

Provided by Rachael Gerber

FOR HIGH
SCHOOL TEACHERS

VOICE LESSONS

*Classroom Activities
to Teach Diction,
Detail, Imagery,
Syntax, and Tone*

NANCY DEAN

V O I C E

L E S S O N S

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by Nancy Dean



Voice Lessons — Classroom Activities to Teach Diction, Detail, Imagery, Syntax, and Tone

Nancy Dean

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For Paul and Seth

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Introduction

My children learned to analyze voice when they were young: “She really means it this time,” they would whisper, conspirators in the intrigue of family limits. “Did you hear what Dad *didn’t* say?” they would knowingly observe, well aware of implications. They analyzed; they responded. Voice became central to communication. So it is. Voice, the color and texture of communication, stamps expression with the indelible mark of personality. It is the expression of who we are: the pitch and timbre of verbalization. Voice is the fingerprint of a person’s language.

During twenty-eight years of secondary English teaching, I have become increasingly aware of the complexity and importance of voice in literature. Understanding voice gives students an appreciation for the richness of language and a deeper understanding of literature. Through voice we come to know authors; by exploring voice, we learn to wield language. The aim, of course, is for each student to better develop a personal voice; to do so, a student must first learn to recognize voice and analyze its elements.

Understanding voice in literature starts with reading. Through guided reading, students can learn to identify and appreciate the elements of voice. Understanding the elements of voice requires practice and explicit instruction. This book provides both.

Voice Lessons focuses on five elements of voice: diction, detail, imagery, syntax, and tone.

- **Diction** (word choice) is the foundation of voice and contributes to all of its elements.
- **Detail** (facts, observations, and incidents) is used to develop a topic, shaping and seasoning voice.

- **Imagery** (verbal representation of sense experience) brings the immediacy of sensory experience to writing and gives voice a distinctive quality.
- **Syntax** (grammatical sentence structure) controls verbal pacing and focus.
- **Tone** (expression of attitude) gives voice its distinctive personality.

A brief discussion of each element follows:

Diction refers to the author’s choice of words. Words are the writer’s basic tools: they create the color and texture of the written work; they both reflect and determine the level of formality; they shape the reader’s perceptions. When studying serious literature, students should rarely skip words they do not know. That is tantamount to wearing earplugs to a symphony. To understand voice, students must both “hear” the words and “feel” their effects. Diction reflects the writer’s vision and steers the reader’s thought.

Effective voice is shaped by words that are clear, concrete, and exact. Good writers eschew words like *pretty*, *nice*, and *bad*. Instead they employ words that invoke a specific effect. A coat isn’t *torn*; it is *tattered*. The United States Army does not *want* revenge; it is *thirsting* for revenge. A door does not *shut*; it *thuds*. Specific diction brings the reader into the scene, enabling full participation in the writer’s world.

Diction depends on topic, purpose, and occasion. The topic often determines the specificity and sophistication of diction. For example, articles on computers are filled with specialized language: *e-mail*, *e-shopping*, *web*, *interface*. Many topics generate special vocabularies as a nexus to meaning.

The writer's purpose – whether to convince, entertain, amuse, inform, or plead – partly determines diction. Words chosen to impart a particular effect on the reader reflect and sustain the writer's purpose. For example, if an author's purpose is to inform, the reader should expect straightforward diction. On the other hand, if the author's purpose is to entertain, the reader will likely encounter words used in ironic, playful, or unexpected ways.

Diction also depends on the occasion. As with clothes, level of formality influences appropriate choices. Formal diction is largely reserved for scholarly writing and serious prose or poetry. Informal diction is the norm in expository essays, newspaper editorials, and works of fiction. Colloquial diction and slang borrow from informal speech and are typically used to create a mood or capture a particular historic or regional dialect. Appropriateness of diction is determined by the norms of society.

When studying diction, students must understand both connotation (the meaning suggested by a word) and denotation (literal meaning). When a writer calls a character *slender*, the word evokes a different feeling from calling the character *gaunt*. A word's power to produce a strong reaction in the reader lies mainly in its connotative meaning.

Finally, diction can impart freshness and originality to writing. Words used in surprising or unusual ways make us rethink what is known and re-examine meaning. Good writers often opt for complexity rather than simplicity, for multiple meanings rather than precision. Thus diction, the foundation of voice, shapes a reader's thinking while guiding reader insight into the author's idiosyncratic expression of thought: the writer's voice.

