

Word Detective Quest

Word Meaning, Connotation & Figurative Language: Use context to determine the meaning of words and phrases, distinguish among the connotations of words with similar denotations, and use Greek and Latin affixes and roots as clues to word meaning.

Learning target: I can figure out word meanings from context and explain how connotation and figurative language shape tone.

Success looks like: Students use the vocabulary correctly, complete the quest, and score 80% or higher on the evidence-based exit ticket.

Materials: Student devices, the printed lesson worksheet (one per student), projector for the mini-lesson presenter.

LESSON AT A GLANCE

60 minutes

Time	Part	Teacher does	Students do
0:00-0:08	Warm-up	Project the warm-up. Circulate, then call on 2-3 students. Save question 3 for the debrief.	Answer Part 2 of the lesson worksheet; share with a partner.
0:08-0:20	Mini-lesson	Teach with the 4-step presenter. Run each quick check with the whole class.	Complete worksheet Parts 4-11 as each slide appears; answer checks with fingers.
0:20-0:48	Quest	Launch Word Detective Quest. Assign mission levels; circulate with the answer key.	Play solo or in pairs; record code pieces; complete any written evidence task.
0:48-0:52	Debrief	Ask 2 debrief questions and revisit warm-up question 3.	Finish worksheet Part 13 (prediction check + one thing learned).
0:52-1:00	Exit ticket	Hand out the exit ticket. Collect and sort with the mastery guide.	Answer with evidence independently.

Key vocabulary

Word	Student-friendly definition
Denotation	The dictionary definition of a word.
Connotation	The feeling a word suggests: positive, negative, or neutral.
Tone	The author's attitude toward the subject (hopeful, bitter, playful).
Hyperbole	Extreme exaggeration for effect.
Allusion	A reference to a well-known story, person, or event.
Imagery	Language that appeals to the five senses.

1. WARM-UP

0:00–0:08 · 8 min

Warm-up expectations (post these): Answer in Part 2 of the lesson worksheet (or on this sheet). Number each answer to match the question. Answer in complete sentences. For math, show your work. Work silently for 5 minutes, then share with a partner for 2 minutes. Be ready to share one answer with the class.

#	Question	Look for
1	Which sounds nicer: "cheap" or "inexpensive"? Why?	"Inexpensive" sounds nicer; "cheap" can suggest low quality.
2	Write a sentence that makes rain sound cozy. Then write one that makes rain sound scary.	Answers vary; look for word choice that changes the feeling.
3	What does "bio" mean in "biography"?	Life.

2. MINI-LESSON

0:08–0:20 · 12 min

Project the Lesson presenter from the room page. It runs the whole hour: target and agenda, warm-up with timer, hook vote, 4 teaching steps (key idea, interactive tool, turn and talk, check for understanding), I do / we do / you do, a work-time screen with a timer and expectations, debrief, and the exit ticket. Press N for teacher notes, T to pause the timer, and P to pick a student.

Hook (1 min): Would you rather be called "thrifty" or "cheap"? Class vote: Thrifty / Cheap / No difference

Step 1 (3 min): Denotation and connotation

Teach	Denotation is the dictionary meaning. Connotation is the feeling a word carries. "Slender" and "scrawny" both mean thin, but feel different.
Interactive tool	Flip cards: Confident, Arrogant, Curious, Nosy
Students do	Rank thin, slender, scrawny, skinny from most negative to most positive.
Turn and talk	Would you rather be called "thrifty" or "stingy"? What is the difference?
Worksheet Part 5A	DENOTATION is the dictionary meaning. CONNOTATION is the feeling a word gives.
Check for understanding	Which word has the most positive connotation? Answer: (C) Determined

Step 2 (3 min): Word choice builds tone

Teach	Tone is the author's attitude. "The puppy scampered" sounds playful; "The creature skulked" sounds sinister.
Interactive tool	Board and notes
Students do	Rewrite "The kitten walked across the room" to sound sneaky, then playful.

Turn and talk	How can two authors describe the same place and make readers feel opposite things?
Worksheet Part 6A	Word choice builds TONE, the author's ATTITUDE toward the subject.
Check for understanding	"The old house crouched in the shadows, its windows staring." The tone is: Answer: (C) Creepy

Step 3 (3 min): Figurative language

Teach	Simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole (extreme exaggeration), idiom, and allusion (a reference to a famous story). Ask yourself: What is compared, and what does it suggest?
Interactive tool	Board and notes
Students do	Name the figurative language in "He has the Midas touch."
Turn and talk	Why might a writer use an allusion instead of explaining directly?
Worksheet Part 7A	HYPERBOLE is extreme exaggeration. An ALLUSION refers to a famous story or person.
Check for understanding	"He has the Midas touch" is an example of: Answer: (B) Allusion

Step 4 (3 min): Context plus word parts

Teach	Use context and word parts together. The sentence gives the clue, and the roots confirm it: "The benevolent (bene = good) queen fed the hungry."
Interactive tool	Board and notes
Students do	Use the root "male" (bad) to define "malevolent."
Turn and talk	Which is more reliable, the context or the root, when they seem to disagree?
Worksheet Part 8A	Use CONTEXT and WORD PARTS together to figure out meaning.
Check for understanding	"bene" means good. "The benevolent coach gave extra help to every player." Benevolent means: Answer: (A) Kind

I do: worked example (shown one step at a time)

1. Sentence: "The old house stood on the hill."
2. Version 1: "The ancient mansion loomed over the hill." (creepy tone)
3. Version 2: "The cozy cottage perched on the hill." (warm tone)
4. Only a few words changed, but the connotation changed the whole tone.

