



Boulder County Latino History Project

Lesson Plans

Title: Using Connotation and Denotation to Identify Bias in Media Past and Present

[Overview](#) | [Preparation](#) | [Lesson Procedure](#) | [Evaluation](#)

Overview

Lesson Overview	Students will use primary sources from the BCLHP and differing news sources on the Baltimore Riots of 2015 to correctly identify connotative and denotative language that implies a biased message. Students will apply their knowledge to creating a news piece that uses both connotative language and denotative language to convey a biased message. This series of lessons covering approximately 7 days is intended to be taught in a quarter-long unit on race and identity. The topic of the Baltimore Riots should be covered or introduced prior to this series of lessons.
Author(s)	Victoria Racz
Grade Level/ Course	High School, Government, Language Arts, 9-12
Standards	<p>1. 9-12th BVSD Standard 4: Analyze word relationships within literary, persuasive, and informational texts to learn grade-appropriate conversational, general academic and content-specific words and phrases.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">b.ii. Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotation.</p> <p>2. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).</p>
Time Required	Multi-day, Seven 70-minute class periods
Topics	Political or community participation, Racism/discrimination Outline topic: Racism and the Ku Klux Klan
Time Periods	1920s-1930s, 2000-2013
Tags (key words)	Racism, KKK, Ku Klux Klan, bias, media, Ferguson, Missouri, Baltimore, Maryland, Freddie Gray, connotation, denotation, messaging, newspapers, High School, Government, Language Arts, discrimination, communities, political participation

Preparation *(Links to worksheets, primary sources and other materials):*

Materials	Ku Klux Klan, Boulder County,
Resources/Links	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Photo of a Klan gathering in Boulder: http://bocolatinohistory.colorado.edu/photograph/a-kkk-meeting-in-boulder-1920s-front-of-photo2. Newspaper article of the Klan parade in Daily Camera: http://bocolatinohistory.colorado.edu/newspaper/boulder-ku-klux-klan-rode-thru-streets-p13. Political Klan cartoon: http://bocolatinohistory.colorado.edu/newspaper/cartoon-the-kkk-and-law-enforcement4. Media article from <i>The Blaze</i> on more policing in Ferguson: https://www.theblaze.com/news/2015/05/28/im-afraid-baltimore-residents-now-want-police-to-do-more-after-arrests-plunge-violence-soars5. Media article from <i>MSNBC</i> on lack of restrictions on police in Baltimore: http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/state-level-flurry-post-ferguson-bills-fizzle6. Video from NPR and Radio Lab about connotation and denotation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0HfwkArpvU7. Online dictionary and thesaurus: www.thesaurus.com, www.dictionary.com8. Computers (1 per 2 students)9. Worksheets (See below attachments)

Lesson Procedure *(Step by Step Instructions):*

<p><u>Day 1-Introduction</u></p> <p>Content Language Objective (CLO): Students will read to identify synonyms with differing connotations.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Introduce the concept of connotation and denotation using the NPR and Radio lab video (see materials).2. Students draw their understanding of connotation and denotation on the back of handout.3. Students will complete a graphic organizer with 10 vocabulary words. For each vocabulary word, they will write the denotation, one synonym with a positive connotation, and one synonym with a negative connotation. Use online thesaurus and dictionary from the materials above: www.thesaurus.com, www.dictionary.com <p><u>Day 2-Connotation and Bias</u></p> <p>CLO: Students will read to identify connotation and implicit bias in a primary source news article.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Review connotation with the “step forward game.” Line students up and read several vocabulary words. If the word has a positive connotation, have them step forward. If the word has a negative connotation, ask them to step back. Reflect as a whole group at the



end why some words produced positive connotations, and why others, negative. (Words may include: stingy/ cheap, youthful/juvenile, confident/proud, etc.)

2. Introduce the concept of bias by showing side-by-side photos from the #IfTheyGunnedMeDown movement: <http://www.upworthy.com/these-side-by-side-photos-show-exactly-what-media-bias-looks-like-with-one-stunning-question>
Ask students to do a “quick write” of what they see in each image. Have students share out in groups of three what they wrote. Choose one student from each group to share a summary of their conversation. As students share, make explicit their bias in how they viewed each photo.
3. Show a modern clip of a current event. Model how the connotation of the word choice leads to the author’s bias. Use the three-column chart “Identifying Connotation and Bias” (below) to model identifying bias using the clip.
4. Give background about the KKK in Boulder County using the photo from BCLHP. Then, students will read *The Daily Camera* article about the KKK from the BCLHP. Students will fill out the connotation graphic organizer as they read, and at the end identify the bias of the author.
5. In pairs, ask students to “check” their understanding of what they believe to be the author’s bias.