Detail includes facts, observations, and incidents used to develop a subject and impart voice. Specific details refer to fewer things than general descriptions, thereby creating a precise mental picture. Detail brings life and color to description, focusing the reader's attention and bringing the reader into the scene. Because detail encourages readers

to participate in the text, use of detail influences readers' views of the topic, the setting, the narrator, and the author. Detail shapes reader attitude by focusing attention: the more specific the detail, the greater the focus on the object described.

Detail makes an abstraction concrete, particular, and unmistakable, giving the abstraction form. For example, when Orwell describes an elephant attack, the attack comes alive through the elephant's specific violent actions. By directing readers' attention to particulars, detail connects abstraction to their lives: to specifics they can imagine, have participated in, or understand vicariously. Detail focuses description and prepares readers to join the action. As a result, readers can respond with conviction to the impact of the writer's voice.

Detail can also state by understatement, by a *lack* of detail. The absence of specific details, for example, may be in sharp contrast to the intensity of a character's pain. In this case, elaborate, descriptive detail could turn the pain into sentimentality. Good writers choose detail with care, selecting those details which add meaning and avoiding those that trivialize or detract.

Imagery is the verbal representation of sensory experience. In literature all five senses may be represented: sight (visual imagery), sound (auditory imagery), touch (tactile imagery), taste (gustatory imagery), and smell (olfactory imagery). Visual imagery is most common, but good writers experiment with a variety of images and even purposefully intermingle the senses (giving smells a color, for example). Imagery depends on both diction and detail: an image's success in producing a sensory experience results from the specificity of the author's diction and choice of detail. Imagery contributes to voice by evoking vivid experience, conveying specific emotion, and suggesting a particular idea.

Imagery itself is not figurative, but may be used to impart figurative or symbolic meaning. For example, the parched earth can be a

metaphor for a character's despair, or a bird's flight a metaphor for hope. Traditional imagery typically has a history. A river, for example, is usually associated with life's journey. Traditional images are rarely disassociated with their historic meaning. Students should be encouraged to examine the traditional meanings of images, the departure from tradition, and the effect of both on meaning. They should also learn to recognize and analyze nontraditional and nonfigurative imagery used to influence and sharpen reader perception.

Syntax refers to the way words are arranged within sentences. Although the basic structure of the English sentence is prescribed (there must be a subject and verb; word order cannot be random), there is great latitude in its execution. How writers control and manipulate the sentence is a strong determinant of voice and imparts personality to the writing. Syntax encompasses word order, sentence length, sentence focus, and punctuation.

Most English sentences follow a subject-verb-object/complement pattern. Deviating from the expected word order can serve to startle the reader and draw attention to the sentence. This, in turn, emphasizes the unusual sentence's message. There are several ways to change normal word order:

- Inverting subject and verb (Am I ever sorry!);
- Placing a complement at the beginning of a sentence (Hungry, without a doubt, he is);
- Placing an object in front of a verb (Sara I like – not Susan).

Good writers shift between conformity and nonconformity, preventing reader complacency without using unusual sentence structure to the point of distraction.

Another aspect of syntax is sentence length. Writers vary sentence length to forestall boredom and control emphasis. A short sentence following a much longer sentence

shifts the reader's attention, which emphasizes the meaning and importance of the short sentence. Many modern writers put key ideas in short sentences. However, this has not always been so. Practice will help students learn to examine sentence length and look for the relationship between length and emphasis in works from different historical periods.

Sentence length contributes to variation and emphasis among sentences. Sentence focus deals with variation and emphasis within a sentence. In the English sentence, main ideas are usually expressed in main-clause positions. However, main-clause placement often varies, and this placement determines the writer's focal point. Sentence focus is generally achieved by syntactic tension and repetition.

Syntactic tension is the withholding of syntactic closure (completion of grammatical structure) until the end of a sentence. Sentences that so delay closure are called *periodic sentences*. Periodic sentences carry high tension and interest: the reader must wait until the end of the sentence to understand the meaning. For example, note that the main idea of the following sentence is completed at the end of the sentence: *As long as we ignore our children and refuse to dedicate the necessary time and money to their care, we will fail to solve the problem of school violence*. The emphasis here is on the problem.

In contrast, sentences that reach syntactical closure early (*loose sentences*) relieve tension and allow the reader to explore the rest of the sentence without urgency. Note the difference in tension when we change the sentence to a loose sentence: *We will fail to solve the problem of school violence as long as we ignore our children and refuse to dedicate the necessary time and money to their care*. The emphasis here is on the cause of failure.

