Word Choice in Non-Fiction

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College and Career Readiness Standards for Reading:

4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

Word choice

Authors are very careful about the words they use. The specific word choice depends on the **audience**, **content** and **context**.

Consider the following topics and audiences. What would be the tone in each situation?

1. Writing a fashion article for the high school newspaper.

2. Writing a letter to the school board to persuade them to switch from textbooks to tablets and e-books.

3. Writing a narrative essay about a vacation you took with your family.

Tone

Specific word choice contributes to the overall **tone** in a piece of writing. The tone is the author's attitude toward the audience and the subject. The tone could be:

excited

friendly

joyous

angry

formal

comical

persuasive

witty

mournful

compassionate

grim

nostalgic

You can identify a text's tone by considering the word choice and asking yourself questions about the writing. Is it formal or informal? Who is the audience? What is the author's purpose?

Press **start** to begin.

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Authors often use figurative language to enhance the impact of their writing.

Can you sort these phrases by the type of figurative language they represent? After sorting all the phrases, press on the note cards to write your own definition and example for each term.

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Why do authors use figurative language? How does it help the reader to understand the message? Go through the animation to learn more about figurative language.

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Read the following excerpt from Dwight D. Eisenhower's famous speech, "Atoms for Peace." Press the highlighted text for more information. Discuss the impact it has on the overall effect of the speech.

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Writers need to be very aware of the meaning of the words they choose. It is important to consider the **connotative** and **denotative** meaning when analyzing a text in order to fully understand the message.

Denotative meaning is the literal or dictionary definition of a word.

Connotative meaning is the implied meaning of a word based on the context in which it is used.
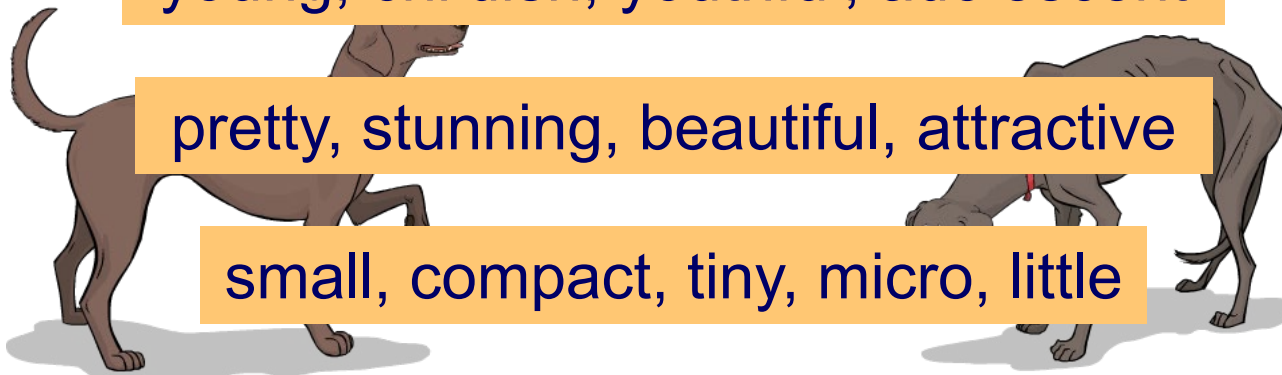
Connotative meanings

Read the following groups of words. The words in each group have similar denotative meanings; however, the connotative meanings are different.

skinny, slim, slender, emaciated, scrawny

young, childish, youthful, adolescent

pretty, stunning, beautiful, attractive

small, compact, tiny, micro, little

Can you think of any other word groups with the same denotative meanings but different connotative meanings?

Occasionally when reading, you will encounter a word that you have never seen before. You can use context clues to help understand the meaning of unknown words.

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Do you know what an allusion is?
Go through the animation to learn
more about what an allusion is and
how an author uses it to add
meaning to his or her writing.

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How much do you remember about word choice and figurative language? Can you match each of these terms to the correct definition?

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