vs. somebody else	"I never said I was the one who ate it."
I never said I <u>ate</u> your cookie.	the action	ate vs. took, moved, or hid	"I never said I ate it. Maybe I did something else with it."
I never said I ate <u>your</u> cookie.	ownership	your cookie vs. somebody else's	"I may have eaten a cookie. I never said it was yours."
I never said I ate your <u>cookie</u> .	the object	cookie vs. something else	"I may have eaten something of yours—but I never said it was your cookie."

The mischievous one: I never said I ate your cookie makes the difference between what happened and what the speaker claims to have said especially easy to hear. Nothing in the sentence explicitly says, "I did not eat the cookie." The emphasis on said makes the listener notice that gap.

The Repeating Teacher Move

1. Hold the words still: write the sentence once.
2. Move the emphasis: underline one word.
3. Predict the focus: ask what should now stand forward.
4. Say it: make the underline audible.
5. Listen for the effect: ask what stood out and what that made students think about.
6. Move the underline again and compare.

The Central Comparison

The teacher is not demonstrating new emphasis → new dictionary meaning. The teacher is demonstrating move the emphasis → move the focus → open a different contrast → the listener may build a different implication. These are examples of contrast, not fixed translations.

After the Morning Routine

Begin after the established morning routine. The class already knows: SEE IT → SAY IT → CLAP IT → BREAK IT → FIND WHAT WE KNOW → READ IT → WRITE IT. Today, one familiar part of that routine deserves a closer look: SAY IT. Do not begin by announcing a definition of emphasis. Let the class experience the phenomenon first.

1. Return to Words Have Meaning

Remind the class briefly: “We have learned that words have meaning.” If useful, connect back to the roots image: “We have also seen that words have histories and roots. Roots go down, and language grows.” Then extend the image: “But words don’t usually live all by themselves. We put them together. We speak them to other people.”

Write on the board: Don’t leave that there. Do not underline anything yet. Say, “Listen to the sentence.” Read it naturally. Then read the exact same sentence again with a strong emphasis on one word: Don’t leave that there. Ask, “Did I change any of the words?” Let the class answer: no. Then ask, “Did something change?” Do not answer too quickly. Let students describe whatever they noticed.

SAME SENTENCE. DIFFERENT POINTING. DIFFERENT THING STANDS OUT.

2. Find Where the Voice Pointed

Say the sentence again: Don’t leave that there. Ask, “Which word did my voice point toward?” When students identify that, underline it. Say it again. Then erase only the underline. Do not erase and rewrite the sentence. Move the emphasis: Don’t leave that there. Ask, “Where did my voice point this time?”

Compare the two readings. Ask: “Did the sentence get new words?” “Which part stood out the first time?” “Which part stood out the second time?” “What did each one make you think I was trying to point out?” The board itself should make the discovery visible: THE SENTENCE STAYED. THE UNDERLINE MOVED.

3. Name the Tool

Once children have heard and identified the difference, give it a name. Write: EMPHASIS. Explain simply: “Emphasis is when we make part of what we say stand out.” Connect it to the experience: “When I emphasized that, my voice pointed toward that. When I emphasized there, my voice pointed toward there.”

The underline is the class’s visible mark for emphasis. It means, “Try pointing your voice here and see what happens.” It is an experiment, not the one correct way to read the sentence.

4. First Ladder Sentence: Don’t Leave That There.

This sentence is especially useful because voice and physical pointing can work together. Try several versions: Don’t leave that there. Don’t leave that there. Don’t leave that there. Don’t leave that there. Ask what stands out each time. Use only as many versions as help the class hear the mechanic. The teacher has several handles. The class does not owe the teacher every possible interpretation.

5. Second Ladder Sentence: I Am Not Eating My Oats.

Write: I am not eating my oats. This sentence allows more expression and humor. Students can act defensive, offended, surprised, sneaky, or dramatically innocent. Move the underline across I, not, eating, my, and oats. Use the teacher handles as needed: who is being contrasted, what is being denied, what action is happening, whose oats they are, or what food is being contrasted. Keep returning to: “What stood out?” “What did that make you think?” “What else could somebody hear there?”

6. Third Ladder Sentence: I Love Apple Pie.

This is the cleanest practice sentence because the vocabulary itself is easy. Write it once: I love apple pie. Then let the class move the underline: I love apple pie. I love apple pie. I love apple pie. I love apple pie. Ask, “Can you make me hear the underline?” Then raise the challenge: “Can you make me hear it without yelling?”

