

Grade 7 Playlist: Word Choice

Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.4:

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

Welcome

When readers attempt to understand the meaning and tone of texts, they often look at the author's specific word choices for their connotative, figurative, or technical meanings. This skill also allows readers to analyze how these compositional decisions reveal the author's standpoint or approach to the subject at hand.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- analyze and evaluate word choices for connotative, figurative, or technical meaning.
- understand how authors use word choice to communicate tone, which expands the meaning of the text.

Review

Key Terms

- **Figurative language** employs the use of various devices (e.g., simile, metaphor) to provide emphasis or meaning to a text or image.
- A word's **connotation** refers to the idea or feeling that is associated with its **denotation**, or literal meaning.
- **Tone** refers to a general attitude toward any given subject; in writing, it is usually associated with the author's **stance**, or position, on the topic.
- Authors use **context clues** to hint at the meaning of words and phrases within a sentence.

Watch!

For a closer look at the key terms, the following video provides more in-depth instruction on how to use context clues to understand and expand vocabulary:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=44&v=85QcLiXBm6A>



Exploring the Standard

Before readers can begin to understand the tone of a text, they must first understand the word's denotation, or text-book/technical definition. When reading more difficult or unfamiliar texts, readers should rely on context clues to ensure their understanding; that is, readers can use other information or words within the sentence or paragraph to determine the meaning of the unfamiliar term. Four main types of context clues include examples, definitions, descriptive words, and synonyms/antonyms. For example, readers can look for other descriptive words that may mean the same as or opposite of the word in question, or note other examples of the word being used. Once readers are confident in their basic understanding of the denotations and technical meanings, then they can determine the connotative meanings that hint at the author's tone or stance.

For connotative meanings, readers need to analyze the emotional responses to or associations with different words. For example, what is the difference between *angry* and *livid*? According to their denotations, *livid* is a stronger, more intense emotion than *angry*. With that said, the reason someone would choose the word *livid* over *angry*, would be that they're *extremely* angry. Determining this information reveals the author's tone or stance by allowing readers to understand the emotional context of the text, which affects the reader's understanding.

Example 1

Using context clues to determine technical meaning is a quick and easy way readers can be sure they understand the words they read, while also expanding their vocabulary. Take a look at the following sentence, paying close attention to the bolded, possibly unfamiliar word:

While planning our vacation, my mother was **prudent** with the itinerary, using great caution and care to make sure we would see and experience all the popular sites of the town.

If readers do not know the technical meaning or denotation of the word *prudent*, they could use context clues within the sentence to figure out its meaning. Because the above sentence structure uses a comma and other descriptive words after the word in question, readers can rightfully assume that those descriptive words are meant to further explain the previous adjective. Therefore, a reader can determine that the mother used great caution and care with the schedule, which are synonyms for *prudent*.

Practice!

To practice using context clues to understand unfamiliar terms, complete the following activities:

- <https://www.opened.com/homework/7-ri-4-determine-the-meaning-of-words-and-phrases-as-they/3712163>
- <http://www.loveyourpencil.com/docs/contextcluesassessment.pdf>



Teaching Notes: Word Choice

The goal of RI.7.4 is for students to determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings, and to analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone. The following information contains ideas that teachers can incorporate into their classrooms as well as additional resources to peruse and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Activities

1. Put students into groups of 3–4, with each group having its own step in the process of determining tone and/or meaning. For example, one group has to locate context clues and another has to identify figurative and technical language. Have students work for about 15 minutes to describe how to do their process point, and then have students “teach” the rest of the class using their findings. Teachers could also give a brief sample text for them to use for examples.
2. Instruct students to listen to a recording of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s speech “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop” as they simultaneously read it. Then, as a class, discuss how King uses word choice to set his tone.
 - <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkivebeentothemountaintop.htm>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixfwGLxRJU8>

Writing Prompts

1. Instruct students to choose their president and have them address the following questions in a multi-paragraph response:
 - What is the overall purpose of an inaugural speech, and how does that affect the tone it should have?
 - There have been many key events that dictate or heavily influence a president’s term in office. What are some events that may have helped shape your chosen president’s term, and how did it affect the speech’s content?
 - Choose a specific paragraph in the speech. Explain how you used context clues to determine the meaning and tone of the paragraph.
 - Explain the overall tone of the speech, using at least two examples from the text that exhibit the president’s careful choice in words.

