

Lesson Plan #8

Title: Vocabulary Development and Writing

Similarities and Differences: Depth and Breadth of Meaning

NOTE: This lesson is designed for advanced (9.0-12.9) adult learners.

Introduction:

Vocabulary development includes recognition that words have depth and breadth of meaning—that they are “deep” as well as “wide.” Often, words have similar, but different, meanings. Another way of putting it is to say that the “**denotation**” of the word (its actual meaning) can be different from its “**connotation**” (the meaning that it evokes for us based on our experience and the connections we make regarding that particular word.)

A good example is the words “sweating” and “perspiring.” Both are verbs; both are adverbs. Both basically mean the same thing, that is, the **denotation** of both words is similar. But “sweating” carries a negative **connotation** that “perspire” does not. We often think of “sweating” as more unpleasant (and sloppy) than “perspiring.” “Sweating” usually also conveys more intensity--more **depth**--than “perspiring” (In either case, we're losing water through our pores; however, we tend to SWEAT heavily and to PERSPIRE lightly. We say, “sweat like a horse,” not “perspire like a horse.” As to **breadth** of meaning, we often say, “The windows were *sweating* due to the humidity,” using “sweat” to mean that moisture is forming on the windows. But we never say, “The windows were *perspiring* due to the humidity.”

(By the way, in the Deep South, it is often said that “Horses sweat, and men perspire, but ladies glow.”)

A lively discussion often follows when students are given words that have similar but different meanings and then asked, “How are they similar?” “How are they different?”

Objectives:

In this lesson, students will:

- recognize that words often have similar but different meanings
- recognize that words with similar meanings (denotation) can convey a positive or negative interpretation (connotation)
- recognize that words have both depth (degree or intensity) and breadth (application) of meaning
- demonstrate an understanding of how word selection can impact interpretation of what we are saying

Session time: 3 hours

Procedures:

Write each group of words on the board. One row at a time, read the words aloud to students:

For each row, ask students in a group discussion:

- How are these words similar?
- How are these words different?
- Which word (s) carries the most positive connotation? Why?
- Which word(s) carries the most negative connotation? Why?

lie misconception fabrication fib perjury

steal borrow appropriate (v.) take kidnap

town community city village metropolis

plan scheme plot project (v.) propose

rural backwoods country pastoral redneck

Group students in twos. Assign one row of words to each group. Ask each group to:

- write a sentence using the word in their assigned row with the most positive connotation
- write a sentence using the word in their assigned row with the most negative connotation.
- Share with the larger group when finished.

Conclusion:

Students may not always agree on their responses. Be prepared to facilitate the reasoning process so that consensus can be reached, if possible. The writing portion of this activity is important because it helps students realize that certain words are selected in speechwriting, news articles, etc. BECAUSE of their connotation to provide either a negative or positive “spin” on the topic.