

DETERMINING THE MEANING AND IMPACT OF WORDS

RL.6.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

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DETERMINING THE MEANING AND IMPACT OF WORDS

TEACHER NOTES

RL.6.4, Lessons 1–3

UNIT OVERVIEW

These lessons promote active engagement with a literary text as students discover how words and phrases have connotative meaning and that this added meaning contributes to the development of the story. Students will collaborate to find the deeper meaning of the words that describe the characters and setting and create the tone of the text.

Lesson 1: You begin this lesson with a discussion of denotative and connotative meaning. Then students read a story and identify words that have connotative meaning, determining whether the connotation is positive or negative. You guide students in determining the subtle differences between the literal definition of a word and the emotional connotation and its impact on the text.

Lesson 2: In this lesson, students discover that an author describes a character with words and phrases that have positive or negative connotation. Students find words and phrases that describe both the protagonist and the antagonist of the story and then explain how those words create the character’s distinct personality.

Lesson 3: In this lesson, students draw a picture of the setting, based on words and phrases from the text. You help students see the connections between the descriptions of the setting and the events that happen and how this contributes to the overall tone of the story.

Research Findings

Lesson Strategies, Approaches, or Activities

<p>“Effective vocabulary instruction also should establish connections among the instructed items. Any instructional method such as semantic mapping that deals with words in groups based on related meanings or relationship to a common topic should help develop knowledge of relationships, among the words being taught.”</p> <p>(Nagy, 1988, p. 14)</p>	<p>In Lesson 1, students explore how the denotation and connotation of a word are related but have subtle differences in emotion or attitude.</p>
<p>“Students’ knowledge of words is the greatest predictor of their reading comprehension. Without the ability to identify words and their meanings in context, readers will struggle to read with deep comprehension.”</p> <p>(Sisson & Sisson, 2014, p. 44)</p>	<p>In Lesson 2, students examine the connotative meaning of the words that describe the protagonist and the antagonist. This activity trains students to decipher the meanings behind the actions and words of a character to comprehend their role.</p>

<p>“Vocabulary instruction that makes students think about the meaning of a word and demands that they do some meaningful processing of the word will be more effective than instruction that does not.”</p> <p>(Nagy, 1988, p.24)</p>	<p>Throughout the unit, students connect the meaning of words with the context of the text and examine how the author’s word choice enriches the story.</p>
<p>Students need skills in contextual analysis, such as determining the connotation of words, and practice integrating the skills to make meaning of what they are reading.</p> <p>(Sisson & Sisson, 2014)</p>	<p>All lessons provide practice in making meaning out of vocabulary to analyze the story.</p>
<p>“Students need to understand terms that can become both conceptual tools for noticing and thinking and procedural tools for interpretation. If all they know is a definition, they possess only inert pieces of information, not tools for knowing and doing the work in flexible and transferable ways.”</p> <p>(Wilhelm & Smith, 2010, p. 64)</p>	<p>The lessons provide students the tools to make meaning out of vocabulary in a story and to transfer those meanings to a deeper conceptual knowledge of how and why an author uses the specific words in the text.</p>

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Wilhelm, J. & Smith, M. (2010). *Fresh takes on teaching literary elements: How to teach what really matters about character, setting, point of view, and theme*. New York: Scholastic.