Repetition is another way writers achieve sentence focus. Purposeful repetition of a word, phrase, or clause emphasizes the repeated structure and focuses the reader's attention on its meaning. Writers can also

repeat parallel grammatical forms such as infinitives, gerunds, and prepositional phrases. This kind of repetition balances parallel ideas and gives them equal weight.

Punctuation is used to reinforce meaning, construct effect, and express the writer's voice. Of particular interest in shaping voice are the semicolon, colon, and dash.

- The *semicolon* gives equal weight to two or more independent clauses in a sentence. The resulting syntactical balance reinforces parallel ideas and imparts equal importance to both (or all) of the clauses.
- The *colon* directs reader attention to the words that follow. It is also used between independent clauses if the second summarizes or explains the first. A colon sets the expectation that important, closely related information will follow, and words after the colon are emphasized.
- The *dash* marks a sudden change in thought or tone, sets off a brief summary, or sets off a parenthetical part of the sentence. The dash often conveys a casual tone.

Students learn to analyze punctuation through careful reading and practice.

Tone is the expression of attitude. It is the writer's (or narrator's) implied attitude toward his subject and audience. The writer creates tone by selection (diction) and arrangement (syntax) of words, and by purposeful use of details and images. The reader perceives tone by examining these elements. Tone sets the relationship between reader and writer. As the emotion growing out of the material and connecting the material to the reader, tone is the hallmark of the writer's personality.

Understanding tone is requisite to understanding meaning. Such understanding is the key to perceiving the author's mood and making the connection between the author's thought and its expression. Identifying and analyzing tone requires careful reading, sensitivity to diction and syntax, and understanding of detail selection and imagery. Students can, with practice, learn to identify tone in writing. Tone is as varied as human experience; and as with human experience, familiarity and thought pave the way to understanding.

To the Teacher

Voice Lessons evolved from my work as an Advanced Placement English teacher. The Advanced Placement English curriculum stresses critical reading and analysis of difficult literature. These are skills that require a great deal of practice. Originally, this book was conceived as guided practice to prepare students for the A.P. English examination. As I began writing the exercises, however, I came to see a broader application. *Voice Lessons* can provide guided reading and practice for virtually all students enrolled in high-school English. The lessons will help students understand and appreciate the power of language, the importance of voice, and the application of voice studies to their personal reading and writing.

Voice Lessons is a collection of 100 lessons to improve understanding of diction, detail, imagery, syntax, and tone. Each lesson has

- a quotation from critically acclaimed literature,
- two discussion questions that direct students' attention to analysis of the quotation, and
- an application exercise that encourages students to put new knowledge into practice.

Each lesson is complete in itself and the order of presentation is flexible.

In choosing quotations, I have considered both historic and cultural balance. Selections include traditional authors from *the canon*, such as Shakespeare and T. S. Eliot, and contemporary, multicultural authors, such as Sandra Cisneros and Toni Morrison. Quotations are short and have been selected to illustrate the particular element of voice under examination.

Voice Lessons assumes a basic knowledge of sentence structure and grammar. Students should be able to identify simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences. In addition, they should understand the difference between independent and subordinate clauses and have a basic knowledge of punctuation, including dashes and semicolons. If students do not have these fundamentals, you should review simple sentence structure and punctuation rules. Although I do occasionally refer to a part of speech, sophisticated knowledge of parts of speech is not necessary, and extensive grammar instruction will be more distracting than helpful.

Voice Lessons is a teacher resource guide, designed to supplement the regular English curriculum. I recommend using the lessons as class openers: exercises to stimulate discussion and engender interest in the critical reading of text, the understanding of voice, and the development of students' personal voices. You may run off copies for students. Alternatively, you may make transparencies of the lessons and have students use their own paper to copy the quotations and take notes. Having copies of the lessons enables students to underline or highlight important parts of the quotations and to take notes on the questions, activities that keep students attentive and engaged.

Lessons usually take ten to fifteen minutes, although some questions and exercises may take longer. Using *Voice Lessons* two to three times a week is optimum for maintaining student interest and encouraging student learning. I recommend rotating categories after every five lessons. For example, after five diction lessons, teach five detail lessons, and so on until students complete twenty-five lessons. Then begin the cycle again.

