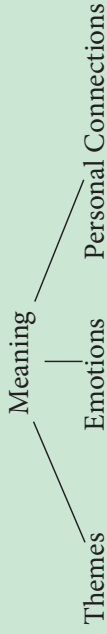


1. FOCUS ON MEANING

An Inclusive Sense of Meaning

When someone asks you “What is the meaning of this text?” how do you understand the question? After all, interpreting what a text means is the central challenge in reading. For many years textbooks suggested that meaning is the same as theme or main idea. However, you can read more effectively if you include emotional understandings and personal connections when you interpret the meaning of a text.



- Themes refer to main ideas expressed or suggested by a text.
- Emotions refer to the feelings suggested by the text's settings, events, and people.
- Personal connections refer to how a reader's personal experiences connect and compare to those in the text.

When you comment on a text's meaning, be sure to emphasize emotions and personal connections as well as themes. Sometimes consider the type of person who would enjoy or approve of the text and the type of person who would dismiss the text. The audience appeal of a text is centrally connected to the emotions conveyed and to targeting readers who will personally connect to it. When you are uncertain about a text's theme, remember that your interpretations of emotional meaning and personal connections are relevant—often more relevant than the theme.

A comprehensive sense of meaning is critical to understanding such texts as song lyrics, advertisements, and cartoons since these real-world texts often convey meaning well beyond a main idea or theme.

Questions about Meaning

- Examine print advertisements in magazines about sports, movies, and travel. Choose an ad from each magazine. What type of reader might have a personal connection to that ad? What emotions are conveyed by the pictures and words?
- For a young adult novel you have read, consider how the characters and events appeal to young adults; how the emotions conveyed by the plot connect to the young-adult experience.

With a text that you are interpreting, consider these questions:

- What emotions are suggested by details, settings, events, or characters?
- How does my personal experience relate to characters, settings, details, and events portrayed in the text?
- Who might enjoy reading the text?
- To what extent does the text help me understand something important?

A student used the questions to interpret a poem about a young person observing a homeless person from a distance. The young person can't help staring but does not approach the street person. (For complete poem see page 12.)

- *The poem suggests curiosity and loneliness. The homeless person is lonely but so is the young person who is curious but who cannot approach the homeless woman.*
- *I find it hard to connect to people who have less than I do. I pity poor people but I don't want them to know I do.*
- *I'd recommend the poem to classmates to see if their response is the same as mine.*
- *The poem helps me understand that it can be difficult to understand and to communicate with someone who is in a less-fortunate situation.*

2. FOCUS ON TECHNIQUE

Meaning-Centred Focus on Technique

An inclusive understanding of meaning will lead you to a meaning-centred consideration of the techniques used by the author. For example, instead of identifying or labeling a metaphor, comment on how the metaphor suggests ideas, emotions, and personal associations.

An ad in a travel magazine for an expensive watch presents an enlarged image of a silver watch against a dark background. The watch is so shiny it reflects the light. Prominent words in the advertisement are “strong,” “powerful,” “greatness,” “crown,” “passion,” “drive,” and “inspiration.” Your consideration of words, colors, and images leads you to interpret the ad’s meaning — an emotional feeling of success and importance. The ad suggests a thematic message that the watch declares the wearer is successful and important. It invites the personal connection that, if you think you are successful and important, you should buy the watch. Note the connection between the technique and meaning.

The chart on page 7 includes terminology you might study in language arts. Terminology need not be a boring exercise in labeling. The key is how techniques convey meaning — emotional meaning, thematic meaning, and personal connections.

Create a Glossary for Literary Terminology

When you learn about a literary term or technique, place the term and definition in your glossary. Make your glossary more useful as a reference tool by including an example of how the technique conveys meaning in a text you have studied. If you are a visual learner, draw pictures to illustrate some of the literary terms.

Literary Technique Conveys Meaning

This chart features a selection of important literary terms to start your glossary. The sample entry for Conflict links the term to meaning in a particular text.

Literary Technique	Definition	Example
Conflict	the problem a character must deal with; sometimes a physical obstacle, sometimes an internal problem	In "To Build A Fire," the main character struggles with freezing weather as well as panic. The conflict suggests desperation and the idea that stupid decisions can be fatal.
Connotation	suggested meaning of words; often the emotional meaning	
Denotation	dictionary meaning of words	
Fantasy	a narrative that moves beyond reality as we know it	
Foreshadowing	an early hint of future action	
Imagery	word pictures; an appeal to the reader's senses	
Metaphor	a figure of speech that compares relatively unlike items	
Point of View	the perspective from which the narrative is told	
Rhythm	the speed at which a text, often a poem, is read	
Symbolism	something that means more than what it is	