Connotation/Denotation
Mini-Lesson Video Clip

- Connotation/Denotation: https://www.flocabulary.com/unit/word-choice/
Terms to Know

**connotation** noun

A secondary meaning or implication of a word or expression, in addition to its primary meaning. Because the word “natural” has a connotation of health and wholesomeness, advertisers often use it to appeal to their consumers.

**denotation** noun

An explicit, agreed-upon meaning of a word. Often in addition to a word’s denotation, or its primary meaning, it has a feeling or tone associated with it as well.

**subtle** adjective

Difficult to detect or define; elusive or ambiguous. There was a subtle change in her son’s attitude that only a very observant parent would notice. Antonyms obvious

WRITE WITH THIS WORD

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Read the following sentence.

The baby was very clever. It already knew how to crawl into a room without making a sound.

How would the meaning of the sentence change if the author used the word “cunning” instead of word “clever”?

A The baby would seem sneakier.

B The baby would seem cuter.

C The baby would seem stupider.

D The baby would seem louder.
The baby was very clever. It already knew how to crawl into a room without making a sound.

How would the meaning of the sentence change if the author used the word “cunning” instead of word “clever”?

A. The baby would seem sneakier.
   “Cunning” and “clever” are both adjectives that mean “intelligent.” But “cunning” also implies that someone or something is “sneaky.”

B. The baby would seem cuter.

C. The baby would seem stupider.

D. The baby would seem louder.
Read the following passage.

“He’s very influential in the clowning community,” she whispered to her friend, pointing to the tall man in loose pants and rainbow suspenders striding across the room. “He’s a great artist. Balloon animals have never been the same.”

What is the “charge” of the word “influential” in this passage?

A  positive
B  negative
C  neutral
D  extremely negative
“He’s very influential in the clowning community,” she whispered to her friend, pointing to the tall man in loose pants and rainbow suspenders striding across the room. “He’s a great artist. Balloon animals have never been the same.”

What is the “charge” of the word “influential” in this passage?

A. positive

“Influential” has a positive charge. “influential” means someone who is powerful or who has great influence over someone or something. And the context clues that describe the man as a “great” artist and state that he has changed the art of balloon animals suggests that he has been influential in a positive way.

B. negative

C. neutral

D. extremely negative
Read the following passage.

After winning the spelling bee, Bridget became cocky. “I can spell any word in the universe,” she insisted loudly, even in places where it was not required to spell things. Like at the movies with her friends.

Her best friend, annoyed, said, “I bet you can’t spell a word in German.” Bridget did not speak German.

“I probably can,” she insisted, “I mean, how hard can it be, right?”

What is the charge of the word “cocky” in this passage?

A positive
B negative
C neutral
D extremely positive
After winning the spelling bee, Bridget became cocky. “I can spell any word in the universe,” she insisted loudly, even in places where it was not required to spell things. Like at the movies with her friends.

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“I probably can,” she insisted, “I mean, how hard can it be, right?”

What is the charge of the word “cocky” in this passage?

A. positive

B. negative

The connotation of “cocky” in this passage is negative. The context clues of the passage, like the detail that Bridget “insisted loudly” “even in places where spelling was not necessary” and that her best friend is “annoyed,” let us know that “cocky” has a negative charge.

C. neutral

D. extremely positive
Read the following sentence.

The man stretched slowly, then continued his sluggish walk down the street.

How would the meaning of the sentence change if the author used the word “unhurried” instead of word “sluggish”?

A. The man would seem less lazy.
B. The man would seem funnier.
C. The man would seem more talented.
D. The man would seem more talkative.
Read the following sentence.

The man stretched slowly, then continued his sluggish walk down the street.

How would the meaning of the sentence change if the author used the word “unhurried” instead of word “sluggish”?

A. The man would seem less lazy.
   “Unhurried” and “sluggish” are synonyms, but “sluggish” more strongly connotes laziness.

B. The man would seem funnier.

C. The man would seem more talented.

D. The man would seem more talkative.
Read the following passage.

My grandmother is thrifty. She never throws out old clothes and saves all her jars to reuse as glasses.

How would the meaning of the sentence change if the author used the word “cheap” instead of word “thrifty”?

A. The writer would seem unafraid.
B. The grandmother would seem unknown.
C. The writer would seem uncertain.
D. The grandmother would seem ungenerous.
My grandmother is thrifty. She never throws out old clothes and saves all her jars to reuse as glasses.

How would the meaning of the sentence change if the author used the word “cheap” instead of word “thrifty”?

A. The writer would seem unafraid.

B. The grandmother would seem unknown.

C. The writer would seem uncertain.

D. The grandmother would seem ungenerous.

“Cheap” can be a synonym of “thrifty.” But its connotation is that of being “ungenerous,” while “thrifty” implies that someone is good at saving money.
Read the following passage.

“How could you do this?” the painter screeched. “How could you paint that wall blue? It should clearly be orange.”

How would the meaning of the sentence change if the author used the word “whimpered” instead of word “screeched”?

A  The painter would seem more pathetic.
B  The painter would seem more powerful.
C  The painter would seem more joyful.
D  The painter would seem more intelligent.
“How could you do this?” the painter screeched. “How could you paint that wall blue? It should clearly be orange.”

How would the meaning of the sentence change if the author used the word “whimpered” instead of word “screeched”?

A. The painter would seem more pathetic.

“Whimper” is a word that is similar to “screech,” but its connotation is much more pathetic.

B. The painter would seem more powerful.

C. The painter would seem more joyful.

D. The painter would seem more intelligent.
Read the following sentence.

A flock of flamingos slowly picked their way across the lawn towards the Gupta family where they stood, waiting.

How would the meaning of the sentence change if the author used the word “mob” instead of word “flock”?

A. The flamingos would seem friendlier.
B. The flamingos would seem more elegant.
C. The flamingos would seem more indifferent.
D. The flamingos would seem more threatening.
A flock of flamingos slowly picked their way across the lawn towards the Gupta family where they stood, waiting.

How would the meaning of the sentence change if the author used the word “mob” instead of word “flock”?

A. The flamingos would seem friendlier.
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D. The flamingos would seem more threatening.

“Mob” is a synonym of “flock” but it has a different connotation: it suggests a group of people, animals or things that could cause danger.
Now practice with a partner…

Dig back into excerpt one of *Travels with Charley*. This time, pay attention to Steinbeck’s diction (word choice). Highlight words and phrases that stand out to you. Annotate each as positive, negative, or neutral in connotation.