1 Denotation and Connotation

Definitions

Denotation: The dictionary definition of a word. "America" denotes the country south of Canada and north of Mexico.

Connotation: The thoughts, feelings, and images associated with a word. "America" connotes freedom, individualism, and opportunity.

Examples from Literature

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow recognizes both the dictionary definitions and the connotations of *spring* and *autumn* in the first stanza of "Autumn Within":

> It is autumn; not without
> But within me is the cold.
> Youth and spring are all about;
> It is I that have grown old.

In his autobiography, author Pio Baroja uses the word *rain* to connote troubles and hardships. In this passage, he refers to the first of many frustrations in his life:

> When I first went to school in Sebastian, at the age of four—and it has rained a great deal since that day—the teacher...looked me over and said: "This boy...will never amount to anything."
> —Pio Baroja, *Youth and Egolatry*

A generation earlier, *rain* connoted the same feelings of sorrow and disappointment:

> Into each life some rain must fall,
> Some days must be dark and dreary.
> —Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Rainy Day"

Understanding Denotation and Connotation

On another sheet of paper, answer the following questions in one or two paragraphs.

1. What do the words *spring* and *autumn* denote? What do they connote? Study the first stanza of "Autumn Within" to help you decide. What does the word *cold* connote in the same poem?

2. In "The Rainy Day," Longfellow suggests that "some days must be dark and dreary." What does the word *dark* denote? What does it connote?

3. In 1858, Hans Christian Andersen wrote a fairy tale called "Something." The eldest of four brothers begins the story by saying, "I mean to be somebody and do something useful in the world." What does it mean to "be somebody"? What does it suggest when someone says, "I'm just a nobody"?

4. Edgar A. Guest defines "home" in his poem of the same name:

   It takes a heap o' livin' in a house t' make it home.

   What images, feelings, and thoughts do you associate with the word *home*?

Identifying Denotations and Connotations

Match each of the following words with its denotation and its connotation. Place the appropriate letters in the spaces provided to show your answers.

	Denotation	Connotation	Denotations	Connotations
1. cherub	_____	_____	a. the son of a king	f. ambitions and desires
2. prince	_____	_____	b. light from the sun	g. innocent and childlike
3. fox	_____	_____	c. a wolf-like mammal	h. noble and admirable
4. dream	_____	_____	d. an angel	i. clever or sneaky
5. sunshine	_____	_____	e. visions during sleep	j. warmth and happiness

Recognizing Negative and Positive Connotations

Imagine you are a business person trying to come up with store names and slogans that convince shoppers to buy your products. Words and phrases that carry positive connotations can help you improve your sales. Below are listed pairs of store names and advertising slogans. Decide which name or slogan in each pair carries positive connotations. Circle the positive slogans and phrases.

Store Names	Advertising Slogans

1. The Bargain Barn
   A Shack of Cheap Stuff
	5. We sell high-priced shoes.
	   We carry only the highest quality footwear.

2. Used Cars, Inc.
   Vintage Automobiles
	6. Cheap clothes for sale.
	   Clothes at a price you can afford.

3. Worms and Hooks
   The Ol' Fishin' Hole
	7. Coziest cabin on the market today.
	   Tiny house for sale.

4. Pasta Paradise
   Sloppy Noodles
	8. Our workers are all computer nerds.
	   We employ highly skilled technicians.

Writing Tip

When writing anything from poetry to persuasive essays, from narratives to informational prose, select words that carry not only the correct dictionary definitions, but also the connotations that will help your audience feel or imagine the meaning you intend.