

## Word Choice (Denotation and Connotation)

In argumentative writing, as in an editorial, authors choose their words carefully in order to best convince the audience of his/her point of view. They try to pick the most precise words to create the proper tone for their message. The way they achieve this effect is to write with words that have attached to them certain denotations and connotations.

**Denotation**-Dictionary, literal meaning of words

**Connotation**-Common associations that people make with words (positive or negative)

### Example

Word: Gray

**Denotation**-Color of any shade between the colors of black and white

**Connotation**-Negative, Gloom, Sadness, Old Age

### Practice

Word: Mustang

**Denotation**-Small, wild horse of the North American Plains

**Connotation**-Positive, strong, fast, sleek, beautiful

The connotation of the word is why Ford carmakers would choose to name one of its models "Mustang."

Think of two currently used automobile names. What are the denotations of the words? What connotations did the manufacturer hope to evoke in naming that car that particular name? What details do the names bring to mind? What does the name tell you about who drives the car, how fast it is, and what its features are?

## Denotation and Connotation Practice

	Car #1	Car #2
<b>Automobile Name:</b>		
<b>Denotation:</b>		
<b>Connotations:</b>		
<b>What name tells you about driver, speed, features of car:</b>		

Now think of a car and color that describe you. Be prepared to share your response with the class.

Car:

Features of car that are similar to you:

Color:

Reason for color of car:

### Connotation Practice

Words with similar dictionary meanings often have different connotations, so it is very important for a writer to choose words carefully. Consider the following table. Each row contains a list of words with similar dictionary meanings but different shades of feeling.

	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Favorable (Positive)</b>	<b>Unfavorable (Negative)</b>
1.	Inactive		
2.	Shy		
3.	Funny		
4.	Old		
5.	Reserved		
6.	Persistent		
7.	New		
8.	Conservative		
9.	Proud		
10.	Curious		

**POSSIBLE ANSWERS—TEACHER KEY:**

<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Favorable</b>	<b>Unfavorable</b>
inactive	relaxed	lazy
shy	modest	mousy
funny	Good-humored	sarcastic
old	time-tested	out-of-date
reserved	dignified	stiff-necked
persistent	persevering	stubborn
new	up-to-date	newfangled
conservative	thrifty	miserly
proud	self-confident	conceited
curious	inquisitive	nosy

### Loaded Words Practice

Directions: Imagine you are writing a letter to someone in which you feel your words will save their life. Change the following words/phrases to have the most persuasive effect on your reader by using the most extreme/loaded words.

Example: Little Person= Midget, Miniscule, and Inferior

These words may refer to a little person, and the connotations of the words provide an extremely negative image of the person.

1. Dislike =
2. Like =
3. Unhappy =
4. Happy =
5. Smart =
6. Not Smart =
7. Underweight =
8. Overweight =
9. Attractive =
10. Unattractive=

Directions: For the following words that have no positive or negative connotation, write two words/phrases to replace the original word. One word/phrase should have a positive connotation. The other word/phrase should have a negative connotation.

Example: Child

Positive Connotation: Angel

Negative Connotation: Brat

1. Mother
2. Pencil
3. Book
4. Movie
5. Dog

Connotation Practice

Each of the following sentences includes a pair of words with similar dictionary definitions but different connotations. One of the words is more appropriate based on the context of the sentence. Write the word in the “Appropriate Word Choice” box.

Sentence Examples	Appropriate Word Choice	Why did you select that word? (What does each word connote?)
As snakes continue to grow, they ( <b>junk, shed</b> ) the protective keratinous layer on the surface of their bodies because it does not expand.		_____ implies _____, while _____ connotes _____.
Oblivious to those around him, the father tenderly ( <b>smiled, smirked</b> ) at his newborn baby through the window of the hospital nursery.		
During rush hour traffic in a metropolis, cars creep along at agonizingly slow ( <b>velocities, speeds</b> ).		
Even the coolest star in the night skies is unbelievably ( <b>sultry, hot</b> ) according to astronomers.		
The local newspaper's front-page story indicated that \$50,000 was ( <b>stolen, taken</b> ) from the town's largest bank during the night.		
The pack of wild horses ( <b>loped, sprinted</b> ) alongside the train at top speed for more than 200 yards.		
Although many Americans purchase meat at their local grocery stores, some farmers still ( <b>butcher, execute</b> ) livestock to feed their families.		
The French are ( <b>noted, notorious</b> ) for their fine food.		

## CONNOTATION PRACTICE-TEACHER KEY

Each of the following sentences includes a pair of words with similar dictionary definitions but different connotations. One of the words is more appropriate based on the context of the sentence. That word appears in the right-hand column.