Scaffold: After reviewing the day’s formative assessment, some students may still struggle with identifying connotation. During the class period, pull a small group of students struggling and support with the following resource:

<http://millcreekhs.com/attachments/article/870/VocabLesson%20-%20Denotation%20-%20Connotation%2023%20%281%29.pdf>

Students who need small group instruction will also need their daily assignment modified, since they will miss work time. They may need fewer words on their graphic organizer, or some of the words filled in for them to identify connotation.

Day 3-Connotation and Bias in Political Cartoons

CLO: Students will read to identify bias in a primary-source and write to create their own political cartoon.

1. Share multiple cartoons from a variety of print sources. These can come from: http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/political-cartoons/pdf/teacher_guide.pdf Ask students to work in pairs to write a list of components that make up a political cartoon. Students may use Chromebooks to research political cartoons. Pairs write their lists on the whiteboard. As a whole group, reflect on a working definition.
2. Show all students the political cartoon from the BCLHP, “Law Enforcement.” Ask students to make observations of the cartoon. Attempt to steer the class away from drawing conclusions first. Create a class list of observations.
3. Students draw conclusions about the author’s bias based on the connotation of images through whole-class discussion.
4. Students create their own political cartoon that shows implicit bias on the subject of the KKK. The cartoons are graded based upon the working definition of a political cartoon created by the class.

Day 4-Connotation and Bias in Modern Media

CLO: Students will read to identify implicit bias in a current news article.

1. Put students into groups of three and ask each group to create a one-minute slide (with text and visuals) they will present to the class to provide background knowledge on the Baltimore Riots. Give each group a specific research topic: Freddie Gray, Police



- Involvement, Timeline, Funeral, Riots, Backlash of Riots
2. Have students present their findings in a whole-class powerpoint. Then, ask for clarification questions.
 3. Now that students have background on the Baltimore riots, ask students to read an article about lack of policing from *The Blaze*. Have students work in groups to answer one question each (from the group of questions below), then have students jigsaw their answers. One student from each group joins together to “teach” the answer from their question.

Scaffold: Some students may need to work on finding more explicit text evidence rather than implicit. Group students accordingly and assign different complexity of questions accordingly. Some groups may even need sentence stems or a teacher’s annotated copy with text evidence already highlighted.

Day 5-Connotation and Bias in Modern Media

CLO: Students will read to identify implicit bias in a current news article.

1. Pass out Venn diagrams and review the learning from the previous day by having students draw their understanding of how the author from *The Blaze* article sees the policing of Baltimore post-riots. They may draw on the back of their Venn diagram.
2. Introduce unknown vocabulary from the article on policing from the *MSNBC*. Ask students to come up with positive and negative connotations for the words (re-use graphic organizer below).
3. Students will then read the article and compare and contrast the bias in it as juxtaposed to the previous day’s article. They will use the Venn diagram to compare and contrast.
4. As students finish, pair them up to share their findings in the Venn diagrams. Discuss as a class how both media sources contain bias. Some questions may include:
 - What connotative word choice does each article present that indicates bias?
 - Why did each author use that particular connotation? What does it say about their news organization?
 - How can identifying bias help the reader think critically about what they are reading?

Days 6-7

CLO: Students will apply the concept of connotation to create a news article or news broadcast that has implicit bias.

1. Review the Venn diagram from the previous day. Students may have had misconceptions about bias that will need to be clarified.
2. Introduce the rubric for the news article or news broadcast.
3. Do a whole-class web brainstorm about possible current events students could use to write about for their news piece.
4. Give students work time to complete their dialogues or articles.
5. As students finish, edit with them in Google Docs.
6. Have students present their articles or broadcast in groups of 4. Have their group members give them a preliminary grade.

Evaluation/Assessment: *(Methods for collecting evidence of student learning)*

Formative



These lesson plans are licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

Day 1: Vocabulary Graphic Organizer
 Day 2: Connotation Graphic Organizer
 Day 3: Political Cartoon
 Day 4: Jigsaw Questions
 Day 5: Venn Diagram

Summative

Days 6-7: Newspaper Article or News Broadcast Skit

**Sample Note Sheet:
 Identifying Connotation and Denotation**

WORD	DENOTATION This word means.....	CONNOTATION This makes me feel....because.....
Swagger		
Violence		
Retribution		
Police		
Justification		
Riot		
Homicide		
Victim		



These lesson plans are licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

Indictment		
Discriminatory		
Barricaded		
Scrutiny		

**Sample Note Sheet:
Identifying Connotation and Bias in A Primary Source**

WORD	Positive Connotation because....	Negative Connotation because....
Connects		
Organization		
Furnished		
Uplifting		
Respect		
Obedience		
Building Up		
Greatly Surprised		
Generosity		



Welcomed		
----------	--	--

Overall, the author believes _____ about the KKK because.....

