

## Section 2 Objectives

When you have completed this section, you should be able to –

- distinguish between the denotation of a word and its connotations.
- recognize how a writer chooses words to accomplish a specific purpose.
- recognize the emotional impact of words and tell how a good writer makes a reader feel his ideas.
- identify two improper uses of the emotional power of words.
- define and identify *triteness*.
- name a technique writers use to keep their writing fresh.

## Lesson 6

## Denotation and Connotation

## Words to Know

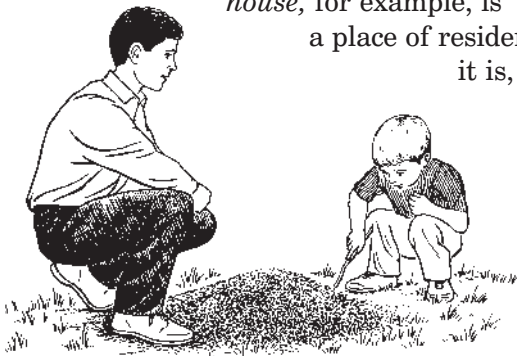
**connotation** (kän' ə tā' shən). Suggested thoughts and feelings beyond the explicit, literal meaning of a word.

**denotation** (dē' nō tā' shən). Explicit, literal meaning of a word.

**diction** (dik' shən). Choice of words in speech or writing.

Dictionaries are excellent for laying out a word's meaning. One, two, three, four, go the definitions. Noun form, verb form, adjective—the poor word lies like a beef quarter, cut with professional skill—chuck roast, sirloin steak, and ground round. Everything is divided and properly named. That is good. When we need to know the precise meaning of a word, the dictionary is the place to go. It is professional, clean, and orderly. It gives us the information we need.

The dictionary's definition of a word is called its **denotation**. The denotation of *house*, for example, is “a dwelling, a place of residence.” There it is, clear and simple on paper.



When you hear the word *house*, however, a certain kind of house likely comes floating into view in your mind. Is it a white bungalow? a brick ranch-style? a stately plantation house? a two-story row house? In any case, it is a house.

Armed with the dictionary's definition, suppose you go on a hike with your little brother. You see a mound of dirt with ants hustling all over the place in their zigzag, stop-and-go manner. You stop and tell your brother, “There's an anthill.” He asks, “What's an anthill?” You promptly reply, “It's a house for ants.” You've given him a nice, clean answer fresh out of the dictionary, meaning, of course, “a dwelling, a place of residence.”

Then the little fellow's mind goes to work, and he begins coming up with all sorts of questions: “Does it have bedrooms? Where's the bathroom? Is there a daddy and mommy ant in the house? Are all these the children? Where's the door? Doesn't it have any windows? Do they have devotions at breakfast?”

This little man's questions suddenly blow such a host of associated ideas and thoughts into your nice dictionary definition that it is nice to

bursting. In his mind a house has bedrooms, a bathroom, a front door, and windows; and it contains parents and children who have devotions along with breakfast.

All these extra ideas are the **connotations** of the word *house* for this boy. The connotation of any word includes the thoughts and feelings associated with that word. As you can see, the connotation of house was quite a bit more involved than the bare denotation. It is also more alive, just as a beef cow is livelier and more interesting to watch than a rib-eye steak.

The denotation of a word, then, is carefully analyzed, accurate, and quite dead. The connotations of a word bring it to life.

As writers, we need to be aware of a word's connotations and use them to our advantage, or

without notice they will give us the slip and go charging off in a dash toward confusion. Consider these examples:

**squawk**

denotation: *to utter a harsh cry*

*With a desperate squawk, the gentleman flung open the door of the burning building.*

connotations: chickens; scrawny neck making unpleasant sounds (The connotations of *squawk* do not fit the connotations of *gentleman*.)

**giggle**

denotation: *to chuckle or laugh lightly*

*The preacher giggled at the boy's comment.*

connotations: silliness; giddy humor (The connotations of *giggle* do not fit the connotations of *preacher*.)



