

Grades 9–10 Playlist: Analyzing Words with Similar Meanings

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.5.B*:

- Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.

Welcome

A word's denotation is its literal, straightforward meaning, distinct from any emotional or cultural associations. When readers use a dictionary to look up a word, the definition they find is the word's denotation. Although many words have similar denotations, some contain subtle differences in meaning that can greatly affect how the words are understood. By learning to recognize the nuances in meaning of words with similar denotations, writers will be able to choose the right words for the ideas they wish to convey.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- recognize differences in the meaning of words with similar denotations.
- determine the intended meaning of words with multiple meanings.

Review

Key Terms

- **Denotation** identifies the dictionary definition of words.
- **Connotation** identifies the emotional and cultural associations of a word. Connotations can expand a word's meaning.
- A word's **nuance** is a subtlety in its meaning that makes it different from other similar words.

Exploring the Standard

It is common knowledge that words can have different denotative, or literal, meanings. For example, the word *rose* can be both a noun referring to a flower and a verb referring to rising or standing up. The meaning of a word with multiple denotations is determined by the context in which it is used.

Watch!

This video provides three examples of words with different literal meanings, or denotations:

- <http://www.sophia.org/tutorials/denotation>



Perhaps lesser known is the role of connotations in word meaning. Connotations are the emotional meanings that words may have, even if the words have approximately the same denotations. The influence of connotative meaning can affect a word's denotative meaning. Although most denotative meanings are neutral, connotations can be positive or negative to varying degrees. It's important to know that connotations and denotations are not separate aspects of any individual word. Rather, connotations and denotations exist together. Words with similar denotations can still have subtle differences in meaning due to their social, cultural, or emotional connotations.

A Closer Look: Distinguishing Between Denotative and Connotative Meanings

Skilled writers choose their words carefully. They recognize that even words that share similar meanings cannot be used interchangeably because of the emotions the words evoke in a reader. Read the following examples, paying attention to the underlined words in each sentence.

Example 1

Everyone knew that Buddy was the cheapest cousin in the family.

Everyone knew that Buddy was the most frugal cousin in the family.

The denotative meanings of the underlined words are the same. The adjective *cheapest* and the descriptor *most frugal* both describe someone who does not spend a lot of money. However, each descriptor has different connotative meanings that affect the meaning of the sentence overall. The adjective *cheapest* has a negative connotation, and thus the sentence becomes a criticism of Buddy. The descriptor *most frugal* has a positive connotation, and thus the sentence praises Buddy.

Example 2

Mr. Rogers had a youthful enthusiasm for life.

Mr. Rogers had a childish enthusiasm for life.

As with Example 1, the denotative meanings of the underlined words are the same. The adjectives *youthful* and *childish* both share the denotation "like someone who is young." However, the word *youthful* has a positive connotation, meaning vigorous or sprightly, while the word *childish* carries the connotation of being immature or foolish. These subtle differences greatly affect the meaning of the sentence, describing Mr. Rogers in either a positive or a negative way.

Watch!

This video illustrates the differences between denotation and connotation using a few examples:

- <http://www.sophia.org/tutorials/connotation-and-denotation>



Teaching Notes: Analyzing Words with Similar Meanings

The goal of L.9-10.5.B is for students to analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations. The playlist accomplishes this goal by having students learn about and distinguish denotative and connotative meanings. Students will also need to understand how one word can have various meanings; the intended meaning is determined by the context of the sentence. In order to further meet these goals, the following information presents activities that teachers can incorporate into their classroom as well as additional resources to read and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Activities

- Ask students to work with a partner. Assign each pair a list of tasks, such as “Describe walking home in the rain” or “Describe a recent movie you have seen.” Then, direct students to take turns coming up with the short descriptions. Direct them to first use words and phrases with neutral connotations, then to use words and phrases with positive connotations, and finally to use words and phrases with negative connotations. Once they have finished, have students discuss the choices they made and justify how their descriptions achieve each desired effect.
- Review with students how words can have strict denotative meanings as well as connotative meanings that are favorable or unfavorable. Then, assign students a short list of sentences with a neutral denotative word emphasized in italics in each sentence. Direct students to rewrite each sentence twice: The first rewrite should replace the italicized word with a synonym that carries a negative connotation, and the second rewrite should replace the italicized word with a synonym that carries a positive connotation.
- Assign students a list of sentences that each use a different denotation of the same word, such as the different meanings of *foil*, *date*, *type*, or *bark*. Then, ask students to write a sentence to identify the meaning of the word as it is used in each sentence. Encourage them to explain how they were able to reach their conclusions based on context.

Additional Resources

Consider these additional resources when teaching L.9-10.5.B:

“Teaching Denotations Versus Connotations Using Storyboards”: This resource provides teachers with a useful exercise for teaching students to recognize the nuances between denotation and connotation using storyboards:

- <http://www.storyboardthat.com/articles/education/grammar/denotation-vs-connotation>

“Denotation and Connotation Study Guide”: This resource provides teachers with sample questions and exercises that could be used to test students on how to analyze nuances in meaning for words with multiple denotations:

- <http://www.slideshare.net/drannabean/denotation-and-connotationpracticeexercisenoans>

