Name: Date: Block:

**Connotation/Denotation Things to Remember:** Words can have context-specific connotations that are not always obvious from their dictionary meaning. For example, the word elderly means “old” but it can only be applied to a person; no matter how old a house is, it would not be called “elderly.” Similarly, blonde means “yellow” but it refers only to hair and to some kinds of wood; it is never used to describe other yellow objects. It is important to be aware of this in order to avoid misusing words.

Sometimes writers choose euphemisms, which are nice ways to describe things that are upsetting. For example, English has many euphemisms for death: instead of saying that someone “died,” we might say they “passed away” or “departed.” This is a way to avoid the negative associations with certain ideas.

**Exercise 1**
*For most people, 10 of the following words have favorable connotations, and 10 have unfavorable ones. Mark the words with favorable connotations with an asterisk (*), and underline those that are unfavorable.*

1. dessert 11. Monday
2. flu 12. weekend
3. monster 13. T.V.
4. music 14. murder
5. worm 15. war
6. progress 16. daughter
7. jewels 17. debt
8. success 18. traffic
9. gang 19. springtime
10 circus 20. liar

**Exercise 2**
*Categorize the following words as positive, neutral, or negative. If you are not sure, look the word up in a dictionary. The first one is done for you as an example.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. house, dump, home</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>dump</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. exotic, foreign, strange</td>
<td>House</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. babble, talk, chat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. dinner, feast, slop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. fragrance, stench, smell</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. venerable, old, decrepit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. sound, tune, noise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. beast, animal, pet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exercise 3**
*Read each of the following sentences. Decide from the context whether the speaker is showing approval or disapproval of the topic. Then circle the best word to put into the sentence.*

1. “The sooner we move out of this (home, dump),” said Jack, “the happier I’ll be.”
2. This cell phone is (expensive, overpriced), but I don’t mind paying extra because it has so many useful features.
3. You’re lucky to have Wilma on your committee. She has lots of (original, crazy) ideas.
4. Boss Reed and his (cronies, employees) have controlled the politics in this city for more than twenty years. I certainly hope the other party wins this year!
5. It was a beautiful spring day, and the (stench, scent) of apple blossoms filled the whole yard.
6. I hope I don’t have to share an office with Janice. Sandra told me how (curious, nosy) she can be.
7. “I think Fay is an excellent president,” said the principal. “She really knows how to (manage, meddle).”
8. Will you please turn your stereo off? I can’t concentrate with all that (music, noise).
9. I love going camping and getting in touch with nature. The woods are filled with so much (vermin, animal life).
10. What makes Jim such an excellent storyteller is his knack for (invention, lying).
11. Mr. Benton had better watch out for that new assistant of his. He’s a (clever, crafty) one.
12. I have a lot of respect for Jenny’s father. He’s rather (reserved, antisocial) and dignified.
13. My brother can’t stand his mother-in-law. She’s practically a millionaire, but she’s about as (thrift, miserly) as a person can get.
14. This coffee is very (bitter, strong) – just the way I like it!
15. Can you please ask the new saleswoman not to be so (enthusiastic, pushy)? She is scaring away the customers.
Denotation and Connotation Practice Exercises

Practice 1: "It's For You!"

Read the selection, and then answer the questions that follow.

You can't go anywhere today without running into someone using a cell phone. People are either talking on them or texting. Okay, so we know the handheld devices are helpful tools, but shouldn't there be some rules about their use in society? Just because someone has a cell phone, does that make it okay to talk rowdily on it in public? Does everyone in the vicinity have to be bombarded with one-sided conversations, even if they don't want to? Not everyone agrees.

Some people, usually those who use their cells a lot, say it's totally okay to use them anywhere, anytime. They may allege, "America's a free country and it's my right to talk in public! Other people talk to each other all the time while they walk down the street or eat in a restaurant. What's the difference if I talk to someone face-to-face or on a cell? If other people don't like hearing my phone conversations, they don't have to listen! I think they should move away from me so they don't hear what I'm saying! After all, it's very rude to eavesdrop! Besides, cells phones are essential in today's world. You see stories on TV all the time about people trapped in elevators, or under rubble from earthquakes or hurricanes, who used their cells to get help that saved their lives. And cells help kids keep in touch with their families . . . so the kids and their parents feel safer!"

Other people see things differently and say things like, "Public places are for everyone. It's true that this is a free country, so why should I be forced to listen to loud talking and laughing, especially when it's usually about stuff that's really lame or should be private anyway? Trust me, no one wants to hear about the fight you had with your friend, the movie you saw, or what you're wearing to the school dance! People should be able to hang out at the mall or ride a bus without hearing brainless conversations. Last week I was almost knocked down by someone skating at the ice rink and talking on the phone at the same time! If it's important enough for you to call someone, take the time to do it right. A phone conversation is private, so keep yours to yourself! Talking on a cell in public is not only badmannered, it adds to noise pollution!"