**Define these words.**

1. denotation: \_\_\_\_\_
2. connotation: \_\_\_\_\_



**Write D for the denotation and C for the connotation.**


3. **cloud**
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ a visible body of fine water droplets suspended in the atmosphere
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ light, billowy, breezy, air-filled, or dark and heavy with rain
4. **work**
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ sweat, tiredness, long days, eight-hour shifts, paycheck
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ one's means of livelihood; employment; toil
5. **computer**
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ an electronic machine that performs high-speed calculations or that stores and processes data
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ logic, speed, beep-beep noises, amazing technology




**For each word write a denotative meaning and then connotative meanings. Try to do this without using your dictionary.**

6. **church**
  - a. denotation: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. connotation: \_\_\_\_\_
7. **camping**
  - a. denotation: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. connotation: \_\_\_\_\_

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 All of these words have the denotation of “not fat.” Put a *P* beside the words that have a pleasant connotation and a *U* beside those with an unpleasant connotation.

- |                  |                  |                    |
|------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| 8. ____ thin     | 12. ____ lean    | 16. ____ skeletal  |
| 9. ____ skinny   | 13. ____ trim    | 17. ____ emaciated |
| 10. ____ slender | 14. ____ willowy | 18. ____ slim      |
| 11. ____ scrawny | 15. ____ gaunt   |                    |

 Underline the synonyms of *boldly* that give nearly the same connotation for the word as it is used in this verse:

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

19. brashly                      confidently                      brazenly                      unhesitatingly                      daringly

## Lesson 7

### Emotion Words

#### Words to Know

**masquerade** (mas' kə rād'). A social gathering where participants come dressed in masks.

**sentimentalism** (sent ə ment' əl iz' əm). Inclined toward the emotional, especially affected emotions.

#### Proper Use of Emotion Words

We said earlier that skilled writers carefully choose their words to accomplish their specific purposes. Experienced writers know that if they



just lay out their ideas as bare skin and bones, the reader is likely to be bored. Seasoned writers use words that state their ideas in ways that stir the reader's feelings. Suddenly, the bone work comes to life and the reader begins to pay attention. The idea by itself may be as dead as the geography of northern Minnesota, but if the writer makes his subject howl at you with its wolves and wildcats, entertains you with its lumberjack history, shows you the peace and quiet of its rivers and lakes, tantalizes you with a stringer of walleye or northern pike, and lets you roam through birch groves and ash swales and pine islands, you may be ready to beg for a family vacation in northern Minnesota.

Skillful writers make you feel their ideas. They use words that stir emotions. The emotional impact of words lies both in their denotation and in their connotations. As you read the following

poem, notice how your feelings change with each line.

### Words

Words, words, words, words!  
 Dimpled, dainty, delicate words;  
 Freshly painted picket words;  
 Chewy, gooey, sticky words;  
 Clonging, gonging, bonging words;  
 Short, curt, pert words;  
 Fluffy, feathery, heathery words;  
 Stiff, starchy, stuffy words;  
 Ultrapreponderant, heavy words;  
 Holy, hallowed, healing words;  
 Words! Words! WORDS! WORDS!

Edgar Allen Poe was an American writer of the 1800s. His life was short and for the most part, unhappy. Poe is remembered especially for his diction. His favorite emotional framework for stories seemed to be terror and fear. Following is an example from “The Masque of the Red Death.” In this story, a prince seals off his palace from the rest of the kingdom that is experiencing a horrible plague. The prince and his friends are having an extravagant and lighthearted **masquerade**. In spite of the merriment, all is not well.

It was in this apartment, also, that there stood against the western wall, a gigantic clock of ebony. Its pendulum swung to and fro with a dull, heavy, monotonous clang; and when the minute-hand made the circuit of the face, and the hour was to be stricken, there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound which was clear and loud and deep and exceeding musical, but of so peculiar a note and emphasis that, at each lapse of an hour, the musicians of the orchestra were constrained to pause, momentarily, in their performance, to hearken to the sound; and thus the waltzers perforce ceased their evolutions; and there was a brief disconcert of the whole gay company; and, while the chimes of the clock yet rang, it was observed that the giddiest grew pale, and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows as if in confused reverie or meditation.

Poe, by the way, was not merely trying to be sensational. He insisted that his stories were seri-

ous works, expressing moral realities. “The Masque of the Red Death,” for example, demonstrates that time and death have sway over man’s pride and folly.

In *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A. W. Tozer is quite a different writer with quite a different purpose. He discusses twenty attributes of God in as many chapters. Here is a paragraph from the opening chapter, “Why We Must Think Rightly About God”:

The man who comes to a right belief about God is relieved of ten thousand temporal problems, for he sees at once that these have to do with matters which at the most cannot concern him for very long; but even if the multiple burdens of time may be lifted from him, the one mighty single burden of eternity begins to press down upon him with a weight more crushing than all the woes of the world piled one upon another. That mighty burden is his obligation to God. It includes an instant and lifelong duty to love God with every power of mind and soul, to obey Him perfectly, and to worship Him acceptably. And when the man’s laboring conscience tells him that he has done none of these things, but has from childhood been guilty of foul revolt against the Majesty in the heavens, the inner pressure of self-accusation may become too heavy to bear.