Jigsaw Questions

Directions:

1. Review your Connotation/Denotation vocabulary. These words are present in this article.
2. Read the article from *The Blaze* and answer the question(s) below assigned to your group.

Questions:

1. What does the author report has happened to arrests and policing after the death of Freddie Gray and the riots in Baltimore? What is the author’s overall bias?
2. Which residents give interview transcripts and what knowledge is the reader supposed to gain from these people? What are they saying about their neighborhoods?
3. What should we believe all people feel is going on in the streets of Baltimore after reading the interview excerpts? What conclusions are intended for the reader about Baltimore neighborhoods as a whole?
4. A list of “tweets” is published in the piece to support the author’s bias. Do you believe these tweets are representative (thought by all) of everyone in Baltimore?
5. Why include transcript from an interview with the police chief? What purpose does it serve in supporting the author’s bias?
6. Why does the author end with a mention of gang violence? What purpose does that serve to support the author’s bias?

Bias in Persuasive Text: Rubric for News Article

	Advanced	Proficient	Partially Proficient
Ideas	-News article is based on a current event that relates to the topics of	-News article is based on a current event	-News article is based on a societal event



	<p>race and identity</p> <p>-Article explicitly states the who, what, where and why of the event</p> <p>-Article uses appropriate details to provide as much description of the event as possible</p> <p>-Author shows implicit bias that is artfully woven into the description at least three times</p>	<p>-Article states the who, what where and why of the event, but the reader is still left with a few questions</p> <p>-Article uses details to describe the event, but the details are vague</p> <p>-Author uses bias less than three times, and/or it is too explicit</p>	<p>-Article is missing key information about the event and the reader is left with many questions</p> <p>-Article uses few details to describe the event, and the details are vague</p> <p>-Bias is not identifiable in the article</p>
Organization/ Formatting	<p>-Article is written in newspaper format with the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Title -Subtitle -Name of the news agency -Picture in margin -Name of the author -Date of publication -Begins with location -Multiple, short paragraphs 	<p>-Article is written in newspaper format, but is missing 1-2 of the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Title -Subtitle -Name of the news agency -Picture in margin -Name of the author -Date of publication -Begins with location -Multiple, short paragraphs 	<p>-Article is <u>not</u> written in newspaper format, and is missing more than 2 of the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Title -Subtitle -Name of the news agency -Picture in margin -Name of the author -Date of publication -Begins with location -Multiple, short paragraphs
Conventions	<p>-Article contains fewer than three grammatical and spelling errors</p>	<p>-Article contains fewer than five grammatical and spelling errors</p>	<p>-Article contains more than five grammatical and spelling errors</p>

Bias in Persuasive Text: Rubric for News Broadcast

	Advanced	Proficient	Partially Proficient
Ideas	-News broadcast is based on a current event that relates to	-News broadcast is based on a current event	-Broadcast is based on a societal event



These lesson plans are licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

	<p>the topics of race and identity</p> <p>-Broadcast explicitly states the who, what, where and why of the event</p> <p>-Broadcast uses appropriate details to provide as much description of the event as possible</p> <p>-Broadcaster shows implicit bias that is artfully weaved into the description at least three times</p>	<p>-Broadcast states the who, what where and why of the event, but the viewer is still left with a few questions</p> <p>-Broadcast uses details to describe the event, but the details are vague</p> <p>-Broadcaster uses bias less than three times, and/or it is too explicit</p>	<p>-Broadcast is missing key information about the event and the viewer is left with many questions</p> <p>-Broadcast uses few details to describe the event, and the details are vague</p> <p>-Bias is not identifiable in the broadcast</p>
Organization/ Formatting	<p>-Broadcast is written in dialogue format with the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Title -Speaker(s) -Name of the news agency -News lingo (i.e. “we turn now tonight to”, “in the wake of..”, etc.) 	<p>-Broadcast is written in dialogue format, but is missing one of the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Title -Speaker(s) -Name of the news agency -News lingo (i.e. “we turn now tonight to”, “in the wake of..”, etc.) 	<p>-Broadcast is written in dialogue format, but is missing more than one of the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Title -Speaker(s) -Name of the news agency -News lingo (i.e. “we turn now tonight to”, “in the wake of..”, etc.)
Presentation	<p>-Presenter is fluid in their delivery and has practiced the script multiple times</p> <p>-Presenter is loud enough for people at the back of the room to hear</p> <p>-Presenter captivates the audience</p>	<p>-Presenter is mostly fluid in their delivery and has practiced the script multiple times</p> <p>-Presenter is loud enough for most people in the room to hear</p> <p>-Presenter delivers the script with enthusiasm</p>	<p>-Presenter is choppy in their delivery and could use more practice with their script</p> <p>-Presenter is quiet and many people could not hear the delivery</p> <p>-Presenter reads script in a monotone way</p>

