

## Lesson 4.1

# Shades of Meaning

**H**ave you ever collected rocks, sports cards, seashells, or anything? If you're like most collectors, you're proud of your collection and love adding to it. Many writers—maybe you're one—also love to collect words. They add to their collections by reading, conversing, keeping word lists in journals—and sometimes browsing through a good thesaurus. A vast word collection allows you to select words with the perfect shade of meaning to convey your idea. That kind of precision gives your word choice power.



### Sharing an Example: *Hope Was Here*

Read the following passage from Joan Bauer's book *Hope Was Here*. In this passage Hope, a self-described "word person," is using her thesaurus to help her work out her feelings.

I took out *my* Roget's thesaurus, which lists words that have the same meaning. If you're a word person like me, you can't live without one. Say you're trying to get an idea across, like *Gleason Beal is a thief*. You can look up the word "thief" in the thesaurus and come up with a slew of even better slams to help you work out your intense feelings.

Gleason Beal is a . . .  
... robber.  
... stealer.  
... purloiner (I like that one).  
... larcenist.  
... pilferer.  
... poacher.  
... swindler.

I flipped to the H section.

Hope is . . .

... belief.  
... credence.  
... faith.  
... trust.  
... confidence.  
... assurance.

I lay on the bed, holding the thesaurus, trying to live up  
to *my* name.

*Hope Was Here*  
by Joan Bauer

## Reflection

If, like Hope, you face lots of word choices, how do you pick the one word that's just right? How do the various synonyms for *thief* differ? Which ones work best for someone who steals your money? How about someone who steals your heart? Discuss this with a partner or in a writing circle and prepare to share some thoughts with the class.

Also look at the synonyms for *hope*. How do they differ? Which one do you think goes best with the name *Hope*?

## Using Your Thesaurus

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To look up synonyms (words with the same or similar meaning) in a thesaurus, it helps to know what part of speech you're looking for—noun or verb, for example.

Is *hope* a noun or a verb in each of these sentences? Talk with your partner to decide.

- Our soccer skills are low, but our hope for a win is high.
- I hope it snows tomorrow.

Use your thesaurus to find three synonyms for *hope* used as a verb:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Choose one of the three synonyms you found and look up that word in the thesaurus. Write down two or more synonyms for your word:

\_\_\_\_\_

## Shades of Hope

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Now that you know a few synonyms for *hope*, you're in a good position to express an idea in more than one way. Read the following sentence and think about other ways to express the idea without using the word *hope*. It's fine to reword the sentence, add details, start it differently, or express the idea more strongly. Remember—this is about shades of meaning.

I hope we win the game.

Write three more ways to say—more or less—the same thing:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Shades of *Big*

Here are some synonyms for *big*. If you were going to put these synonyms for *big* in order, which three would be the “biggest” of the *big* words? Put stars by those three. It’s fine to work with a partner as you do this.

- huge
- gigantic
- gargantuan
- enormous
- mammoth
- vast
- whopping
- large
- humongous
- sprawling
- giant
- oversized
- expansive
- spacious

As you know, synonyms do not have *exactly* the same meaning. You can’t just plunk any old word in the blank. Read these sentences carefully to see if the writer chose a good synonym for *big* in each case. If not, cross out the **bold word** and write a better choice right above it. **NOTE:** You do not have to use a word from the list. If you have a better choice, use it!

1. Herman managed to finish the **vast** pizza.
2. They owned **spacious** acreage in Texas.
3. **Large** waves pounded the shore.
4. The dog had **expansive** feet.
5. That’s some **oversized** fish you caught!
6. Her **sprawling** hat blocked my view.

## Share and Compare

Compare your choices with those of your classmates. Did you hear words the same way? If you cannot agree, use a dictionary and a thesaurus to zero in on the meaning of any given word. And if any of these words are new to you, be sure to add them to the word list in your writing journal.

## Creating Meaning

Let's say you're writing a mystery set in 19<sup>th</sup> century England. In your opening scene, the heroine Dorcas is running from her small house on a cliff (heroines love living on cliffs) down a dark path to a tiny village at the edge of the sea. She plans to warn her friend that a ship carrying a particularly menacing person is approaching.

Read the story carefully, paying attention to the **bold blue** words. With a partner or in your writing circle, use your thesaurus to find a synonym that might work better than each of these words. Feel free to reword any sentences—or add original details. **HINT:** Imagine that this story is going to become a film. Make it exciting, vivid—and mysterious.

### The Ship

#### Chapter 1

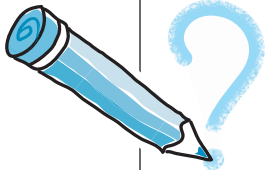
Dorcas **looked** up at the sky. Dark clouds were **forming** in the west—a **bad** storm was **coming**. She **took** her hat from the peg on the wall and **pulled** it down over her ears—then stepped out. The wind **shut** the door behind her. It **circled** around her, almost **taking** the coat right off her back.

**Holding** her coat, Dorcas **started** down the **dark** path. The wind was **blowing**—so there was no point lighting a candle. She couldn't see a thing—tree roots **came** up everywhere, and sharp rocks **pushed into** her feet. If only she could reach the village in

time. Dr. Perfidy, the most **unpleasant person** ever to sail the seas, was about to dock at their port! She was **worried**, but there was no time to think of herself. Lightning **shone**, and in the light, Dorcas saw the **slim** outline of the ship's mast and sails. She stopped worrying about falling and **ran** down the narrow **path**, her feet **hitting** the dirt, and her heart **beating** with every step.

## Share and Compare

Share your revision with another group or with the whole class. As you listen to other versions, record any words you especially want to remember. Think about the meaning of each word and about the mood it creates.



### A Writer's Question

As you've seen in this lesson, words aren't just about literal meaning. They're also about mood. Suppose you wanted to write a light, happy piece showing that Dorcas had been waiting and wishing for the ship to come in so she could meet someone she loved and missed. How would your word choice change?



### Putting It to the Test

Let's say you're in a writing assessment and you need a synonym for *good*. You have a thesaurus handy and it shows more than 20 synonyms for this word. Can you just pick any one of them? If not, how will you know which one is right for your particular sentence?