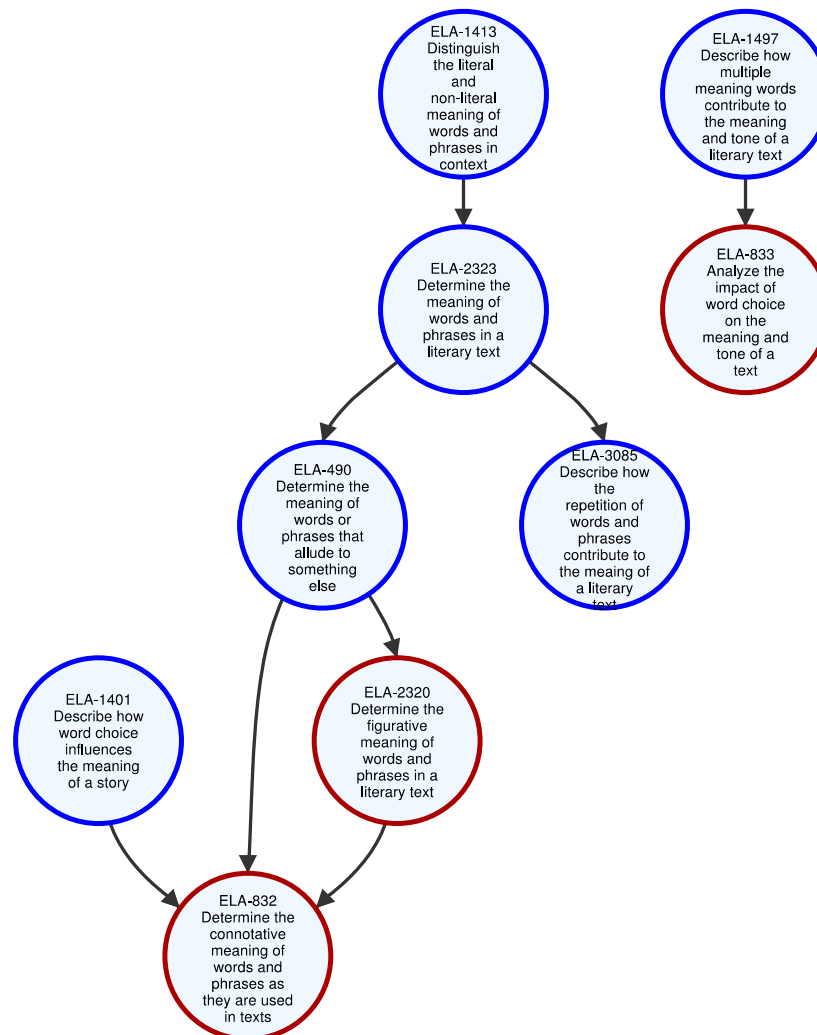
DETERMINING THE MEANING AND IMPACT OF WORDS

LEARNING MAP TOOL

RL.6.4

STANDARD

RL.6.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.



**Learning map model for RL.6.4.*

Node ID	Node Name	Node Description
ELA-490	DETERMINE THE MEANING OF WORDS OR PHRASES THAT ALLUDE TO SOMETHING ELSE	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including of those that allude to significant characters found in mythology (e.g., Herculean).
ELA-832	DETERMINE THE CONNOTATIVE MEANING OF WORDS AND PHRASES AS THEY ARE USED IN TEXTS	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including connotative meanings.
ELA-833	ANALYZE THE IMPACT OF WORD CHOICE ON THE MEANING AND TONE OF A TEXT	Analyze how word choice (e.g., figurative and connotative meaning) impacts the overall meaning and tone of a text.
ELA-1401	DESCRIBE HOW WORD CHOICE INFLUENCES THE MEANING OF A STORY	Describe the ways in which the meaning of a story is influenced by the author's word choice.
ELA-1413	DISTINGUISH THE LITERAL AND NONLITERAL MEANING OF WORDS AND PHRASES IN CONTEXT	Describe the difference between the literal and figurative meaning of words and phrases, based on context (e.g., take steps).
ELA-1497	DESCRIBE HOW MULTIPLE-MEANING WORDS CONTRIBUTE TO THE MEANING AND TONE OF A LITERARY TEXT	Describe how multiple-meaning words contribute to the meaning and tone (e.g., humor or sorrow) of a literary text.
ELA-2320	DETERMINE THE FIGURATIVE MEANING OF WORDS AND PHRASES IN A LITERARY TEXT	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative meanings, such as in metaphors and similes.
ELA-2323	DETERMINE THE MEANING OF WORDS AND PHRASES IN A LITERARY TEXT	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a literary text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.
ELA-3085	DESCRIBE HOW THE REPETITION OF WORDS AND PHRASES CONTRIBUTES TO THE MEANING OF A LITERARY TEXT	Describe how the repetition of words and phrases contributes to the meaning of a literary text (e.g., theme, character development, setting, and point of view).

DISTINGUISHING DENOTATIVE VS. CONNOTATIVE LANGUAGE

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY

RL.6.4, Lesson 1

LEARNING GOAL

In this lesson, students determine the difference between the denotative and connotative meanings of words in a story.

STANDARD

RL.6.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

PREPARATION

Before the lesson, select a literary text from a curriculum resource that has been purchased for individual student use, such as a class set of textbooks. The text should contain several figurative and connotative words for students to examine throughout the unit, as well as descriptive phrases about the setting. Follow all copyright restrictions and guidelines as they pertain to material you select for classroom use.

MATERIALS & HANDOUTS

- ▶ literary text, for individual student use
 - ▶ **STUDENT HANDOUT: CONNOTATIVE WORDS**
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IMPLEMENTATION

As a class, turn the learning goal into an I Can statement: “I can describe the difference between the denotative and connotative meanings of the words in a story.”

