



# Connotative Definitions: Free Verse Poetry as L2 Writing Resource




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# Overview

- Introductions and Background
  - Read first stanza of “Persimmons”
  - “Connotative Definitions” Part 1 Exercise
  - “Connotative Definitions” Part 2 Exercise
  - Q&A
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**What:** free verse poetry exercises in response to Li Young Lee's poem "Persimmons"



**Who:** Advanced ELLs (College Level)



# Teaching Context

- University of Pittsburgh English Department
- ESL Workshop in Composition course
- Sample learning goals: In this course, writers use L2 to
  - ❖ Develop their own, specific ideas
  - ❖ Persuade readers with detailed, qualitative evidence
  - ❖ Evaluate other authors' perspectives in relation to their own
  - ❖ Analyze ideas, writing strategies, and significant details

# Li-Young Lee

- ▶ lived in Indonesia, Japan, Hong Kong, and moved to US in 1964
- ▶ According to Lee, he could speak Japanese, Cantonese, and Mandarin when he was a child. He learned English when he was 8 years old.
- ▶ Studied poetry at University of Pittsburgh in 1970s





# Connotative Definitions: Goals

Students will


- Distinguish and explain denotative versus connotative definitions of words
- Select and evaluate details
- Connect the project of Lee's poem to their own experiences as users of multiple languages



## “Persimmons”

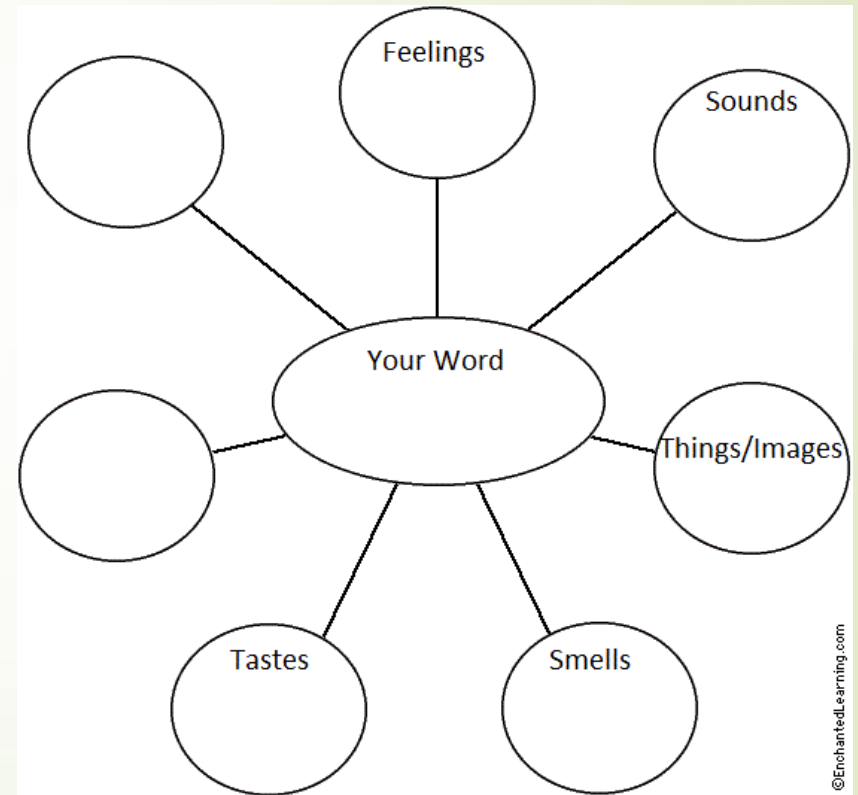
Read the opening stanza of “Persimmons” and discuss with a partner:

How is the speaker’s understanding of “persimmons” and “precision” different from his teacher’s understanding?

