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Meanings

Throughout life, words are understood with many different meanings. Each word has a denotative meaning which is the actual dictionary definition and also a connotative meaning which is what the word suggests. Everyone has their own understanding of what words illustrate. This is especially visible in poetry.

William Carlos William’s poem, “The Red Wheelbarrow,” has a denotative meaning of just a plain, old wheelbarrow. Throughout the poem, many connotations are evident. In lines three through six, William states, “a red wheelbarrow glazed with rain water.” The one connotation that sticks out the most is the symbolization behind the wheelbarrow glistening with rain water. The red wheelbarrow symbolizes the blood, sweat, and tears of the hardworking American farmers. This meaning was generated through examining the lines. The red symbolizes the blood and the glistening rain resembles the sweat and tears. The title of the poem implies that the poem would just be about a red wheelbarrow, when in fact the poem is an ode to the hard working American farmers.

“Barbie Doll” is another poem that’s title and poem also has different denotative and connotative meanings. The title, “Barbie Doll,” implies the poem will be about a Barbie Doll when in fact that is not the case at all. The poem was actually about a young girl attempting alter herself in order to look like a Barbie Doll. In lines seventeen and eighteen, Marge Piercy states, “So she cut off her nose and he legs and offered them up.” The meaning of these lines is that the girl underwent the process of altering her body in order to fit into modern American society. The alleged alteration resulted in the young girl’s death. The image of the Barbie Doll is supposed to be positive. The Barbie Doll is a toy children, especially young girls, grew up playing with, but in the situation the view is completely opposite. The girl attempting to fill the image of the Barbie Doll turned into a tragedy, but in the end she achieved her overall goal: to look pretty. The irony of the situation is that the girl wanted to look pretty, but ended up looking pretty in her casket at her funeral.

Another poem that demonstrates denotative and connotative meanings is “To a Daughter Leaving Home.” In Linda Pastan’s poem, the title suggests a denotative understanding that the poem would be about a daughter leaving her home and parents. The poem illustrates that “To a Daughter Leaving Home” is really about a young girl learning how to ride a bike. The poem goes through the experiences of what the parent is viewing. The parent is watching their child fall off the bike and fail, but eventually they see their child succeed. The little girl finally caught on and took off on her bike while the parent stood behind and watched her ride away. In lines twenty-one through twenty four, Pastan states, “the hair flapping behind you like a handkerchief waving goodbye.” While she was riding away, the parent views this as a symbol of their daughter leaving home.

In conclusion, the poems “The Red Wheelbarrow,” “Barbie Doll,” and “To a Daughter Leaving Home” all demonstrate that poems consist of denotative and connotative meanings. These three poems illustrate that the denotative meaning of the title differs from the connotative meaning of the entire poem. Each word has several different connotations which lead to the many different understandings of poems by readers. Poetry is a prime example of the differences in denotative and connotative meanings.

Works Cited

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