To hold students accountable for *Voice Lessons*, I require them to take notes on the discussion questions and to submit the application exercises in writing. I collect written work after every five lessons. Since most of the work is oral, I simply skim the written work to ensure students are attentive and practicing. My intent is to give teachers a practical classroom resource that promotes student learning without increasing teacher workload.

I have included suggestions for answering the discussion questions in the “Discussion Suggestions” section, found in the back of the book. These are suggestions only. Undoubtedly, there are many other answers equally valid and more insightful. My intention is to spark discussion and encourage thought.

I wish you well in your work. We have the opportunity to shape students’ voices. May they ring strong and true.

Diction

L E S S O N S

Diction

Consider:

Art is the **antidote** that can call us back from the edge of numbness, restoring the ability to feel for another.

— Barbara Kingsolver, *High Tide in Tucson*

Discuss:

1. By using the word *antidote*, what does the author imply about the inability to feel for another?
2. If we changed the word *antidote* to *gift*, what effect would it have on the meaning of the sentence?

Apply:

Brainstorm with the class and develop a list of medical terms; then write a sentence using a medical term to characterize art. Explain to the class the effect this term has on the meaning of the sentence.

Diction

Consider:

As I watched, the sun broke weakly through, brightened the rich red of the fawns, and **kindled** their white spots.

— E. B. White, “Twins,” *Poems and Sketches of E.B. White*

Discuss:

1. What kind of flame does *kindled* imply? How does this verb suit the purpose of the sentence?

2. Would the sentence be strengthened or weakened by changing *the sun broke weakly through* to *the sun burst through*? Explain the effect this change would have on the use of the verb *kindled*.

Apply:

Brainstorm with the class a list of action verbs that demonstrate the effects of sunlight.

Diction

Consider:

An aged man is but a paltry thing
A **tattered** coat upon a stick....

— W. B. Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium”

Discuss:

1. What picture is created by the use of the word *tattered*?
2. By understanding the connotations of the word *tattered*, what do we understand about the persona’s attitude toward *an aged man*?

Apply:

List three adjectives that can be used to describe a pair of shoes. Each adjective should connote a different feeling about the shoes. Discuss your list with a partner. Share one of the best adjectives with the class.

Diction

Consider:

The man sighed **hugely**.

— E. Annie Proulx, *The Shipping News*

Discuss:

1. What does it mean to sigh hugely?
2. How would the meaning of the sentence change if we rewrote it as:

*The man sighed **loudly**.*

Apply:

Fill in the blank below with an adverb:

The man coughed _____.

Your adverb should make the cough express an attitude. For example, the cough could express contempt, desperation, or propriety. Do not state the attitude. Instead, let the adverb imply it. Share your sentence with the class.

Diction

Consider:

A rowan* like a **lipsticked** girl.

*a small deciduous tree native to Europe, having white flower clusters and orange berries.

— Seamus Heaney, “Song,” *Field Work*

Discuss:

1. Other than the color, what comes to mind when you think of a *lipsticked* girl?
2. How would it change the meaning and feeling of the line if, instead of *lipsticked girl*, the author wrote *girl with lipstick on*?

Apply:

Write a simile comparing a tree with a domesticated animal. In your simile, use a word that is normally used as a noun (like *lipstick*) as an adjective (like *lipsticked*). Share your simile with the class.

Diction

Consider:

Abuelito under a **bald** light bulb, under a ceiling **dusty** with flies, puffs his cigar and counts money soft and wrinkled as old Kleenex.

— Sandra Cisneros, “Tepeyac,” *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*

Discuss:

1. How can a ceiling be *dusty* with flies? Are the flies plentiful or sparse? Active or still? Clustered or evenly distributed?

2. What does Cisneros mean by a *bald* light bulb? What does this reveal about Abuelito’s room?

Apply:

Take Cisneros’s phrase, *under a ceiling dusty with flies*, and write a new phrase by substituting the word *dusty* with a different adjective. Explain to a partner the impact of your new adjective on the sentence.

Diction

Consider:

Meanwhile, the United States Army, **thirsting** for revenge, was **prowling** the country north and west of the Black Hills, killing Indians wherever they could be found.

— Dee Brown, *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee*

Discuss:

1. What are the connotations of *thirsting*? What feelings are evoked by this diction?
2. What are the connotations of *prowling*? What kind of animals prowl? What attitude toward the U.S. army does this diction convey?

Apply:

Use an eating or drinking verb in a sentence which expresses anger about a parking ticket. Do not use the verb to literally express eating or drinking. Instead, express your anger through the verb. Use Brown's sentence as a model. Share your sentence with a partner.

