



## English I: Reading: Module 1: Lesson 2: Section 6

### Denotation and Connotation

### Explaining Word Choice

**Instructions:** Read the short passage that follows taken from the novel *Run with the Horsemen* by Ferrol Sams. As this excerpt opens, the protagonist Peter Osborne has decided to “make something of himself,” so he enters debate tournaments to increase his high school grade point average. He has just won a tournament and is walking back to his seat. When you’re finished reading the excerpt, answer the questions that follow. Click the sample response button at the bottom of page two to see possible answers.



Source: Medal, Daniel.d.slee, Flickr

He was sliding back into the seat by his beaming mother before he surreptitiously opened the blue box with “Balfour” printed on it. (2) The shiny gold medal threw reflected lights into his shining eyes. (3) For the first time he thought of the ten points it represented. (4) Hello, beautiful, he greeted it silently. (5) Three weeks later the UDC meeting was held at the big house. (6) He yielded to his childish urge and crept on all fours beneath one of the living room windows opening onto the verandah. (7) He slowly raised his head and peered through a breeze-floated lace curtain. (8) Miss Beauty Graves sat on the edge of her seat, teacup gripped in rigidly curved talons, glittering chain to her *pince nez* fastened daintily in her jet black hair, her mouth a scarlet slash in the stark whiteness of her powdered face. (9) “I tell you, Mrs. Osborne,” she announced—all the hum of ladies stilled—“that boy of yours is sure to Go Far.”

#### Questions:

1. In the first sentence, why does the author choose “beaming” rather than “grinning”?

2. In the fourth sentence, why would he choose “beautiful” over “precious”?



3. In the sixth sentence, why is “crept” a better choice than “crawled” or “snuck”?

4. In the eighth sentence, how does the word “gripped” help you understand Miss Beauty Graves? Why did the author choose “gripped” rather than “held”?

5. Also in the eighth sentence, why does the author choose “talons” rather than “claws” or “hands”?

6. In the ninth sentence, why is Miss Beauty Graves’ mouth described as a “slash”? Is the connotation of this word positive or negative in this context? Why?

7. In the ninth sentence, why does the author use “stilled” rather than “quieted”? How does “still” connect to the word “hum,” which is used to describe the sound of the ladies?

[Click for possible responses.](#)



**Possible Responses:**

1. In the first sentence, why does the author choose “beaming” rather than “grinning”?

“Beaming” suggests brightness like the sun. He was a happy boy.

2. In the fourth sentence, why would he choose “beautiful” over “precious”?

He speaks to the medal like it’s a human. The author describes the medal in human terms rather than as something valuable because the actual sight of the medal in his own hand is beautiful.

3. In the sixth sentence, why is “crept” a better choice than “crawled” or “snuck”?

“Crept” suggests secrecy; he’s trying to spy without being seen.

4. In the eighth sentence, how does the word “gripped” help you understand Miss Beauty Graves? Why did the author choose “gripped” rather than “held”?

As you read on, you see that her fingernails are described as “talons” suggesting that she’s birdlike. “Gripped” would describe how a bird holds its prey.

5. Also in the eighth sentence, why does the author choose “talons” rather than “claws” or “hands”?

“Talons” tell the reader that the author wants us to think of Miss Beauty as a bird of prey. It’s here that we see the power of connotation. We read this, and we know that there is something very negative in his description of Miss Beauty.

6. In the ninth sentence, why is Miss Beauty Graves’ mouth described as a “slash”? Is the connotation of this word positive or negative in this context? Why?

Again, this word signals to the reader that Peter might not like Miss Beauty. The idea that her mouth is a thin red line as opposed to soft, red lips tells the reader that Miss Beauty is not a nice person, as viewed from the perspective of Peter.

7. In the ninth sentence, why does the author use “stilled” rather than “quieted”? How does “still” connect to the word “hum,” which is used to describe the sound of the ladies?

“Quietened” suggests that there is no sound, but “stilled” suggests that there is no activity as well. It adds to the idea that the ladies are insects humming around Miss Beauty.