Sentence Examples	Appropriate Word Choice	Why did you select that word?
As snakes continue to grow, they ( <b>junk, shed</b> ) the protective keratinous layer on the surface of their bodies because it does not expand.	shed	Junk implies skin is trash, while shed connotes the necessity of the situation
Oblivious to those around him, the father tenderly ( <b>smiled, smirked</b> ) at his newborn baby through the window of the hospital nursery.	smiled	Smirked implies sarcasm or mocking while smiled connotes happiness.
During rush hour traffic in a metropolis, cars creep along at agonizingly slow ( <b>velocities, speeds</b> ).	speeds	Velocities implies fact-paced, while speeds could measure any mph.
Even the coolest star in the night skies is unbelievably ( <b>sultry, hot</b> ) according to astronomers.	hot	Sultry implies sexiness, while hot connotes temperature.
The local newspaper's front-page story indicated that \$50,000 was ( <b>stolen, taken</b> ) from the town's largest bank during the night.	stolen	Taken implies possible good intentions while stolen connotes thievery.
The pack of wild horses ( <b>loped, sprinted</b> ) alongside the train at top speed for more than 200 yards.	sprinted	Loped implies slow and steady while sprinted connotes "top speed"
Although many Americans purchase meat at their local grocery stores, some farmers still ( <b>butcher, execute</b> ) livestock to feed their families.	butcher	Execute implies evil intent while butcher connotes the necessity of the kill (for food)
The French are ( <b>noted, notorious</b> ) for their fine food.	notorious	Noted implies somewhat known, while notorious indicates widespread fame.

**Loaded Language Hunt (R1.2: Connotative Power of Words)**

- 1) **Denotation:** the literal dictionary definition of a word. Denotations are characterized by a neutral, objective tone. For example, *thin* and *skinny* have similar denotations. They each describe a quality of depth or size.
  
- 2) **Connotation:** the meaning, association, or emotion that has come to be attached to a word. A connotation can be positive or negative, depending on its context and each reader’s past experience. For example, many people would say *thin* has a positive connotation, but *skinny* has a negative one. Also, *thin* is often associated with beauty and attraction.
  
- 3) **Loaded Words:** words with strong emotional connotations.

<i>Word or Phrase from Advertisement</i>	<i>Denotation of Key Words</i>	<i>Connotation of Key Words (positive, negative, or neutral)</i>	<i>Effect on Audience (makes the reader feel ____.)</i>
“Lose the <u>slouchy</u> sweats... throw on a <u>sassy</u> skirt.” (from an ad for Venus)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>slouchy</u>: awkward and drooping</li> <li>• <u>sassy</u>: lively and spirited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>slouchy</u>: negative</li> <li>• <u>sassy</u>: positive</li> </ul>	Makes the reader feel lazy when they wear sweats and stylish and chic when they wear a skirt.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

**WARM-UP (R1.2: Connotations)**

**Directions:** Read the advertisement below and answer the questions that follow.



Drink  
**Coca-Cola**  
Delicious and Refreshing

Thirst asks  
nothing more

DRINK  
**Coca-Cola**  
ICE-COLD

Life's "big moments" are often little ones. One of them is that happy moment at the soda fountain... with a tinkling glass of ice-cold Coca-Cola. "Delicious and refreshing" ... Coca-Cola has the taste all ages like.

PURE REFRESHMENT... FAMILIAR TO EVERYONE

One of them is that happy moment at the soda fountain...with a tinkling glass of ice-cold Coca-Cola.

1. The writer of this advertisement probably used the word *ice-cold* rather than *freezing* because *ice-cold* has

- A the opposite meaning.
- B a more negative connotation.
- C a more positive connotation.
- D the same denotation.

“Delicious and refreshing.”

2. Which of the following could best replace *refreshing* in the sentence? (HINT: Choose a synonym with the same connotation.)

- A clean
- B sparkling
- C energizing
- D satisfying

Pure refreshment... familiar to everyone.

