



Sensing Connotations: Creating Atmosphere

All words have particular **denotations**, or specific dictionary definitions. Some words also have **connotations**—associations and emotional overtones that people have come to attach to them. For example, the word *puzzling* suggests that something is mildly confusing or confounding. The word *bewildering* goes a step further, suggesting that something is so puzzling as to be hopelessly confusing.

Words that have especially strong positive or negative connotations are called **loaded**, or

suggestive, words. Poe felt that a story's mood, or **atmosphere**, was of paramount importance, so it's no surprise that he often used suggestive words to manipulate our emotional responses.

1. Reread the famous first paragraph of Poe's story. Which words suggest decay, sterility, finality, and emptiness? List them.
2. Rewrite the first few sentences of the first paragraph. Change the time of day, the time of year, and the weather conditions to paint a cheerful or cozy picture of the house of Usher. How does your choice of words change the atmosphere of the paragraph?

CHOICES: Building Your Portfolio

Writer's Notebook

1. Collecting Ideas for a Controversial Issue

Using the topic you explored in an earlier



Writer's Notebook (page 258), or another controversial topic of your choice, write down two or three emotional appeals. Use words with strong **connotative** meanings to persuade readers to accept your position on the issue. Save your notes for possible use in the Writer's Workshop on page 331.

Interpreting a Story

2. What's It All About?

Select one of these interpretations of "The Fall of the House

of Usher"—or develop a position of your own—and defend it in a brief essay.

- The house personifies the diseased, dying Usher family.
- The narrator is insane or dreaming. The entire story is a projection of his mind.
- The story is an **allegory** about an artist who is drawn on a journey through the dark side of the human mind.

Creative Writing

3. Changing Genres

Tell the story of the house of Usher in another genre: a poem, a newspaper article, a magazine interview, a script, a picture book, a comic strip—even a drawing or song. For inspiration, see Reed Whittemore's poem "The Fall of the House of Usher" (*Connections*, page 279).

Music

4. A Little Night Music

Search for music—classical, jazz, contemporary instrumental, rock, movie soundtracks—that to you evokes the **atmosphere** and events of the story. Play the music for the class and explain why you chose it.


Art

5. House of Horrors

What does the house of Usher *look* like? Draw, paint, or even build your vision of this ghastly Gothic structure.

Monitoring Your Reading

6. Talk It Over

With a group, discuss the reading problems  posed by Poe's story and share the strategies you used to work them out.