

Grade 6 Playlist: How Word Choice Shapes Meaning and Tone

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.4*:

- Analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

Welcome

Both *annoyed* and *furious* mean “angry.” Which word best gets across the idea that a person is really, really mad? Someone who is annoyed is somewhat bothered. But someone who is furious feels *very* angry. An author chooses every word carefully to express exactly what he or she wants to say. Being able to analyze an author’s choice of words and phrases helps the reader better understand a story’s or a poem’s meaning and tone.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- analyze how the word choices an author makes reveals meaning in stories and poems.
- analyze how the word choices an author makes conveys tone in stories and poems.

Review

Key Terms

- Tone** is the attitude of the narrator in a story or the speaker in a poem.
- Denotation** is the dictionary definition of a word.
- Connotation** is the feelings and emotions that a word conveys.

Exploring the Standard

Authors choose specific words and phrases to set the tone and to shape the meaning of a text. Here are some examples of adjectives that can help an author create a certain tone in a poem or story.

Adjective	Adjective	Tone
gloomy	creepy	mysterious
intelligent	graceful	admiring
cautious	doubtful	suspicious
silly	goofy	humorous



In these sentences from a story, the underlined adjectives help create a mysterious tone.

Kevin and Kyle peered into the dingy attic. *Thunk!* “Did you hear that?” Kyle whispered, shining his flashlight at a stack of sealed boxes.

Now look at the same sentences but with some different words.

Kevin and Kyle peeked into the dusty attic. *Thunk!* “Did you hear that?” Kyle yelled, shining his flashlight at a stack of colorful boxes.

The author creates a different tone by replacing the underlined words. The new words help to make story seem exciting. For example, in the second version, Kyle yells out to Kevin instead of whispering. Yelling instead of whispering may take away the tension that the whispering helps to create. In addition, in the first version, the boxes are described as sealed but in the second version, the boxes are colorful. Sealed boxes help to create an air of mystery while colorful boxes are more likely to lead to excitement.

A Closer Look: Denotation and Connotation

Understanding whether an author uses a word based on its dictionary definition or deeper meaning can help the reader understand the tone and meaning of the overall text. For example, consider the following words:

Word	Denotation	Positive or Negative Connotation
brisk	cold	Pleasantly chilly
raw	cold	unpleasantly cold

Both words describe something that is cold. However, the connotations are different. The word “brisk” would be used to describe a pleasant cold sensation such as “This September morning is bright and brisk.” The word “raw” on the other hand, would more likely be used to describe a cold winter night.

Caution!

Many words have neither a negative nor a positive connotation. For example, *cool*, *warm*, and *round* do not necessarily cause strong feelings or emotions. Therefore, neutral words do not impact the tone of a text.

