



# Diction & Tone

DEVICES OF THE DAY

# What is tone?

**TONE is simply the author's attitude toward the subject.**

Note: The author reveals his (or her) attitude through the selection of words he uses to describe the subject

# What is diction?

**Diction is the author's word choice.**

Important words to know:

Denotation – dictionary definition of the word

Connotation – feeling behind the word. (can be positive or negative)

What is the **TONE** of the song?  
The **DICTION** (word choice) can give you  
hints!



How about the TONE of this one?



What about this example? Notice how the tone shifts...



# Diction Analysis #1

- ▶ Consider:

- ▶ Meanwhile, the United States Army, thirsting for revenge, was prowling the country north and west of the Black Hills, killing Indians wherever they could be found. - Dee Brown, *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee*

- ▶ Discuss:

- ▶ 1. What are the connotations of thirsting? What feelings are evoked by this diction?
- ▶ 2. What are the connotations of prowling? What kind of animals prowl? What attitude toward the U.S. army does this diction convey?

- ▶ Connect:

- ▶ What tone is conveyed by the sentence?
- ▶ How does the diction reveal the tone?

# Diction Analysis #2

- ▶ Consider:
  - ▶ Abuelito under a bald light bulb, under a ceiling dusty with flies, puffs his cigar and counts money soft and wrinkled as old Kleenex. - Sandra Cisneros, "Tepeyac," *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*
- ▶ Discuss:
  - ▶ 1. How can a ceiling be dusty with flies? Are the flies plentiful or sparse? Active or still? Clustered or evenly distributed?
  - ▶ 2. What does Cisneros mean by a bald light bulb? What does this reveal about Abuelito's room?
- ▶ Connect:
  - ▶ What is the tone in Cisneros's sentence?



# Diction Analysis #3

## ▶ Consider:

- ▶ Pots rattled in the kitchen where Momma was frying corn cakes to go with vegetable soup for supper, and the homey sounds and scents cushioned me as I read of Jane Eyre in the cold English mansion of a colder English gentleman. - Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

## ▶ Discuss:

- ▶ 1. By using the word cushioned, what does Angelou imply about her life and Jane Eyre's life?
- ▶ 2. What is the difference between the cold of the English mansion and the cold of the English gentleman? What does Angelou's diction convey about her attitude (tone) toward Jane's life?

## ▶ Apply:

- ▶ Write a sentence using a strong verb to connect one part of your life with another. For example, you could connect a book you are reading and your mother's dinner preparations, as Maya Angelou does; or you could connect a classroom lecture with sounds outside. Be creative. Use an exact verb (like cushioned), one which connotes the attitude you want to convey.

# Diction Analysis #4

- ▶ Consider:
  - ▶ An aged man is but a paltry thing. A tattered coat upon a stick... -W. B. Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium" (Note: paltry means worthless or insignificant)
- ▶ Discuss:
  - ▶ 1. What picture is created by the use of the word tattered?
  - ▶ 2. By understanding the connotations of the word tattered, what do we understand about the speaker's attitude toward an aged man?
- ▶ Apply:
  - ▶ List three adjectives that can be used to describe a pair of shoes. Each adjective should connote a different feeling about the shoes.

# Diction and Tone Activity

- ▶ In your groups, create and complete the chart below. When you finish the chart, create a handwritten word cloud below the chart. The word cloud should convey a tone by using diction. Use color to further emphasize the effect.

Page #	Word, Phrase, or Passage	Reason for selecting word, phrase, or passage.	Why did the author select this word or phrase? What is the author trying to say? How does the diction help the author achieve his or her purpose?

# Word Cloud Example

