Diction, Tone, and Mood

Denotation and Connotation
**Basic Definitions**

- **Diction**– Word choice
  - bad vs. spoiled vs. rotten vs. putrid

- **Denotation**– Dictionary definition of a word

- **Connotation**– Cultural Meaning of a word

  - What is the denotative meaning of the word *House*?

  - What is its connotative meaning? What are all of the things we associate with the word *house*?
Basic Definitions

- **Tone**— how author feels about subject he is writing about or audience he is writing to

- **Example**—
  - $150 shoes— they last for ten years & still look new
  - What type of letter would you write to the company?
  - What things might you say in the letter?

  - $150 shoes— soles rip second day wearing them
  - What type of letter would you write to the company?
  - What things might you say in the letter?
Mood – how the setting and word choice makes the reader feel; implied

Example – What is the mood of the passage?

◦ The waiter lit the two, sleek, white candles and set the small table aglow in soft flaming radiance. The amber light danced gently across the crystal glasses and porcelain plates and bathed the sumptuous meal in warmth. A melody of smooth jazz oozed into the corners of the room and curled around the nearby tables beckoning for the two to cozy up to the musical champagne.
Mood – how the setting and word choice makes the reader feel; implied

Example – What is the mood of the passage?
   ◦ Sudden scurrying in the nearby bush sent Bess and Cheryl jumping in agitation as they crept closer to the looming, dark mansion in hopes that someone was home to let them call for a tow truck. Cheryl’s toe caught on the driveway’s loose gravel and she nearly fell in the pitch blackness of the moonless night. “Watch out!” yelled Bess in sheer panic as she grasped her friend’s arm and steadied her. At that moment, both girls glanced upwards at the windows and noticed the ramshackle shutters were askew and covered in filmy white cobwebs too thick to be mistaken for new.
Consider the following words

- Sad, depressed, unhappy, melancholy, glum, rundown, blue, disheartened

- What are their denotative meanings?
- What are their connotative meanings?
- How would you arrange them from least to most intense?
Degree of Difference

Activity 1: Denotative versus Connotative Meanings
Objective

- Develop understanding of denotation and connotation
- Determine the difference between a word’s denotative and connotative meanings
Work in small groups

Draw a line across a sheet of notebook paper similar to a number line or time line

On the following slides are lists of words that have similar denotative meanings. In fact, many of the words are definitions of each other in the dictionary.

As a group, you must arrange the words on the line from least to most (as in expressing the least amount of happiness to the most happiness or least angry to most angry).

You must come to a consensus and agree as a group on the word order and arrangement.

Be prepared to defend your word line.
List 1: Pretty Words (Arrange from Least to Most)

- Pretty
- Gorgeous
- Beautiful
- Exquisite
- Attractive
- Fair
- Elegant

- Adorable
- Hot
- Comely
- Appealing
- Nice-looking
- Stunning
- Dazzling
List 2: Female Words (Arrange from youngest to oldest...)

- Girl
- Lady
- Woman
- Maiden
- Schoolgirl
- Lass
- Ma’am
- Mother
- Sister
- Grandmother
- Damsel
- Mademoiselle
List 3: Angry Words (Arrange from least to most...)

- Angry
- Mad
- Annoyed
- Livid
- Enraged
- Irritated
- Aggravated
- Furious
- Fuming
- Irate
- Cross
- Wrathful
List 4: Happy Words (Arrange from least to most...)

- Happy
- Joyous
- Ecstatic
- Content
- Cheery
- Elated
- Delighted
- Pleased
- Exultant
- Blissful
- Gleeful
- Euphoric
List 5: Buildings (Arrange from worst to best...)