Invite students to share definitions of *denotation* and *connotation*.

Explain that *denotation* is the literal meaning of a word; for example, a house is a structure where people live. *Connotation* is the positive or negative feeling associated with a word. For example, **ask**, “Does *shack* have a positive or negative connotation? What about *mansion*? Those are both examples of a house, but the words have different connotations. The word *house* is neutral because it does not have a positive or negative feeling. But if you add the words *old* and *creepy*, then the feeling of the text changes.”

Direct students to listen as you read the text and mark the words that have a positive or negative connotation with a positive or negative sign. As you read, **think aloud** about the vocabulary and talk students through marking connotative words.

Call on students to identify the connotative words in the first paragraph and share whether they have a positive or negative connotation. **Write** the words on the board in one column. **Ask** what neutral word goes with each connotative word, and record responses in a second column.

Pass out [STUDENT HANDOUT: CONNOTATIVE WORDS](#). **Explain** that students will work with a partner to record the connotative words in the rest of the story and determine the neutral words that they refer to. Explain that the words with connotation in the story will not state the denotation (or literal definition) of the word. Students will determine what the literal definition is and write it in the denotation column.

While students work, **circulate** and ask the Checking for Understanding questions.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING	
Determine if the student can DISTINGUISH THE LITERAL AND NONLITERAL MEANING OF WORDS AND PHRASES IN CONTEXT (ELA-1413) :	
▶ What words have positive connotation?	▶ What is the denotation of this word?
▶ What words have negative connotation?	▶ How do you know?

Ask for volunteers to share their examples with the class by describing the difference between the multiple meanings of the words. **Collect** the handouts.

For a discussion of the research that supports this instructional model, see the [TEACHER NOTES](#) for this lesson set.

CONNOTATIVE WORDS

STUDENT HANDOUT

Lesson 1

Directions: Record connotative words from the text and mark whether they have a positive or negative connotation. Then provide the denotation (literal meaning) of the word.

Word	Positive	Negative	Denotation
mansion	✓		house
clunker		✓	car

DESCRIBING CHARACTERS WITH CONNOTATIVE LANGUAGE

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY

RL.6.4, Lesson 2

LEARNING GOAL

In this lesson, students determine how the connotations of words help describe the characters in a literary text.

STANDARD

RL.6.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

MATERIALS & HANDOUTS

- ▶ whiteboard or chart paper
 - ▶ literary text from Lesson 1
 - ▶ [STUDENT HANDOUT: CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS](#)
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IMPLEMENTATION

As a class, turn the learning goal into an I Can statement: “I can describe the characters in the story by using the connotative meaning of words from the text.”

Review connotation and denotation. Instruct students to share an example of both terms with their neighbor.

Explain that today students will describe the main characters in the story using the connotative meanings of words in the text.

Call on students to define *protagonist*. Write responses on the board, and **give** a definition: A protagonist is the main character in a story.

Invite students to share definitions of *antagonist*, and write responses on the board. **Tell** students that an antagonist is a person who opposes the main character. The antagonist can be hostile toward the character, or the antagonist can be a well-meaning person who stands in the main character’s way.

Ask students which character word has a more positive connotation, *protagonist* or *antagonist*? Which has a negative connotation? Consider pointing out the shared root of the words and that the prefix *pro-* means “for” and the prefix *ant-* (or *anti-*) means “against.”

Tell students that they will describe both the protagonist and the antagonist in the story.

As a class, **reread** the text from the previous lesson.

Next, **call on** students to give a word from the text that describes the main character or the protagonist. **Write** each word on the board, and ask students whether it has a positive connotation or a negative one. Mark each word with a positive or negative sign.

Pass out **STUDENT HANDOUT: CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS**. **Explain** that partners will find words that describe each character and will record whether the words have a positive or negative connotation. Then they will write a brief description of the characters based on the full meaning of the description words.

Release students to work. **Walk around** and collect evidence about student thinking.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING		
<p>Determine if the student can DETERMINE THE MEANING OF WORDS AND PHRASES IN A LITERARY TEXT (ELA-2323):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ What word describes the protagonist [or antagonist]? What does it mean?	<p>Determine if the student can DESCRIBE HOW WORD CHOICE INFLUENCES THE MEANING OF A STORY (ELA-1401):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Why does the author use this word? How would the description of the character change if the author used [synonym] instead?▶ What does the character do that shows they are [description word]?▶ What is your opinion of the protagonist [or antagonist]? What words in the story make you think that?	<p>Determine if the student can DETERMINE THE CONNOTATIVE MEANING OF WORDS AND PHRASES AS THEY ARE USED IN TEXTS (ELA-832):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ What is the connotation of this word? How did you determine that?