3. All of the following have the same connotation as *familiar* except —

- A well-known
- B common
- C popular
- D memorable

4. What tone does the author use to persuade?

- A nostalgic
- B happy
- C soothing
- D reasonable

ANSWER KEY

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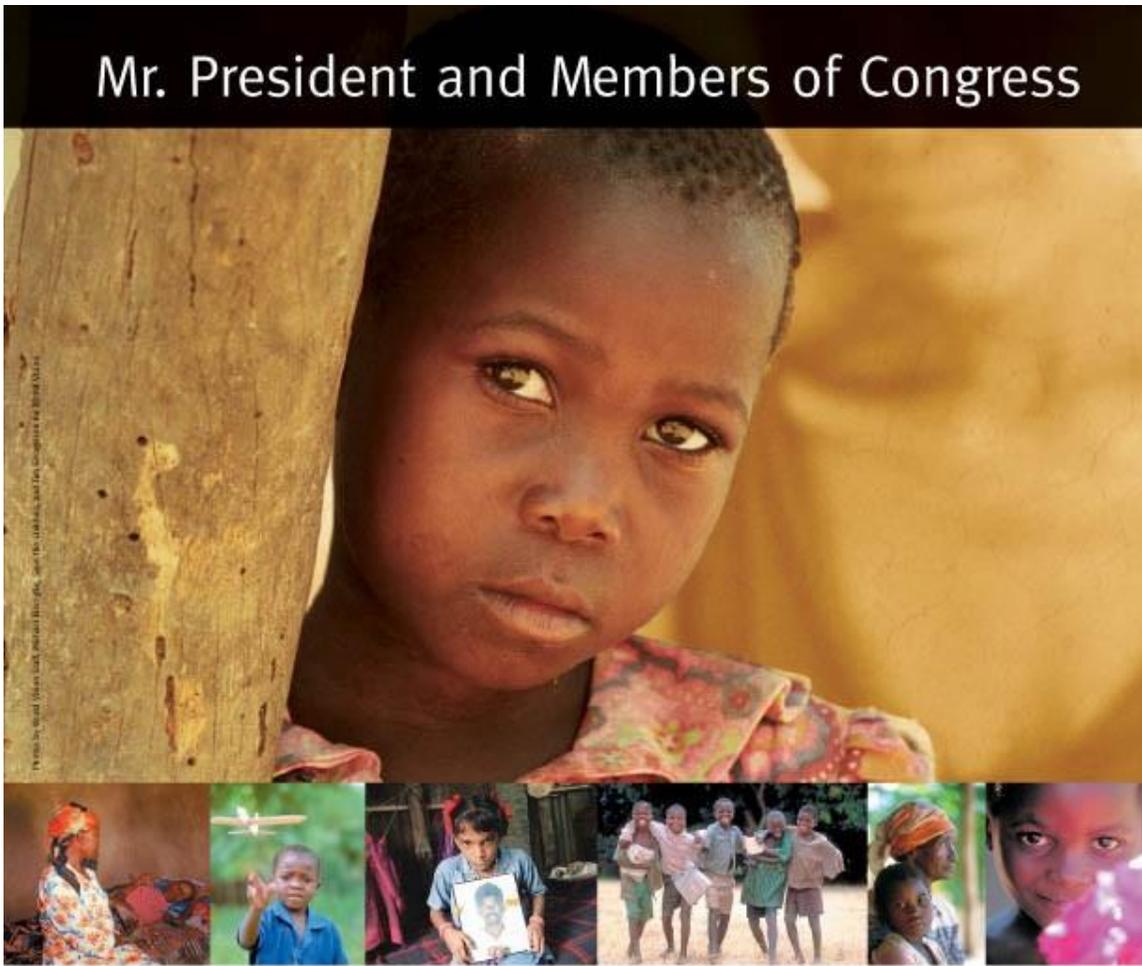
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**WARM-UP (R1.2: Connotations; LS1.13)**

**Directions:** Read the advertisement below and answer the questions that follow.



# Mr. President and Members of Congress

Thank you for your commitment to the world's poor by authorizing historic Global AIDS legislation in May.

**Now, on behalf of 14 million children orphaned by AIDS, we call upon you to fund AIDS appropriations at \$3 billion for 2004, and dedicate 10% for the care of AIDS orphans and vulnerable children.**

**The need is urgent. Together, we have the capacity to make a difference.**

- |   |  |  |  |  |  |  |   |  |   |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|---|--|---|
| <br>George Rapp<br>President & CEO | <br>Paul C. Kennel<br>President | <br>Santel A. Worthington<br>National Executive Director<br>& CEO | <br>Nancy A. Ansey<br>President & CEO | <br>Richard E. Stearns<br>President & CEO | <br>Neal Korry-Geyer<br>Chief Executive Officer | <br>Charles MacCormack<br>President & CEO | <br>Raymond C. Offenberg<br>President | <br>Peter Bell<br>President & CEO | <br>Pat Yarr<br>Executive Director |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|---|--|---|

Now, on behalf of 14 million children orphaned by AIDS, we call upon you to fund AIDS appropriations at \$3 billion for 2004 and dedicate 10% for the care of AIDS orphans and vulnerable children.

1. If the writer of this advertisement wanted to use a stronger phrase than *call upon*, she might use the word

- A urge
- B ask
- C request
- D invite

2. All of the following have the same connotation as *vulnerable* except —

- A defenseless
- B at risk
- C challenging
- D helpless

The need is urgent. Together, we have the capacity to make a difference.

3. If the writer of this advertisement wanted to use a stronger word than *capacity*, she might use the word

- A potential
- B competence
- C ability
- D power

4. The language and pictures of this advertisement appeal to the audience primarily on a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ level.

- A logical
- B ethical
- C emotional
- D reasonable

*ANSWER KEY*

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The need is urgent. Together, we have the capacity to make a difference.

3. If the writer of this advertisement wanted to use a stronger word than *capacity*, she might use the word

- A capability
- B competence
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- A logical
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