- House
- Home
- Shack
- Residence
- Shelter

- Cabin
- Mansion
- Dwelling
- Abode
- Lodge
Connotative Influences

Activity 2: Categorizing Positive and Negative Tones
Objective

- Develop understanding of connotative value of words
- Determine the emotional value of words based on their roots, physical sound, cultural connections, social uses, and pop culture references.
Things to Consider

- People have emotional reactions to words—sometimes large reactions and sometimes minute.
- Consider the word car. What is your immediate feeling (without thinking too hard) when you hear the word car? What do you associate with the word car?
  - Usually things like freedom, age, status…
- What about the word vehicle? How does vehicle have a different feel from the word car? Which word has a more positive feeling associated with it? Which is more neutral?
Things to Consider

- Sounds also play an important role in how words make us feel.
- Consider the following two synonyms:
  - Quiet
  - Hush
- Say them out loud. Which word has a harsher sound on the ears? Which word is softer? Of the two words, which is more soothing to say? More grating?
- Now try:
  - Hug
  - Embrace
- Say them out loud. Which has a nicer physical sound? Which has a sluggish sound?
Instructions

- The following slides contain a list of words that have similar denotative meanings.
- Considering the sound, cultural uses of, and emotional reaction to the words, determine if each word is mainly a positive, negative, or neutral word.
- Using your positive–neutral–negative chart, write each word in the box you associate with the emotional connotation of the word. Your group needs to come to a consensus (agreement) for each word.
Categorize each word in each list as either connotatively positive, neutral/indifferent, or negative.

**Example:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Neutral/Indifferent</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home, Cabin, Mansion, Shelter, Lodge</td>
<td>House, Abode, Residence</td>
<td>Shack, Dwelling, Shelter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List 1: Skinny Words (Positive–Neutral–Negative)

- Skinny
- Thin
- Emaciated
- Skeletal
- Starved
- Ragged
- Lanky
- Lean
- Scrawny
- Gaunt
- Slim
- Slender
- Boney
- Slight

Hint: There should be few to no neutral words!
List 2: Smart Words (Positive–Neutral–Negative)

- Smart
- Intelligent
- Brainy
- Genius
- Intellectual
- Wiley

- Tricky
- Clever
- Bright
- Gifted
- Sharp
- Crafty

- Wise
- Rational
- Perceptive
- Scholarly
- Knowledgeable
- Sensible

*Hint: There should be few to no neutral words!*
List 3: Jog Words (Positive–Neutral–Negative)

- Scamper
- Frolic
- Run
- Tear
- Move
- Rush
- Escape
- Tear
- Lope
- Scurry
- Stream
- Proceed

Hint: There should be few to no neutral words!
List 4: Eat Words (Positive–Neutral–Negative)

- Eat
- Consume
- Nibble
- Gobble
- Chew
- Devour
- Gorge
- Dine
- Gnaw
- Guzzle

Hint: There should be few to no neutral words!
List 5: Speak Words (Positive–Neutral–Negative)

- Talk
- Chat
- Gossip
- Gab
- Express
- Yak
- Speak
- Whisper
- Scream
- Yell
- Utter
- State

Hint: There should be few to no neutral words!
Coloring with Tone

Activity 3: Creating Sentences
Objective

- Connect the emotional value of words with diction
- Determine how diction impacts the tone of written works
Consider the following sentence:

**The student looked across the classroom.**

What do you see in your mind when you hear the sentence?

What happens to your mental image when you add one word and the sentence becomes…

**The intelligent student looked across the classroom.**

How about …

**The crafty student looked across the classroom.**

What happens to your mental picture? How does your impression of the student change?

What is the tone of each sentence?
Practice

- Create an **active** sentence using the word *Thin* (use an action verb, no linking or being verbs)
- Write the same sentence again except change *Thin* to *Skeletal*
- Say your two sentences softly out loud to yourself.

How does the meaning, picture, and/or feel of the sentence change with the exchange of the two words?
Practice 2

- Create an active sentence using the word *Pretty*

- Write the same sentence an additional two times.
  - First sentence— use the first word on your degree of difference line (list 1, activity 1)
  - Second sentence— use the last word on your degree of difference line (list 1, activity 1)

How does the meaning, picture, and/or feel of the sentence change with the exchange of the two words?
Create a sentence from your “Smart” Word list (Activity 2, List 2)

- Sentence 1 – inspired tone
- Sentence 2 – critical tone
Create 2 sentences from your “Angry” Word list (activity 1, list 3)

- Sentence 1 – dangerous tone
- Sentence 2 – playful tone
Activity 4: Locating Tone in Passages
Objective

