**Denotation, Connotation and Myth**

**Denotation** refers to the literal meaning of a word, the dictionary definition. For example, if you look up the word snake **in a dictionary**, you will discover that one of its denotative meanings is "any of numerous scaly, legless, sometimes venomous reptiles having a long, tapering, cylindrical body and found in most tropical and temperate regions."

**Connotation**, on the other hand, refers to the associations that are connected to a certain word or the emotional suggestions related to that word. The connotative meanings of a word exist together with the denotative meanings. The connotations for the word snake could include evil or danger.

<http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/English_Literature/terms/denotation.htm>

**Connotation** is the associated or secondary meaning of a word or expression in addition to its explicit or primary meaning; for example, example, ‘red’ connotes danger/passion/communism, a ‘car’ in an ad often connotes freedom. This is very often cultural and can depend on context.

<http://pixelbrain-mmu.blogspot.com.au/2011/07/denotationconnotationmyth.html>

Words may have positive, neutral or negative connotations.

**Which of the following words usually have favourable connotations? Are any neutral? Which has the most negative connotations?**

Springtime dessert flu monster music worm progress jewels success gang circus Monday weekend murder war daughter debt traffic liar holiday work beach house dump home exotic foreign alien fat thin skeletal

**Myth:** Roland Barthes argued that some connotations are so widely held that they reach the level of myth. A myth, according to Barthes, is where socially agreed symbolic associations become widely accepted. A myth is a textual representation of a shared understanding about the world. The mythic level of meaning in a text is not a single idea or topic; **it is a pre-packaged set of beliefs and practices** that seem natural and obvious to members of a culture. Texts use combinations of signs (words or images taken from the culture) to invite readers to activate or recognize the myth. For example, “Once there was a dear little girl whom everyone loved” activates myths of childhood and girls – innocence, virtue, honesty, love, and beauty.

**Consider the myth of the cowboy:**

**The Cowboy**

* (from films & books) The lawman of Western films defends other people. His purpose in life is to combat evil. He's strong and silent and never boasts. In the typical basic story, he rides into town alone, hitches his horse, walks into a local establishment, gets insulted by the villain and his henchmen, eventually has a victorious "showdown," and quietly rides out of town again.
* (from history) The cowboy is a symbol of the frontier and its values. The frontier conveyed a particularly American experience and produced a "superior individual". The cowboy tamed nature, brought order and control to the wilderness. He is a mythic figure taming the territory. Because he was improving it, he had a right to take it.
* Characteristics of cowboys:
  + Cowboys are simple and individualistic.
  + Cowboys are "men triumphing over nature."
  + Cowboys kill Indians.
  + Cowboys leave women at home. Cowboys are alone on the range.
  + Cowboys are outlaws.
  + Cowboys are rough and tough.
  + Cowboys eat simple fare such as pork and beans.
  + Cowboys dress for function.
  + Cowboys shoot wolves.

<http://www.indiana.edu/~slavicgf/e103/class/2011_03_21/CowboyMyth.htm>

**What are the characteristics of the following myths?** Marilyn Munroe, cats, French waiters, feminists, nurses, rugby league players

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