Connotation vs. Denotation

Because words change based on the society representation of them, the dictionary definition, or denotation, may not always be a complete representation of what a word means to you. That’s when the connotation becomes important. Some words have strong negative or positive feelings tied to them, making them mean a little more than is stated in the definition. The suggested meaning of a word is the connotation. To understand this, let’s look at some examples:

**Here’s an example:**

Saying someone is youthful has a positive connotation. It’s good, especially when you are old.

But saying someone is childish has a negative connotation. No one wants to be childish and immature.

These words MEAN the same thing according to the dictionary, but the implications of the words are different.

**Let’s try another.**

When your parents won’t buy you that iPod you want, you might call them cheap. They think of themselves as economical or frugal.

You are saying the same thing, but cheap has a negative connotation. Frugal and economical are both more positive.

Knowing HOW you want to say a word is important. That’s why word choice is important. Looking at a text for with the word choice in mind can open up different meanings that may otherwise have been hidden. Sometimes the smallest change in a word can mean a lot to a story.

**You try.**

Try analyzing the word choice of your text to see why the author picked one word over a similar one. It may add new understanding to your reading!