

CONNOTATION & DENOTATION

What “extra baggage” do words hold?

Words work in funny ways. They have literal meanings that come from the dictionary definition. We call these meaning **denotation**. As you know, words also sometimes have extra meanings that go with them. In this case, the words also come with some emotional meanings. We call these meanings the **connotation** of a word.

This might sound confusing at first, but as teenagers, you’re likely experts! For example, the following words mean the same thing (overall), but they have different emotional associations:

• thin	• slim	• scrawny
• slender	• skinny	• lean

A connotation might be positive (makes something sound good), it might be negative (is almost an insulting word, makes something sound bad), or it might be neutral (doesn’t really make something sound good or bad). Here’s a common example of negative vs. positive connotations.

I have a daughter who is

~~Bossy,~~ *assertive*

~~Loud,~~ *outspoken*

~~Emotional,~~ *passionate*

& ~~Picky,~~ *decisive*

And I hope she stays that
way.

Activity 1

The words in each box have similar denotations but very different connotations. For each group of words, tell me whether each word has a negative connotation, positive connotation, or a neutral connotation.

nosy interested questioning	conceited courageous confident	meticulous selective picky	elated happy manic
thrifty stingy saving	peculiar unique different	old vintage decrepit	eager keener ambitious

Activity 2

Create your own list of three or more words that have similar denotations but different connotations. Label each word as positive, negative, or neutral.

Activity 3

Based on this information, explain why you think it is important to pay attention to the words that you use? Be specific and give reasons to support your opinion.