Ask for volunteers to share their descriptions with the class. **Collect** handouts.

For a discussion of the research that supports this instructional model, see the [TEACHER NOTES](#) for this lesson set.

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

STUDENT HANDOUT

Lesson 2

Protagonist

Word	Positive	Negative	Description

Antagonist

Word	Positive	Negative	Description

DETERMINING TONE

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY

RL.6.4, Lesson 3

LEARNING GOAL

In this lesson, students determine how the word choice in setting details establishes the tone in the story.

STANDARD

RL.6.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

MATERIALS & HANDOUTS

- ▶ whiteboard or chart paper
 - ▶ literary text from previous lessons, for individual student use
 - ▶ highlighters (one per student)
 - ▶ [STUDENT HANDOUT: SETTING AND TONE](#)
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IMPLEMENTATION

As a class, turn the learning goal into an I Can statement: “I can describe the tone of the setting using words and connotations from the text.”

Direct students to turn to a neighbor and define *tone*. **Ask** for volunteers to share their answers, and write responses on the board. **Review** the definition with the class: Tone is the mood of a text. Tone can come from the attitude of a speaker or author and the atmosphere of the setting.

Call on students to define *setting* in a literary text. Write responses on the board. **Review** the definition with students: The setting is the time and place a story occurs. Setting can include culture, historical period, time of day, and geography.

Instruct students to talk to a neighbor about why the setting is important in a story, and then invite volunteers to share. **Explain** that the setting details show a feeling or attitude about that place and moment in time.

Invite students to think about the setting of their favorite movie. For example, the movie *Frozen* takes place in the cold and snow. The main character, Elsa, has the power to turn things to ice. The story would not have developed the same way in a warm or dry setting. **Explain** that the setting sets the tone of the story and helps develop the characters because the setting affects characters, either positively or negatively.

Select a word or phrase from the text that describes the setting of the story. **Think aloud** about the connotation and tone of your selection. For example, if the story refers to an abandoned house, ask students whether that is a positive or negative image. What if the character visits an abandoned house at night in the rain? What would be the overall tone of the setting?

Draw a picture based on the description.

Explain that today students will work with a partner to find words, phrases, and images in the text that describe the setting and help create the tone or feeling of the story. For example, in *Frozen*, it is cold and Elsa feels alone and isolated in the ice castle. The tone is sadness and loneliness because she feels like no one accepts her.

Pass out [STUDENT HANDOUT: SETTING AND TONE](#). **Direct** students to reread the text and work with a partner to highlight the words that tell about the setting. Then students will draw a picture of the setting, based on the text evidence. Last, they will write a description of the tone. While pairs work, **circulate** and check understanding.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING		
Determine if the student can ANALYZE THE IMPACT OF WORD CHOICE ON THE MEANING AND TONE OF A TEXT (ELA-833) :		
▶ What is the setting of the story?	▶ What words or phrases tell about the setting? ▶ What connotation do the words have?	▶ What is the overall tone of the setting? ▶ What changes to the setting would impact the tone?

Ask for volunteers to share their drawing and description with the class, or complete a gallery walk with all students. **Collect** handouts.

For a discussion of the research that supports this instructional model, see the [TEACHER NOTES](#) for this lesson set.

SETTING AND TONE

STUDENT HANDOUT

Lesson 3

Directions: Draw a picture of the story's setting, based on the words that show the tone. Label the picture with the words from the text. Then answer the question.

What tone does the setting create? (Include the words from the text that create this feeling in your description.)

DETERMINING THE MEANING AND IMPACT OF WORDS

STUDENT FEEDBACK GUIDE

RL.6.4, Lessons 1–3

Directions: For each learning goal, circle the sentence that best matches what you can do.

Learning Goal	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Identify words from a text that have connotation	I know that words can have a positive or negative connotation.	I can identify a word with a positive or negative connotation in a text.	I can identify multiple words with positive and negative connotation in a text.
Explain how the connotations of words help describe the characters in a text	I can explain whether a word or phrase related to a character has a positive or negative connotation.	I can describe a character based on the connotative words that tell about them in the text.	I can explain how the connotations of words in a text add to the literal descriptions of the characters.
Explain the overall tone of the setting in the text	I can explain whether a word or phrase related to the setting has a positive or negative connotation.	I can explain the connotative meaning of words that describe the setting.	I can describe the overall tone of the story by using the connotations of the words that describe the setting.