

5.2 Literal and figurative meaning

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 12 marks

Objective

Build the skills to read **multiple meanings** 多重含义.

You must be able to:

- state what words with multiple meanings add
- distinguish a meaning from a connotation
- explain why ambiguity can be an asset
- defend a reading that keeps two senses

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a task used later.

■ The claim

Words with multiple meanings or connotations add nuance or complexity that can contribute to interpretations of a text.

■ Meaning and connotation

A **meaning** is what a word denotes; a **connotation** is what it carries with it. "Slender" and "scrawny" can denote the same thing and connote opposite judgments.

■ Ambiguity as asset

If a word can mean two things and both fit the poem, the poem may be holding both. Choosing one and discarding the other can lose what the line is doing.

■ Defending a double reading

Show that each sense is supported by something in the text, and then say what the poem gains by not resolving between them.

2 Practice

2.1 State what words with multiple meanings add.

[2]

2.2 Distinguish a meaning from a connotation. [2]

2.3 Ambiguity can be an asset.

(a) Explain when. [2]

(b) State how a double reading is defended. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 A connotation is what a word [1]

- **A** denotes
- **B** carries with it
- **C** rhymes with
- **D** replaces

3.2 "Slender" and "scrawny" differ mainly in [1]

- **A** denotation
- **B** connotation
- **C** length
- **D** origin

3.3 A poem's key word can mean two things and both fit.

(a) State what an analysis should do. [1]

(b) Explain why choosing one might lose something. [2]

4 Go further

- work through the **5.2 Literal and figurative meaning** lesson on the **Learn** page;
- read the **Poetry II** section of the AP English Literature handout on the **Know** page.

Solutions

2.1 nuance or complexity that can contribute to interpretations of the text.

2.2 a meaning is what the word denotes; a connotation is the judgment or association it carries.

2.3 (a) when both senses are supported by the text, so the poem may be holding both rather than choosing. (b) show each sense is supported and say what the poem gains by not resolving.

3.1 B. what it carries with it.

3.2 B. connotation.

3.3 (a) keep both senses and show each is supported. (b) the poem may be using the doubleness deliberately, so resolving it substitutes the reader's tidiness for the text's effect.