Denotation and Connotation

A word’s **denotation** is its dictionary definition. A word can also make people feel or think a certain way. These feelings and ideas are the **connotations** of a word. Words with the same meaning can have different “shades of meaning”—that is, they can be understood differently.

**Positive connotation:** Being on the track team has made Alan **slender** and **lean**. (attractively thin)

**Neutral connotation:** Being on the track team has made Alan **thin**.

**Negative connotation:** Being on the track team has made Alan **skinny** and **scrawny**. (unattractively thin)

Be sure that the words you use have the right connotation as well as the right denotation.

**A. Identifying Positive and Negative Connotations**

Each pair of phrases includes synonyms with different connotations. Put a + sign next to the one with a positive connotation and a – sign next to the one with a negative connotation. Use a dictionary or thesaurus if needed.

1. a powerful stink _______ a powerful aroma _______
2. a dynamic leader _______ a pushy leader _______
3. squandered his money _______ spent his money _______
4. a reckless plan _______ a daring plan _______
5. energetic children _______ wild children _______
6. answered with arrogance _______ answered with confidence _______
7. sloppy clothes _______ casual clothes _______
8. an aggressive attitude _______ a hostile attitude _______
9. an easygoing friend _______ a lazy friend _______
10. a thoughtful response _______ a calculated response _______
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B. Connotations in Action

In the first paragraph below, circle the words that have a positive connotation. In the second paragraph, circle the words that have a negative connotation. Use a dictionary or thesaurus if needed.

Positive connotation:
Ms. Baxter has been a(n) (valuable, costly) employee of this company for three years. In that time, she has expressed many (militant, strong) opinions. Her methods of solving problems are sometimes (unusual, bizarre). In short, she is a real (leader, show-off).

Negative connotation:
I was surprised to get a birthday gift from my Aunt Joanna. She is (an inquisitive person, a real snoop), so she had asked many of my relatives what I might like. I tore the (colorful, gaudy) paper off the package and found a shirt made of (flimsy, delicate) material. It was covered with (detailed, fussy) embroidery and (flashy, eye-catching) sequins. It certainly was a(n) (strange, exotic) present.

C. Vocabulary Challenge

Replace each word with a synonym that has positive connotations. Then write a sentence using the synonym correctly. Use a dictionary or thesaurus if needed.

1. nosy __________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

2. odd __________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

3. cheap __________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

4. overprotective _________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

5. glare __________________
   ______________________________________________________________________