7. Fourth Ladder Sentence: That Little Horse Runs Fast.

This sentence carries forward the horse and hippopotamus thread without reopening the root-history lesson. Move emphasis across that, little, horse, runs, and fast. Ask what each version makes the listener notice: which horse, surprising size, the animal, the action, or the speed.

Teacher Language Bank

- "Listen first. Just hear it."
- "Did the words change?"
- "Which word did my voice point to?"
- "What does that make the listener notice?"
- "What might the speaker be correcting?"
- "Move the underline. Now what changes?"
- "Can you make us hear that word without shouting it?"

Participation Handles

Students can answer by speaking, pointing, underlining, moving a word card, acting the contrast, drawing the listener's thought, reading with a partner, or stepping forward in a Human Sentence. The form can vary; the function is always to show what the student heard or intended the listener to hear.

Optional Games and Extensions

Where Did My Voice Point?

The teacher secretly chooses an emphasis, performs the sentence, and students identify which word the voice pointed to. A student underlines it on the board.

Director and Actor

One student underlines a word silently. Another reads the sentence so the class can hear the underline.

Same Words, New Story

Two students read the same sentence with different underlined words. The class compares what each speaker seems to be pointing out, correcting, or implying.

Human Sentence

Give students word cards and arrange them in sentence order. The emphasized word steps forward, raises the card, or points upward as the class speaks the sentence.

COMMON STUDENT DISCOVERIES TEACHERS MAY NOTICE

- The sentence can sound like an answer to a different invisible question.
- The emphasized word can make the listener imagine a contrast.
- The speaker can sound as if correcting one part of what someone else thought.
- The same written sentence may not tell us everything about how it was meant aloud.
- Reading with expression is not decoration; it can carry focus, contrast, attitude, and implication.

8. The Big Game — Cookie Courtroom

Write the culminating sentence once: I never said I ate your cookie. First, move the emphasis through the sentence together: I never said I ate your cookie. I never said I ate your cookie. I never said I ate your cookie. I never said I ate your cookie. I never said I ate your cookie. I never said I ate your cookie. I never said I ate your cookie. Ask what defense, correction, or hidden story each version might suggest. Then let students take over the courtroom game. One child is “accused” and may use only that sentence, but may move the emphasis to build a defense. The class acts as the jury and explains what they think the speaker was pointing out, correcting, or implying. If listeners hear something slightly different, do not automatically call them wrong. Ask them to show the class how they heard it. The game is investigating communication, not grading one hidden interpretation.

Put the Idea Back Together

Return to the sentence on the board. Remove the underline. Read it normally. Ask, “What did we change today?” The words? No. The definitions of the individual words? Not necessarily. What changed was what the voice made prominent, where the listener’s attention went, what contrast seemed important, and sometimes what the listener thought the speaker was implying.

Bring it back to the simple class language: OUR VOICE CAN POINT. Then: EMPHASIS HELPS PART OF WHAT WE SAY STAND OUT.

Worksheet Support

The student page should support listening and performance: one sentence repeated with different underlined words, a place to draw or write what the listener hears, and a blank sentence for the student to choose an emphasis. The paper should not overtake the oral drill.

What Becomes Available for Lesson 10

Lesson 9 adds a spoken-language handle to the toolbox. Students can now notice that what a listener understands is shaped not only by the words themselves, but also by how those words are delivered. This prepares future work with punctuation, dialogue, fluency, performance, point of view, and the gap between written words and spoken interpretation.

Teacher Professional Note

Emphasis should not be taught as though stressing a word automatically assigns one fixed new meaning to the sentence. The individual words retain their lexical meanings. Moving emphasis changes prominence and can encourage the listener to infer a particular contrast, correction, attitude, or implication from the utterance and its context. This is why two listeners may sometimes describe the implication differently while agreeing completely about which word was emphasized.

The lesson should preserve both sides: language is not arbitrary—the words and sentence constrain what can reasonably be understood—and communication is more than dictionary definitions. The speaker's voice, context, gesture, relationships among the words, and listener knowledge all contribute to what is understood.

Hold On To This

WORDS HAVE MEANING.

WORDS ENTER RELATIONSHIPS.

EMPHASIS DOES NOT HAVE TO CHANGE THE MEANING OF THE INDIVIDUAL WORD.

EMPHASIS CHANGES WHAT STANDS OUT.

THAT CAN CHANGE WHAT THE LISTENER THINKS THE SPEAKER IS POINTING OUT.

YOUR VOICE CAN POINT.