

### Connotative Definitions: Free Verse Poetry as L2 Writing Resource

Excerpt from Li-Young Lee's "Persimmons"

In sixth grade Mrs. Walker  
slapped the back of my head  
and made me stand in the corner  
for not knowing the difference  
between *persimmon* and *precision*.  
How to choose  
  
persimmons. This is precision.  
Ripe ones are soft and brown-spotted.  
Sniff the bottoms. The sweet one

will be fragrant. How to eat:  
put the knife away, lay down  
newspaper.  
Peel the skin tenderly, not to tear the  
meat.  
Chew the skin, suck it,  
and swallow. Now, eat  
the meat of the fruit,  
so sweet,  
all of it, to the heart. (Lines 1-17)

### In-Class Writing: Connotative Definitions, Part 1

In his poem "Persimmons," Li-Young Lee captures the feelings, vivid images, and memories that specific words evoked for him—words that he struggled with as a language student and words that lead to both conflicts and connections with other people. That is, he explores the **connotations** that words like *persimmons* and *precision*, *wren* and *yarn*, hold for him.

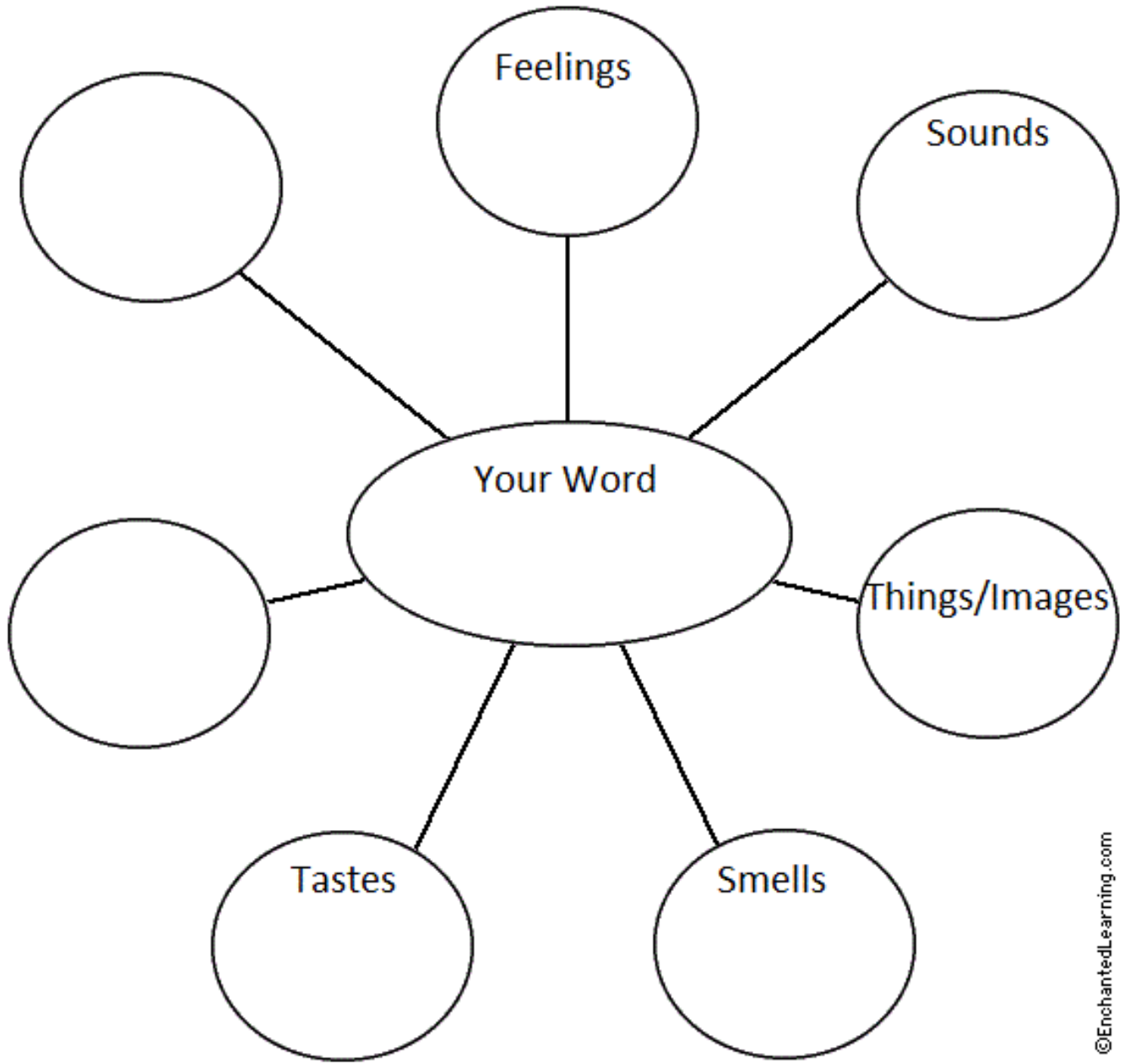
For this activity, think of an English word that was confusing or surprising for you to learn. It could be a word that you struggled to understand, a word that you misunderstood, or a word that you think was strange, funny, beautiful, unusual.

1. Write your word here: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Look up your word in an online dictionary and write its **denotative** (dictionary) definition here:

Now, write your word in the middle circle on the chart on the back of this paper. Think about the **connotative** meanings of the word. Answer these questions by writing on the chart:

- How does this word make you feel?
- What does the word sound like? For example, does it sound like any word in your home language? Does it sound like a musical instrument or an animal?
- What other things or images does the word remind you of?
- What smells does the word remind you of?
- What tastes does the word remind you of?

Use the other circles in the chart to write other **connotations** (feelings, memories, images) that the word means to you. You can add more circles to the chart, if you'd like.



### In-Class Writing: Crafting a Poem about Connotations, Part 2



Wrens are small, plain birds,  
yarn is what one knits with.  
Wrens are soft as yarn.  
My mother made birds out of yarn,  
I loved to watch her tie the stuff;  
a bird, a rabbit, a wee man.

Li-Young Lee, "Persimmons," lines 34-37

In this short passage, what connections does Lee between the "wrens" and the "yarn"? How do you as a reader react to this passage?

**Directions:** Write a short poem about the **connotations** that your word has for you!

1. Re-read the definition of your word and the web you made for Part 1.
2. Write a short poem (7-8 lines) about the feelings and memories of the word. It does not have to rhyme.

For example, you could:

- Begin your poem with a dictionary (**denotation**) definition like Lee does in the passage above
- Tell a story about your word
- Make a list of the **connotations** (feelings, sounds, tastes, smells, memories) that your word evokes

No matter what you choose to do for your poem, you should select the most vivid details. You should also arrange these words or details so readers can see and hear your memories of a strange, confusing, beautiful, funny, etc. word!