Diction

Consider:

Most men wear their belts low here, there being so many **outstanding** bellies, some big enough to have names of their own and be formally introduced. Those men don't **suck** them in or hide them in loose shirts; they **let them hang free**, they pat them, they stroke them as they stand around and talk.

— Garrison Keillor, "Home," *Lake Wobegon Days*

Discuss:

1. What is the usual meaning of *outstanding*? What is its meaning here? What does this pun reveal about the attitude of the author toward his subject?

2. Read the second sentence again. How would the level of formality change if we changed *suck* to *pull* and *let them hang free* to *accept them*?

Apply:

Write a sentence or two describing an unattractive but beloved relative. In your description, use words that describe the unattractive features honestly yet reveal that you care about this person, that you accept and even admire him/her, complete with defects. Use Keillor's description as a model. Throw in a pun if you can think of one. Share your description with the class.

Diction

Consider:

Doc awakened very slowly and clumsily like a fat man getting out of a swimming pool. His mind **broke the surface** and fell back several times.

— John Steinbeck, *Cannery Row*

Discuss:

1. What is the subject of the verb *broke*? What does this tell you about Doc's ability to control his thinking at this point in the story?

2. To what does *surface* refer? Remember that good writers often strive for complexity rather than simplicity.

Apply:

List three active verbs that could be used to complete the sentence below. Act out one of these verbs for the class, demonstrating the verb's connotation.

He _____ into the crowded auditorium.

Diction

Consider:

Pots rattled in the kitchen where Momma was frying corn cakes to go with vegetable soup for supper, and the homey sounds and scents **cushioned** me as I read of Jane Eyre in the **cold** English mansion of a **colder** English gentleman.

— Maya Angelou, *I know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Discuss:

1. By using the word *cushioned*, what does Angelou imply about her life and Jane Eyre's life?
2. What is the difference between the *cold* of the English mansion and the *cold* of the English gentleman? What does Angelou's diction convey about her attitude toward Jane's life?

Apply:

Write a sentence using a strong verb to connect one part of your life with another. For example, you could connect a book you are reading and your mother's dinner preparations, as Maya Angelou does; or you could connect a classroom lecture with sounds outside. Be creative. Use an exact verb (like *cushioned*), one which connotes the attitude you want to convey. Share your sentence with the class.

Diction

Consider:

Once I am sure there's nothing going on
I step inside, letting the door **thud** shut.

— Philip Larkin, "Church Going"

Discuss:

1. What feelings are evoked by the word *thud*?

2. How would the meaning change if the speaker let the door *slam* shut?

Apply:

Fill in the following chart. In the first column, record five different verbs which express the closing of a door; in the second column, record the feelings these verbs evoke.

Verbs expressing the closing of a door	Feeling evoked by the verb
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Diction

Consider:

We have been making policy on the basis of myths, the first of them that trade with China will **dulcify** Peking policy. That won't work; there was plenty of trade between North and South when **our** Civil War came on.

— William F. Buckley, Jr., “Like It or Not, Pat Buchanan’s Political Rhetoric Has True Grit”

Discuss:

1. What does *dulcify* mean? What attitude toward his readers does his diction convey?

2. What attitude does Buckley communicate by writing *our* Civil War instead of *the* Civil War?

Apply:

Fill in the following chart, substituting uncommon words for the common, boldface word in the sentence below. Your new words should change the connotative meaning of the sentence. Use your thesaurus to find unusual words. Share your chart with a partner.

She gazed at the **tidy** room.

Synonym for *tidy*

Effect on the meaning of the sentence

Synonym for <i>tidy</i>	Effect on the meaning of the sentence

Diction

Consider:

Close by the fire sat an old man whose countenance was **furrowed** with distress.

— James Boswell, *Boswell's London Journal*

Discuss:

1. What does the word *furrowed* connote about the man's distress?

2. How would the impact of the sentence be changed if *furrowed* were changed to *lined*?

Apply:

Write a sentence using a verb to describe a facial expression. Imply through your verb choice that the expression is intense. Use Boswell's sentence as a model. Share your sentence with a partner.

Diction

Consider:

Her face was white and sharp and slightly gleaming in the candlelight, like **bone**. No hint of pink. And the hair. So fine, so pale, so much, crimped by its plaiting into springy zigzag tresses, **clouding** neck and shoulders, shining metallic in the candlelight, catching a hint, there it was, of green again, from the reflection of a large glazed cache-pot containing a vigorous sword-leafed fern.

