**Connotation**

Words can also affect the reading of a poem through the ideas and associations or connotations that readers produce for them. For example, the words, 'thin', 'lean', 'slightly build’, and

'slender' all have a similar meaning, but they may suggest different associations to readers. For example, readers often react more positively to the word 'slender' than to the word 'thin'; and the former tends to be applied to women and boys, rather than to men.

#### **Activities**

1. Below are two combinations of words taken from the different versions of Andrei

Voznesensky's poem. Tick the ideas and associations that each description suggests to you.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Ideas and associations | | Ideas and associations | |
| draughty overcoat: | full-length coat |  | old |  |
|  | half-length coat |  | worn out |  |
|  | loose fitting |  | thin |  |
|  | inexpensive |  | tattered and torn |  |
|  | lets in the cold air |  | coarse |  |
|  | borrowed/ handed-down |  | other? |  |
| flimsy coat: | full-length coat |  | old |  |
|  | half-length coat |  | worn out |  |
|  | loose fitting |  | thin |  |
|  | inexpensive |  | tattered and torn |  |
|  | lets in the cold air |  | coarse |  |
|  | borrowed/ handed-down |  | other? |  |

Based on the ideas and associations you have ticked, which of the phrases ('draughty overcoat' or 'flimsy coat') do you think better matches the subject matter and mood of the poem, as you read it? Is sound also a factor in your choice?

1. Here are some other pairs of words or phrases from the two poems. Discuss the differences between them, taking account of sound and ideas. For each pair of phrases, say which you prefer (A or B).

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | Your preference |
| 1. | is freezing | freezes |  |
| 2. | huddles | hides |  |
| 3. | face stained by tears  & smeared with lipstick | face all smeared in lipstick and tears |  |
| 4. | the start of winter glittering on her cheek | Frozen tears glisten on her cheeks |  |

#### 

1. In judging which of these words and phrases works better, you will have made some assumptions about the overall 'feeling' that readers should have about the girl and about her situation.

Which of the following best describes this feeling, according to your reading of the poem?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Feeling | Explanation | Your reading |
| sympathetic | (the reader is emotionally involved and feels sorry for the girl) |  |
| detached | (the reader merely observes the situation without feeling involved) |  |
| understanding | (the reader relates to the situation but may not be emotionally affected) |  |
| uninterested | (the reader understands the situation but has no particular view about it) |  |
| philosophical | (the reader views the girl's situation in terms of broader human experience) |  |
| other |  |  |

1. Does your idea about how the reader should feel help to explain the judgements you have made in the activities above?

For example: would a preference for a sympathetic reading lead you to prefer particular words or phrases from the two different translations or versions of the poem over others?

If so, where do you think your feelings about the character of the girl and her situation might have come from?

The words in the poem?

Personal experience?

Stories and poems about similar situations?

Movies?

Somewhere else?