Is there a happy medium between using a cell "wherever and whenever" and outlawing its use altogether? Sure, it's called common sense. Be respectful of other people's rights. Don't talk so loudly on the phone . . . The person on the other end can hear just fine without your shouting . . . and adjust the ring tones so you don't hog the air that's for all to share.

1. Which word could the author have used instead of rowdily that means the same but has a less negative connotation?
   a. Softly
   b. Loudly
   c. Happily
   d. Quietly

2. Which word in the following sentence gives a negative connotation? They may allege, "America's a free country and it's my right to talk in public!"
   a. Free
   b. Right
   c. Alleged
   d. Public

3. Which word in the second paragraph is a positive connotation for important?
   a. Essential
   b. Difference
   c. Conversation
   d. Eavesdrop

4. What is the denotation of the word hog? What is its connotation in the last paragraph? Why do you think the author used that word?
**Practice 2: Only Woman Medal of Honor Winner**

Read the selection, and then answer the questions that follow.

As a child, they say Mary Walker was a bit of a brat. She always wanted to do things differently. When she grew up, she continued to do so, becoming the first woman military doctor, a prisoner of war, a spy, and the only woman to win the Medal of Honor, America's highest military award.

Born in 1832, Walker graduated from medical school at the age of 21. She was the only female in her class and only the second U.S. woman to graduate from a medical school. When the Civil War broke out, she went to Washington, D.C. to become an Army surgeon. The Army gave her a tough time, so she volunteered as a nurse and went off to treat wounded soldiers.

The Army finally conceded and appointed her as an assistant surgeon in 1863, making her the first female doctor in the U.S. Army. The foxy Walker designed a military uniform for herself—a knee-length skirt over trousers and a man's uniform jacket. To those unhappy with her garb, she clarified that the hoop skirts women normally wore were too cumbersome and dangerous when she was working in field hospitals and on battlefields.

As a dedicated doctor, Walker treated those in need, no matter what their politics. So she often crossed Confederate lines to treat civilians. It's generally accepted that while in enemy territory, she was also working as a spy for the North. On one of these trips, she was captured by Confederate troops and held in a Southern prison until both sides exchanged captives.

The Army nominated Walker for the Medal of Honor and she was awarded it in 1866. Her citation praises her wartime service but doesn't specifically mention valor in combat. That turned out to be an important oversight.

In 1916, the government began reviewing Medal of Honor awards. Over the years, the medal had been copied and sold, and many people wore medals illegally. Congress revised the standard for awarding a Medal of Honor to mandate it only be given for actual combat with an enemy.

Mary Walker and hundreds of past Medal of Honor recipients were stripped of their medals. The government demanded Walker and the others return theirs. She refused and wore hers until her death at age 87 in 1919.

In the late 1960s, Mary's great-grandniece launched a campaign to restore the medal her great-aunt had earned. Congress studied the case, and in 1977, President Jimmy Carter reinstated Mary Walker's Medal of Honor.

1. A denotation of foxy is “like a fox” and the connotation is
   a. Dull
   b. Clever
   c. Bashful
   d. Frightened

2. Which word gives a negative connotation to doing things differently?
   a. Continued
   b. Graduated
   c. Brat
   d. Child

3. Which is probably the most positive connotation of concealed
   a. Okayed
   b. Contracted
   c. Denied
   d. Tolerated

4. Which connotation is more negative?
   a. Prisoner
   b. Detainee
   c. Hostage
   d. Inmate

5. “…stripped of their medals” gives a more negative connotation to
   a. Exchanging prisoners of war.
   b. Working in a field hospital.
   c. Requesting a commission as an army surgeon
   d. Taking away an award

6. Which word, that means the same as demanded, is more positive?
   a. Commanded
   b. Asked
   c. Decreed
   d. Required
ANSWER KEY

Exercise 1
1. dessert* 6. progress* 11. Monday 16. daughter*
2. flu 7. jewels* 12. weekend* 17. debt
3. monster 8. success* 13. T.V.* 18. traffic
4. music* 9. gang 14. murder 19. springtime*
5. worm 10. circus* 15. war 20. liar

Exercise 2
Positive Neutral Negative
1. home house dump
2. exotic foreign strange
3. chat talk babble
4. feast dinner chow
5. fragrance smell stench
6. venerable old decrepit
7. tune sound racket
8. pet animal beast

Exercise 3
1. dump (-) 6. nosy (-) 11. crafty (-)
2. expensive (+) 7. manage (+) 12. reserved (+)
3. original (+) 8. noise (-) 13. miserly (-)
4. cronies(-) 9. animal life (+) 14. strong (+)
5. scent(+) 10. invention (+) 15. pushy (-)