(From *The Knowledge of the Holy* by A.W. Tozer. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1961, pp. 10, 11.)

Tozer’s purpose is to show the importance of knowing God as God and of recognizing the obligation of man to God. Notice how many words Tozer uses that carry the idea of weight—“burdens of time . . . burden of eternity . . . weight more crushing . . . piled one upon another . . . mighty burden.” Then he uses expressions such as “obligation to God,” “lifelong duty,” and “obey Him perfectly.” By the time Tozer arrives at his last sentence and declares that man “has from childhood been guilty of foul revolt against the Majesty in the heavens,” and “the inner pressure of self-accusation may become too heavy to bear,” the reader is prepared to own his guilt and confess his obligation to the Majesty in the heavens.



### Complete the sentences.

1. Experienced writers know if they just lay out their ideas as bare skin and bones, the reader is likely to be \_\_\_\_\_.

**Lesson 7**

- 2. Skilled writers make you \_\_\_\_\_ their ideas.
- 3. The emotional impact of words lies both in their \_\_\_\_\_ and in their \_\_\_\_\_.



**Complete these activities.**

- △ 4. Reread the paragraph from Poe and list the kinds of emotions you feel as you read.

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- △ 5. Reread the paragraph from Tozer and list the emotions you feel as you read.

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**Improper Use of Emotion Words**

So far we have seen how the emotional feel of words can be used for good by skillful writers to achieve their purposes. However, not all skillful writers have worthy ideas. A writer may take a bad idea and pack it with sweet and noble emotion to make it acceptable to his readers, or he may take a good idea and discuss it in such an emotionally negative atmosphere that readers are glad to reject the idea just for a breath of fresh air. Notice the hair-raising language in the following paragraph.

For centuries women have borne their husband’s babies, prepared their husband’s meals, washed their husband’s dishes, scrubbed their husband’s floors, served and slaved and run at his slightest whim, and thought all the while it was their God-given duty. Enough! Enough of this slave labor. Enough of this dirty-diaper drudgery without thanks. It is time women be recognized as persons. It is time men accept that women are as noble, as intelligent, and as feeling a part of humanity as men ever have been.

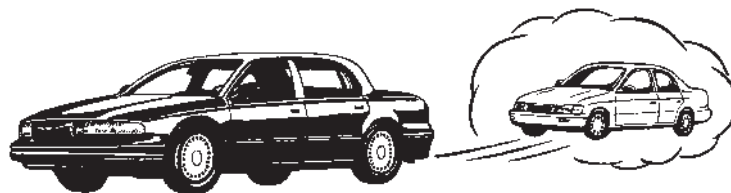
When a writer uses emotion-stirring words to distract from a logical approach to his ideas, he is using “emotional appeal.” This is an improper use of the emotional impact of words.

Before we examine the idea of this paragraph, let’s look at the emotion words. How many words can you find emitting negative feelings about a woman’s role as homemaker? Notice how the work is described in a way to jab the husband and create sympathy for the wife—his babies, his meals, his dishes, his floors make her a slave of

drudgery. Notice how the work is implied to be a slap at the woman’s nobility, intelligence, and feelings.

Now, what is the idea of the paragraph? It implies that homemaking ought not to be the wife’s responsibility. By making a strong emotional appeal to the reader, the writer is trying to gain acceptance for the idea. Who wants to be part of a system that is unfair, outdated, foolish, and cruel? The writer also takes a passing shot at Christianity, claiming this slave labor in the minds of some is “God-given duty.” The Bible unapologetically says wives are to be “discreet, chaste, keepers at home” (Titus 2:5). Thus, the Bible refutes the basic idea of the paragraph. The Bible does not intend, however, that the woman’s home responsibility be degrading any more than the man’s responsibility to provide be degrading. The woman’s role as described in Proverbs 31 demonstrates just how noble, intelligent, and feeling a godly woman is in effectively fulfilling her home responsibilities. She also is praised, loved, and admired by her husband, her children, and her acquaintances. The writer of the paragraph, then, is attempting to sell a wrong idea with emotional words.

