

Grade 8 Playlist: Connotative Meanings

Aligns with *CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.4*:

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

Welcome

Writers often make deliberate choices while writing. They don't simply use any old word, especially when specific words with specific meanings will best achieve their purpose. To make their words more meaningful, writers can consider the words' connotative meanings. The connotation depends on the context of the sentence and the overall context of the piece of literature. Just as writers carefully consider their words, it's important for readers to analyze the impact of a writer's word choice when figuring out meaning and tone.

Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- determine the connotative meaning of words and phrases.
- analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.

Review

Key Terms

- **Denotations** are the literal meanings of a word or phrase. The dictionary definition of a word or phrase is its denotation.
- **Connotations** are the implied meanings of a word or phrase. The feelings that a word evokes are its connotation. These feelings are often described in general terms as positive, negative, or neutral, but they can also be identified in more specific, sophisticated terms.

Watch!

For a review of connotation and denotation through the meanings of the word *rose*, watch this video:

- <https://www.opened.com/video/c2c-lesson-meaning-of-denotation-vs-connotation-youtube/103557>

For a review of tone in literature, watch this video:

- <https://vimeo.com/14334436>



Exploring the Standard

Word choice contributes not only to the diversity of texts but also to their meanings and tone. The connotations of a word add layers of meaning to an idea in the text or to the entire text. They answer the questions “What does this word or idea represent?” and “Why is this word or idea important?”

It’s important to first be able to determine a word’s connotation in context. To do so, keep in mind the following three components.

1. The literal meaning of the word (its denotation)	Consider the word or phrase on its own. What is its literal meaning, or dictionary definition?
2. The context of the sentence	Read the word or phrase in the context of the sentence. What is the overall idea that is being expressed in the sentence? Is it negative or positive? What is its part of speech? The answers to these questions will allow readers to determine whether the connotative meaning evokes emotions, ideas, or actions.
3. The context of the paragraph	In some cases, more context will be needed to determine the connotative meaning of a word or phrase. Reread the paragraph and then look for nearby details to that can be helpful in figuring out the meaning.

Example 1

Read this example sentence and pay attention to the underlined word.

When I was little, my mother taught me that the best antidote to heartache was time and laughter.

Now, use the table to determine the meaning of the underlined word. Because the underlined word does not appear in a paragraph, the third element of the table is not needed.

1. The literal meaning of the word (its denotation)	An antidote is a cure for poison and/or illness.
2. The context of the sentence	The narrator is talking about a lesson learned from a parent about how to deal with heartache. The narrator uses the word <i>antidote</i> to describe a cure for heartache.
Meaning	Considering both the literal definition and the context of the sentence, the connotative meaning of the word <i>antidote</i> is “a way to work through a problem.” The narrator’s mother is stating that a person heals heartache by giving herself time and by laughing.



Teaching Notes: Connotative Meanings

One of the goals of RL.8.4 is for students to determine and explain connotative meanings as they are used in a text. The following information contains activities and prompts that teachers can incorporate into their classrooms as well as additional resources to peruse and integrate into instruction as appropriate.

Activity

Choose an excerpt from a grade-appropriate fiction text. As a class, create a chart listing the connotative language in the excerpt. Identify the literal and connotative meanings of each word and phrase. Then, ask students to pick another word or phrase that could replace the original without changing the meaning.

Writing Prompts

1. Assign students a grade-appropriate excerpt from a fiction text that has three to five examples of connotative language. Direct students to answer this question in an essay: *How does one of the examples in the fictional text contribute to the reader's overall understanding of the story?*
2. Instruct each student to write a story including five to eight examples of connotative meanings. Then, have students exchange their stories and identify the connotative meanings.

Differentiated Learners

For students who may learn best by reading text accompanied by audio, the following link provides the audio for *Jane Eyre*, the novel from which the examples were excerpted in the playlist.

- <https://librivox.org/jane-eyre-by-charlotte-bront/>

For students who may learn best through visual displays, use the following link to lead a discussion on connotative language. Watch the depiction of a scene from *Jane Eyre*, and direct students to pay attention to the language. Ask students: *What does Mrs. Reed mean by "unnatural child"?*

- <http://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/gtexp12.ela.lit.firstimp/jane-eyre-1-first-impressions/>

Additional Resource

Consider this resource when teaching RL.8.4:

- "Assessment: Determine the Meaning of Words and Phrases in a Text": This assessment tests students' ability to determine the meaning of words and phrases in poetry and in narratives: <https://www.opened.com/assessment/determine-the-meaning-of-words-and-phrases-in-a-text/1073108>

