

Reviewing Connotation and Denotation to Analyze Them in Literature

diction – an author’s word choice

connotation – the emotional and imaginative association with a word; the figurative cultural assumptions that the image implies or suggests. It involves emotional overtones, subjective interpretation, socio-cultural values, and ideological assumptions.

denotation – the strict definition of a word; a specific, literal image, idea, or concept

Examples: McDonald’s restaurant – **connotation:** obesity, *Supersize Me*, Ronald McDonald, happy meal, hamburgers, American stereotypes, unhealthy choices
denotation: a fast food American restaurant that serves cheap food

private school students – **connotation:** rich, spoiled, stuck up, entitled kids with expensive cars
denotation: students who do attend private school, not public school

An author’s diction matters. Some words are more appropriate or fitting than others. For example, consider the following words’ **connotations:** strikes vs. disputes, discussion vs. fight, and dislike vs. hate.

Directions: Rank the following words in each group from positive to negative.

1. **Group 1** – thin, slim, fit, lanky, skinny, gaunt, and slender
2. **Group 2** – aggressive, assertive, domineering, dynamic, pushy, and forceful
3. **Group 3** – shrewd, egghead, bright, clever, brilliant, cunning, smart, intelligent, and brainy
4. **Group 4** – burnt, tanned, glowing, radiant, cancerous, and sun-loving
5. **Group 5** – independent, a “type A” person, anal, pushy, bossy, overbearing, abrasive, and dictatorial

Directions: Write what the following words **connote** to you personally.

1. dope – _____
2. cheddar – _____
3. Gucci – _____
4. salty – _____
5. lit – _____

Directions: Between the following words, which has the more favorable **connotation** to you? Why?

1. thrifty vs. penny-pinching – _____
2. pushy vs. aggressive – _____
3. politician vs. statesman – _____
4. chef vs. cook – _____
5. slender vs. skinny – _____