Salespeople regularly use feeling-packed words to sell their wares and to discredit their competitors. An automobile advertisement may praise the “smooth, confident power” of a certain car. What emotions are stirred in you as you read about “smooth, confident power”? The advertiser hopes these emotional appeals will cause people to feel good about the car and then want to buy one.



The emotional power of words may be misused in other ways. Some writers purposely play on their reader's emotions. They try to stir certain feelings for emotional effect. This is called **sentimentalism**.

Kristie's daddy had died six months before, and poor Kristie relived her bitter grief every day. She was like a wilted flower. Even now, knowing that her friends had planned this birthday party especially to cheer her aching heart, tears trickled down her twelve-year-old cheeks. To Kristie it seemed there never, never would be enough happiness to take away the pathetic emptiness in her life.

The writer above was trying to stir the emotion of pity. In every sentence words are used that drip with sympathy—*poor Kristie . . . bitter grief . . . wilted flower . . . aching heart . . . pathetic emptiness*. This is sentimentalism. It is not good writing, nor does it make good reading.

Many writers of romance are sentimental. Eyelashes flutter, pulses throb, and everyone, including the wind in the pines, whispers lovely messages on the night air.

Understanding the emotional impact of words and word arrangement gives Christians two important responsibilities. First, Christians must use integrity when they write. It is not wrong when a writer states his ideas well and stirs the emotions of readers. But it is improper to use emotion-stirring tactics to detract from or override a logical approach to the ideas being presented. The second responsibility Christians have is to

read with discernment. As Christians understand emotional appeal and sentimentalism, they can avoid literature in which such tactics are used.

Emotions are a real part of our lives, and well-written books stir our emotions. Even so, these books stir our emotions by putting us in touch with truth and reality, not through emotional appeal and sentimentalism. Following is a paragraph from a book by E. M. Bounds on spiritual warfare. Notice how the writer presents his views in such a way that you feel them without playing on your emotions.

The devil goes out into the wilderness, finds us in a fainting, discouraged condition, with our faith weak, the sky cloudy, and our vision obscured. Then he shows us the world from the loftiest peak and tries to ensnare us with its enchanting wonders. He never gets tired of trying to ruin us until the coffin lid is sealed and our happy spirits are bathing in the land where "the wicked cease from troubling; and the weary be at rest" (Job 3:17) [From *Winning the Invisible War*, by E.M. Bounds. Pittsburg: Whitaker House, 1984, p. 94.]

Bounds refers directly to emotions (*discouraged* and *happy*), and he uses words that have emotional connotations: *wilderness* and *cloudy* help us feel the "discouraged condition." *Bathing*, *cease from troubling*, and *weary be at rest* help us to feel the anticipated happiness of heaven. Yet, the appeal of Bounds' writing is not emotional. He is presenting clear ideas and helping us to feel those ideas through careful diction.

 **Complete these activities.**

6. Define *emotional appeal*: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Define *sentimentalism*: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Tell how a writer may use emotional appeal to promote a wrong idea.

## Lessons 7, 8

9. Tell how a writer may use emotional appeal to discredit a worthy idea.

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10. Tell how advertisers use emotional appeal.

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11. List two responsibilities Christians have, knowing the emotional impact of words and word arrangement.

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## LOOKING BACK . . .



Answer the questions.

12. What is the difference between denotation and connotation?

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13. What connotations do these synonyms of *smell* have? Write **P** for *pleasant* or **U** for *unpleasant*.

a. \_\_\_ aroma

c. \_\_\_ reek

e. \_\_\_ stink

g. \_\_\_ odor

b. \_\_\_ stench

d. \_\_\_ scent

f. \_\_\_ perfume

## Lesson 8

### Freshness Versus Triteness

#### Words to Know

**eccentric** (ik sen' trik). Different from the norm; unconventional or odd.

**trite** (trīt). Commonplace and overused; lacking freshness and originality.

Good diction, we have seen, requires an awareness of a word's denotation and connotation. It requires a sensitivity about how a word or a combination of words will "feel" to the reader—the emotional impact. Sometimes a certain combination of words is so good it stays around for a while. The longer it stays, the more commonplace it becomes. Once it is commonplace, people no longer think of it as original or witty. It has

become **trite**. Good diction requires that we avoid triteness.

When jets first began flying, people would stop, look up, and watch them with interest. Nowadays people pay only casual attention. Look at the following expressions. Probably, when first used, they arrested people's attention, but now they are such a normal part of our speech that, like the jets, we seldom notice them.