- Consider how diction influences the tone of a passage.
- Determine the tone of a passage based on its diction.
Typical Tone Words

- Content
- Joyful
- Jovial
- Whimsical
- Celebratory
- Optimistic
- Intimate
- Contemplative
- Derisive
- Mocking
- Sarcastic
- Patronizing
- Spiteful
- Pessimistic
- Wrathful
- Gloomy
- Depressed
- Sad
- Suspenseful
- Anxious
- Adventurous
- Mysterious
- Scary
- Fantastical
- Enigmatic
What is the tone and mood of the passage? Locate specific diction to support claim.

- Finally, one of the girls pointed to the grass and giggled. "Meow!" A cat sat on the edge of the field and licked its paw. They did indeed have company. The girls ran over to the cat and pet his belly. They laughed and the cat sauntered back to the field.

Happy/Contentment
After New Year's, the time came to put all the decorations away and settle in for the long, cold winter. The house seemed to sigh as we boxed up its finery. The tree was dry and brittle, and now waited forlornly by the side of the road to be picked up.

Dreary/Depressed
During the holidays, my mother's house glittered with decorations and hummed with preparations. We ate cookies and drank cider while we helped her wrap bright packages and trim the tree. We felt warm and excited, listening to Christmas carols and even singing along sometimes. We would tease each other about our terrible voices and then sing even louder.

Celebratory/Cheerful
"There was a steaming mist in all the hollows, and it had roamed in its forlornness up the hill, like an evil spirit, seeking rest and finding none. A clammy and intensely cold mist, it made its slow way through the air in ripples that visibly followed and overspread one another, as the waves of an unwholesome sea might do. It was dense enough to shut out everything from the light of the coach-lamps but these its own workings, and a few yards of road; and the reek of the labouring horses steamed into it, as if they had made it all."

Mysterious/Ominous
Coloring with Tone

Activity 5: Practice Questions
Which of the following words would create an **ominous** tone for the following sentence?

The ___ figure floated along the wooded path.

A. **Jovial**
B. **Gaunt**
C. **Abrasive**
D. **Gaudy**
Which of the following words would create a suspenseful tone for the following sentence?

The rabbit ____ under the bushes.

A. hopped  
B. crawled  
C. snuck  
D. scurried
Which of the following words would create a whimsical tone for the following sentence?

The colorful balloon ____ in the air.

A. floated
B. popped
C. lingered
D. jockeyed
Which of the following words creates the most **negative** connotation for the following sentence?

The ___ schoolchildren laughed at the boy in the center of the circle.

A. lively
B. playful
C. mischievous
D. spirited
Which of the following words creates the most positive connotation for the following sentence?

The gracefully exquisite dancer ___ across the stage during the performance.

A. leaped
B. dove
C. hurdled
D. soared
Which of the following words creates a patronizing tone for the following sentence?

“I told you, ____, that you need to follow directions.”

A. Tom
B. Boy
C. Son
D. Sweetie
Which of the following words creates a frantic tone for the following sentence?

Isabella ___ into the room, closed the door, and hid under the desk.

A. walked  
B. crept  
C. dove  
D. went
Which of the following words creates a **content** tone for the following sentence?

While dozing on the couch, Juan ___ his request to turn down the T.V. as he rolled lazily onto his side.

A. whispered  
B. yelled  
C. said  
D. sighed
Which of the following words creates a **positive** tone for the following sentence?

Janice’s two dogs, a German Shepherd and a Golden Retriever, just had a litter of _____.

A. mongrels  
B. puppy mixes  
C. half-breeds  
D. mutts
Which of the following words creates a positive tone for the following sentence?

“Watch out!” Shantrelle ______, “The ball is heading straight for you!”

A. Exclaimed  
B. Bellowed  
C. Screamed  
D. Warned
Recap

- **Diction**– Word Choice
- **Denotation**– Dictionary Definition of a Word
- **Connotation**– Cultural Meaning of a Word
- **Tone**– author’s attitude about the text he/she is writing (its topic, the characters, the audience)
- **Mood**– how the diction makes the reader feel
Any Questions?