



Emotional Language

Persuasion & Influence · Tier 1: How Persuasion Works · Component 4

Grades: 6–8 **Time:** 35–45 min (standard) **Format:** individual or pairs

Students learn how *word choice* steers feeling before thinking — how two sentences with the same facts can pull in opposite directions — and practice hearing the difference.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Loaded language is the most common persuasion tool students meet and the hardest to notice, because the words feel like simple description. Swapping a loaded word for a neutral one and feeling the sentence change is a fast, physical way to make the invisible audible.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- One copy of the **Student pages** (Student pp. 1–3) per student or pair.
- Optional: a headline or two with visibly loaded wording.

HOW TO RUN IT

1. **Read the explainer together (8–10 min).** Student p. 1 covers connotation and loaded words.
2. **Work the activity (18–22 min).** Students swap loaded words for neutral (Student p. 2) and write both a warm and a cold version of one fact (Student p. 3).
3. **Debrief (10–15 min).** Run the Discussion Guide (Instructor p. 3).

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

- Naming **connotation** — the feeling a word carries beyond its dictionary meaning.
- Noticing the facts can stay identical while the *feeling* flips.
- Spotting euphemisms (softeners) and loaded intensifiers alike.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT (COMMON CORE)

Codes reflect the grade 6 band; grade 7–8 equivalents apply equally.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.5** — Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings, including connotations.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.4** — Determine the meaning of words and phrases, including connotative meanings.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6.3** — Use knowledge of language and its conventions; choose words for meaning and effect.

Printing: Hand students the 3 Student pages. The 3 Instructor pages are for you.



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In depth: connotation, loading, and why feeling comes first

Every word carries two payloads: its **denotation** (dictionary meaning) and its **connotation** (the feeling it drags along). Persuasion lives in the second one. Because feeling often arrives ahead of reasoning, a well-chosen word can set the verdict before the argument is even heard.

THE MECHANISM

Feeling before thinking

We tend to consult "how do I feel about this?" and treat the answer as if it were "what do I think?" (affect heuristic). A word that triggers a fast feeling can quietly stand in for evidence (appeal to emotion). The frame the word sets then colors everything that follows (framing effect).

TWO DIRECTIONS OF LOADING

Heat it up or cool it down

INTENSIFIERS. "Slammed," "crushed," "disaster," "swarm" make things feel bigger, worse, more urgent than "criticized," "beat," "problem," "group."

EUPHEMISMS. Softeners run the other way — "let go" for fired, "enhanced interrogation," "pre-owned." Same fact, sanded down.

Same events, opposite feelings — chosen, not neutral.

ONE THING TO KEEP REPEATING

Loaded isn't the same as false. A loaded word can sit on top of true facts. The skill isn't catching liars — it's noticing when the *wording*, not the evidence, is doing the persuading, and asking what the plain version would say.



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Debrief prompts & a sample answer key

DISCUSSION ANCHOR

- Can two sentences share the **exact same facts** and still feel opposite? How?
- What's the difference between a word's **dictionary meaning** and its **feeling**?
- When is a **softer** word (a euphemism) being kind, and when is it hiding something?
- Find a headline from this week. Which word is doing the feeling-work?

ONE-LINE TAKEAWAY

Watch the adjectives and verbs — that's usually where the persuasion is hiding.

SAMPLE READS FOR PART A

LOADED	NEUTRAL SWAP
The mayor slammed the plan.	<i>criticized / disagreed with</i>
A swarm of tourists arrived.	<i>a large group / many</i>
The new rule is a total disaster .	<i>a problem / unpopular</i>
The company let go of 200 workers.	<i>fired / laid off (here the loaded direction is soft)</i>



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How word choice moves you

Two sentences can carry the exact same facts and still feel completely different — because words don't just mean things, they *feel* like things. That feeling often lands before you've had a chance to think.

THE KEY IDEA

Meaning vs. feeling

Every word has a **meaning** (what the dictionary says) and a **connotation** (the feeling it carries). "Cheap" and "affordable" can point to the same price — but one feels like junk and the other feels like a smart buy. The facts didn't change; the feeling did.

TWO MOVES TO SPOT

Heating up & cooling down

TURNING IT UP. "Slammed," "crushed," "disaster," "swarm" make things sound bigger, scarier, more urgent than "disagreed," "beat," "problem," "crowd."

TURNING IT DOWN. Some words *soften* — "let go" instead of fired, "pre-owned" instead of used. Same fact, made gentler.

Loaded doesn't mean lying. A loaded word can sit on top of true facts. Your job isn't to catch liars — it's to notice when the *wording* is doing the persuading, and ask what the plain version would say.



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Name: _____ Date: _____

Quick recap: Meaning = the dictionary · Connotation = the feeling · Loaded words steer you before you think

PART A — COOL IT DOWN

Underline the loaded word. Then rewrite the sentence with a **neutral** word that keeps the same facts.

LOADED SENTENCE	NEUTRAL REWRITE
1. The mayor <i>slammed</i> the plan.	
2. A <i>swarm</i> of tourists arrived downtown.	
3. The new rule is a <i>total disaster</i> .	
4. She <i>bragged</i> that she finished first.	

PART B — WHICH WAY IS IT LOADED?

For each word, write **UP** (makes it feel bigger/worse) or **DOWN** (softens it): *crushed* ____ *pre-owned* ____
nightmare ____ *let go* ____

**PART C — SAME FACT, TWO FEELINGS**

Here's a plain fact: "**The team lost the game 3 to 2.**" Write it two ways.

Warm version (makes the team look good)

Cold version (makes the team look bad)

PART D — IN THE WILD

Find a real headline this week. Copy it, then circle the one word doing the most feeling-work — and write the neutral version of that word.