

Connotation

Connotation Definition

Connotation refers to a meaning that is implied by a word apart from the thing which it describes explicitly. Words carry cultural and emotional associations or meanings, in addition to their literal meanings or denotations.

For instance, “Wall Street” literally means a street situated in Lower Manhattan, but connotatively it refers to wealth and power.

Positive and Negative Connotations

Words may have positive or negative connotations that depend upon the social, cultural, and personal experiences of individuals. For example, the words *childish*, *childlike* and *youthful* have the same denotative, but different connotative, meanings. *Childish* and *childlike* have a negative connotation, as they refer to immature behavior of a person. Whereas, *youthful* implies that a person is lively and energetic.

Common Connotation Examples

Below are a few connotation examples. Their suggested meanings are shaped by cultural and emotional associations:

“He’s such a *dog*.” – In this sense, the word *dog* connotes shamelessness, or ugliness.

“That woman is a *dove* at heart.” – Here, the dove implies peace or gentility.

“There’s no place like *home*.” – While *home* may refer to the actual building someone lives in, connotatively, it most often refers to family, comfort, and security.

“What do you expect from a *politician*?” – *Politician* has a negative connotation of wickedness and insincerity. To imply sincerity, the word *statesperson* might be used.

“That woman is so *pushy*!” – *Pushy* refers to someone who is loud-mouthed, insisting, and irritating.

“My *mom and dad* worked hard to put me through college.” – The words *Mom* and *Dad*, when used in place of *mother* and *father*, connote loving parents, rather than simply biological parents.

Examples of Connotation in Literature

In literature, it is a common practice among writers to deviate from the literal meanings of words in order to create novel ideas. Figures of speech frequently employed by writers are examples of such deviations.

Example #1: *Sonnet 18* (By William Shakespeare)

Metaphors are words that connote meanings that go beyond their literal meanings. Shakespeare, in his [Sonnet 18](#), says:

“Shall I Compare Thee to *a Summer’s Day*...”

Here, the phrase “a Summer’s Day” implies the fairness of his beloved.

Example #2: *The Sun Rising* (By John Donne)

Similarly, John Donne says in his poem *The Sun Rising* says:

“She is all states, and all princes, I.”

This line suggests the [speaker](#)’s belief that he and his beloved are wealthier than all the states, kingdoms, and rulers in the whole world because of their love.

Example #3: *The Merchant of Venice* (By William Shakespeare)

[Irony](#) and [satire](#) exhibit connotative meanings, as the intended meanings of words are opposite to their literal meanings. For example, we see a sarcastic remark made by Antonio to Shylock, the Jew, in William Shakespeare’s play *The Merchant of Venice*:

“Hie thee, gentle Jew.

The Hebrew will turn Christian: he grows kind.”

The word “Jew” generally had a negative connotation of wickedness, while “Christian” demonstrated positive connotations of kindness.

Example #4: *The Animal Farm* (By George Orwell)

George Orwell’s allegorical novel *Animal Farm* is packed with examples of connotation. The actions of the animals on the farm illustrate the greed and corruption that arose after the Communist Revolution of Russia. The pigs in the novel connote wicked and powerful people who can change the ideology of a society. In addition, Mr. Jones (the owner of the farm), represents the overthrown Tsar Nicholas II; and Boxer, the horse, represents the laborer class.

Example #5: *Julius Caesar* (By William Shakespeare)

[Metonymy](#) is another [figure of speech](#) that makes use of connotative or suggested meanings, as it describes a thing by mentioning something else with which it is closely connected. For example, Mark Anthony, in Act III of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, says:

“Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.”

Here, the word “ear” connotes the idea of people listening to him attentively.

Example #6: *Out, Out* (By Robert Frost)

Read the following lines from Robert Frost’s poem *Out, Out*:

“As he swung toward them holding up the hand
Half in appeal, but half as if to keep
The *life* from spilling”

In the line “The life from spilling,” the word “life” connotes “blood.” It does make sense as well because loss of blood may cause loss of life.

Example #7: *As you Like It* (By William Shakespeare)

Connotation provides the basis for symbolic meanings of words because symbolic meanings of objects are different from their literal sense. Look at the following lines from Shakespeare’s play *As you Like It*:

“All the world’s *a stage*,
And all the men and women merely *players*;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many *parts* ...”

Here, *a stage* connotes the world; *players* suggests human beings; and *parts* implies different stages of their lives.

Function of Connotation

In literature, connotation paves way for creativity by using figures of speech like [metaphor](#), [simile](#), [symbolism](#), and [personification](#). Had writers contented themselves with only the literal meanings, there would have been no way to compare abstract ideas to concrete concepts, in order to give readers a better understanding. Therefore, connotative meanings of words allow writers to add to their works dimensions that are broader, more vivid, and fresher.