What to say on every slide is in the presenter script PDF.

We do: guided practice

Change the tone: "The kitten walked across the room." Make it sound sneaky, then playful.

1. Tone depends on word choice.
2. Sneaky: "The kitten crept across the room."
3. Playful: "The kitten bounced across the room."
4. Only the verb changed, but the connotation changed the whole feeling.

Answer: "crept" (sneaky) vs. "bounced" (playful)

You do: independent check (2 min)

"The council rammed through a greedy new fee." The author's tone toward the council is: (A) Neutral (B) Admiring (C) Humorous (D) Critical

Answer: (D) Critical. Students who miss it: 3-minute reteach at the teacher table, then start the room at the Explorer level.

Misconception: "Synonyms can always be swapped." Connotation changes the meaning and tone.

Misconception: "Tone and mood are the same." Tone is the author's attitude; mood is how the reader feels.

Misconception: "Figurative language is only in poems." It appears in all kinds of writing, even news.

3. QUEST: WORD DETECTIVE QUEST

0:20–0:48 · 28 min

Launch: project the start screen, read the story aloud, and assign mission levels (Explorer = extra support, Agent = on level, Legend = challenge). Students can open Supports any time for read-aloud, bigger text, a word bank, and a scratch pad.

- Levels unlock in order, like a video game. Celebrate "level-ups" out loud to keep energy high.
- Students who finish early can replay and aim for 100% first-try accuracy, which is shown on their certificate.
- If a student is stuck on a level, pair them with someone who has already cleared it to explain without giving the answer.

Students turn in: the completion code plus their copied "turn in your work" block (Canvas Text Entry).

4. DEBRIEF

0:48–0:52 · 4 min

1. Pick a word from the activity. How would the sentence change with a synonym?
2. How can you tell an author's tone?
3. Why would a writer use hyperbole?

Close the loop: return to warm-up question 3. Answer: Life.

5. EXIT TICKET

0:52–1:00 · 8 min

Print the exit ticket PDF (page 2 is the key and mastery guide). Every item requires evidence: Part A asks students to justify each choice, Part B asks for an explanation, and Part C applies the standard to a new situation using RACE. Sort results into Mastered, Approaching, and Beginning to plan tomorrow's groups.

LESSON RESOURCES

Resource	How it fits the lesson
Warm-up worksheet (PDF)	Optional standalone warm-up (also Part 2 of the lesson worksheet), with a key.

Resource	How it fits the lesson
Mini-lesson presenter	Projectable, step-by-step interactive lesson with tools and quick checks (room page).
Lesson worksheet (PDF + key)	One printable packet students complete during the whole lesson: short fill-ins and quick checks in 13 small parts that match the presenter slides.
Word Detective Quest (.html)	The quest for Canvas, with differentiated levels, supports, and a turn-in.
Exit ticket (PDF + key)	Evidence-based check with a rubric and a mastery sorting guide.
Vocabulary.com (extra)	Adaptive practice, including shades of meaning. https://www.vocabulary.com/
Poetry Foundation (extra)	Poems for studying imagery, tone, and figurative language. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/
CommonLit (extra)	Grade 6 texts with word choice questions. https://www.commonlit.org/
ReadWriteThink (extra)	Connotation and tone lessons. https://www.readwritethink.org/

ANSWER KEY: WORD DETECTIVE QUEST

Level 1: Context Clues (code piece: W)

1. "Unlike his verbose brother, Sam spoke few words." What does "verbose" mean? -> Using many words
2. "After the long, arduous hike up the mountain, we collapsed in exhaustion." What does "arduous" mean? -> Very difficult and tiring
3. "The detective's meticulous notes recorded every tiny detail, down to the color of each button." What does "meticulous" mean? -> Extremely careful and precise
4. Tap the TWO clue phrases that reveal what "meticulous" means. -> "every tiny detail," + "down to the color of each button."

Level 2: Greek and Latin Roots (code piece: O)

1. Use the roots to match each word with its meaning. -> chronological = In time order; thermometer = Measures heat; microscope = Tool to see small things; hydrate = Give water to; erupt = Break out
2. A "projectile" is most likely something that... -> Is thrown forward
3. Cast a word spell! Build the word that means "an instrument for looking at very small things." -> micro scope
4. Build the word that means "to throw forward," like a movie onto a screen. -> pro ject

Level 3: Word Families (code piece: R)

1. To "interrupt" someone is to... -> Break into what they are saying
2. An "advocate" is someone who... -> Speaks up in support of a cause
3. Sort each word into its root family. -> voc/vok (voice, call): vocal, evoke, provoke | rupt (break): disrupt, rupture, bankrupt
4. Build the word that means "to break in between" someone's words. -> inter rupt

Level 4: Multiple-Meaning Words (code piece: D)

1. Match each sentence number to the meaning of "current." -> Sentence 1 = Happening now; Sentence 2 = Flow of water; Sentence 3 = Flow of electricity
2. "The students will present their projects." Here, "present" means... -> To show or give a talk about

Level 5: Boss Level (code piece: S)

1. What does "benevolent" mean? -> Kind and wishing good for others
2. What does "malevolent" mean? -> Wishing harm on others
3. Which clues helped you? -> Context clue: "loved by her people", "fed the hungry each winter", "schemed in the shadows" | Word-part clue: bene = good, male = bad

4. Tap the TWO actions that prove the queen is benevolent. -> “she opened the palace gardens to the public” + “and fed the hungry each winter.”

Final code: WORDS