Name: Unit 5 The Power of Words

Connotation & Denotation Exercise:

Since everyone reacts emotionally to certain words, writers often deliberately select words that they think will influence your reactions and appeal to your emotions. Read the dictionary definition (DENOTATION) below.

**cock roach (kok' roch'), n**. any of an order of nocturnal insects, usually

brown with flattened oval bodies, some species of which are household

pests inhabiting kitchens, areas around water pipes, etc. [Spanish cucaracha]

1. What does the word cockroach mean to you?

2. Is a cockroach merely an insect or is it also a household nuisance and a disgusting creature?

\*\*See what meanings poets Wild and Morley find in roaches in the following poems.

***Roaches***

Last night when I got up

to let the dog out I spied

a cockroach in the bathroom

crouched flat on the cool

porcelain,

delicate

antennae probing the toothpaste cap

and feasting himself on a gob

of it in the bowl:

I killed him with one unprofessional

blow,

scattering arms and legs

and half his body in the sink...

I would have no truck with roaches,

crouched like lions in the ledges of sewers

their black eyes in the darkness

alert for tasty slime,

breeding quickly and without design,

laboring up drainpipes through filth

to the light;

I read once they are among

the most antediluvian of creatures,

surviving everything, and in more primitive times

thrived to the size of your hand...

yet when sinking asleep

or craning at the stars,

I can feel their light feet

probing in my veins,

their whiskers nibbling

the insides of my toes;

and neck arched,

feel their patient scrambling

up the dark tubes of my throat.

--Peter Wild

***from Nursery Rhymes for the Tender-hearted***

Scuttle, scuttle, little roach-

How you run when I approach:

Up above the pantry shelf

Hastening to secrete yourself.

Most adventurous of vermin,

How I wish I could determine

How you spend your hours of ease,

Perhaps reclining on the cheese.

Cook has gone, and all is dark-

Then the kitchen is your park;

In the garbage heap that she leaves

Do you browse among the tea leaves?

How delightful to suspect

All the places you have trekked:

Does your long antenna whisk its

Gentle tip across the biscuits?

Do you linger, little soul,

Drowsing in our sugar bowl?

Or, abandonment most utter,

Shake a shimmy on the butter?

Do you chant your simple tunes

Swimming in the baby's prunes?

Then, when dawn comes, do you slink

Homeward to the kitchen sink?

Timid roach, why be so shy?

We are brothers, thou and I,

In the midnight, like yourself,

I explore the pantry shelf!

--Christopher Morley

**Reread the dictionary definition.**

3. Which of the denotative characteristics of a cockroach both poets include in their poems?

4. What characteristics does Wild give his roaches that are not in the dictionary definition?

5. What additional characteristics does Morley give to roaches?

In each poem, the insect acquires meaning beyond its dictionary definition. Both poets lead us away from a literal view of roaches to a nonliteral one.

6. Which poet succeeds in giving roaches favorable connotations?

7. Which poet comes closer to expressing your own feelings about roaches?