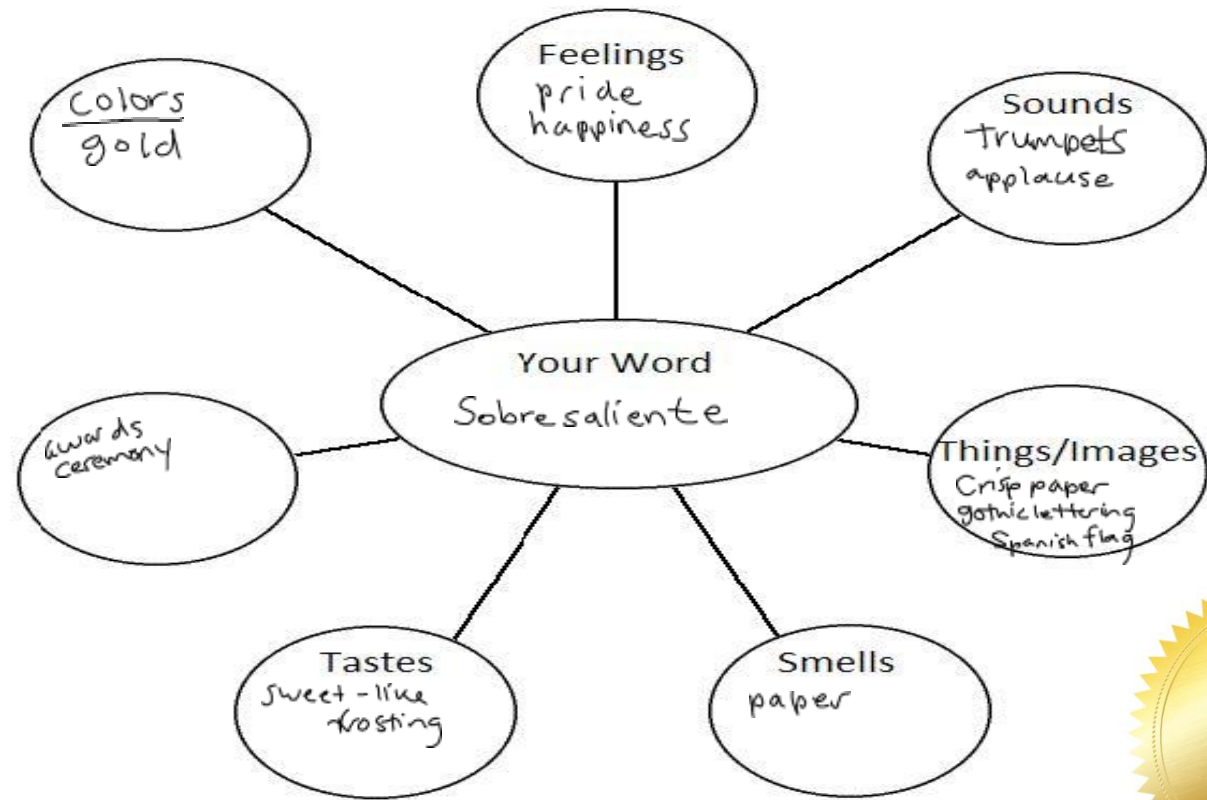


# “Connotative Definitions” Part 1

- Brainstorm with graphic organizer
- Contrast denotative and connotative senses of word
- Connect Lee’s project to own translingual experience







my word = Sobresaliente (Spanish, "excellent," "outstanding")  
- writing about undergrad. Spanish awards ceremony





## “Connotative Definitions” Part 2

- Compose short free-verse poem (7-8 lines)
- Select and arrange significant details
- Writers can
  - Contrast denotative and connotative definitions of their word
  - Tell a short story around their word
  - Create a list of vivid details (visual, auditory, taste, olfactory, etc.) about their word so that readers can imagine their experience of it

## Excerpt from Student Poem

Cats are cute and clean  
Cuts hurt and make me bleed  
Cats cut when they are angry  
Cats cut when they are happy.

I once had a cat.  
It came from the street.  
Brave and fearless as a lion,  
Innocent and playful as a child.

I got cut twice,  
Once by the lion,  
Once by the child.



# Excerpt from Student Poem



Tobacco the fragrant leaf in cigarette.  
Tamago is the egg in Japanese.  
I ordered tamago in the market for food,  
The chef looked at me as seeing an alien.  
I missed my family.  
I wished to go back the day when my  
grandpa told me interesting stories,  
With a cigarette in his mouth,  
The smell of tobacco inundated my  
surrounding,  
As the sunshine.