— A. S. Byatt, *Possession: A Romance*

Discuss:

1. When the author describes a face “like *bone*,” what feelings are suggested?
2. How can hair be “*clouding* neck and shoulders”? What picture does this word create for the reader?

Apply:

Substitute another noun for *bone* in sentence one. Your substitution should change the meaning and feeling of the sentence. Share your sentence with the class and explain how your noun changes the sentence’s connotation and impact.

Diction

Consider:

“Ahhh,” the crowd went, “Ahhh,” as at the most beautiful of fireworks, for the sky was alive now, one instant a **pond** and at the next a **womb** of new turns: “Ahhh,” went the crowd, “Ahhh!”

— Norman Mailer, “Of a Fire on the Moon”

Discuss:

1. This quote is from a description of the Apollo-Saturn launching. The Saturn was a huge rocket that launched the Apollo space capsule, a three-man ship headed for the moon. Why is the sky described as a *pond* then a *womb*? Contrast the two words. What happens that changes the sky from a *pond* to a *womb*?
2. What does Mailer’s use of the word *womb* tell the reader about his attitude toward the launch?

Apply:

Think of a concert you have attended. Write one sentence which expresses a transformation of the concert stage. Using Mailer’s description as a model, call the stage first a _____ then a _____. Do not explain the transformation or your attitude toward it. Instead, let your diction alone communicate both the transformation and your attitude. Share your sentence with a partner.

Diction

Consider:

. . . then Satan first knew pain,
And writh'd him to and fro convolv'd; so sore
The **grinding** sword with **discontinuous** wound
Passed through him.

— John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book VI, lines 327-330

Discuss:

1. By using the word *grinding*, what does Milton imply about the pain inflicted by the sword?

2. What does *discontinuous* mean? How does the use of *discontinuous* reinforce the idea of a *grinding* sword?

Apply:

Pantomime for the class the motion of a *grinding* sword, a *slashing* sword, and a *piercing* sword. Discuss the context in which a writer might use the three different kinds of swords.

Diction

Consider:

Newts are the most common of salamanders. Their skin is a **lighted** green, like water in a sunlit pond, and rows of very bright red dots line their backs. They have gills as larvae; as they grow they turn a luminescent red, lose their gills, and walk out of the water to spend a few years padding around in damp places on the forest floor. Their feet look like **fingered baby hands**, and they walk in the same leg patterns as all four-footed creatures — dogs, mules, and, for that matter, lesser pandas.

— Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

Discuss:

1. What is the difference between a *lighted* green and a *light* green? Which one do you think creates a more vivid picture?

2. What is the effect of saying *fingered baby hands* instead of simply *baby hands*?

Apply:

Compare the neck of each of the animals below to something familiar. Use Dillard's comparison (*Their feet look like fingered baby hands*) as a model.

The elephant's neck looks like _____

The gazelle's neck looks like _____

The flamingo's neck looks like _____

Share one of your comparisons with the class and explain the attitude it conveys about the animal.

Diction

Consider:

This is earthquake
Weather!
Honor and Hunger
Walk **lean**
Together.

— Langston Hughes, “Today”

Discuss:

1. What does *lean* mean in this context?

2. Is *lean* a verb, an adjective, or both? How does this uncertainty and complexity contribute to the impact of the lines?

Apply:

With a partner, read the poem aloud several times, changing the meaning of *lean* with your voice. Discuss how you controlled your voice to make the changes.

Diction

Consider:

Twenty **bodies** were thrown out of our wagon. Then the train resumed its journey, leaving behind it a few hundred naked **dead**, deprived of burial, in the deep snow of a field in Poland.

— Elie Wiesel, *Night*

Discuss:

1. This scene describes the transporting of Jews from Auschwitz to Buchenwald, both concentration camps in World War II. In this selection, Wiesel never refers to the men who die on the journey as men. Instead, he refers to them as *bodies* or simply *dead*. How does his diction shape the reader's understanding of the horror?

2. How would the meaning change if we substituted *dead people* for *bodies*?

Apply:

Change the italicized word below to a word that disassociates the reader from the true action of the sentence.

Fifteen chickens were *slaughtered* for the feast.

Share your new sentence with the class and explain its effect.

Detail

L E S S O N S

Detail

Consider:

An old man, Don Tomasito, the baker, played the tuba. When he blew into the huge mouthpiece, his face would turn purple and his thousand wrinkles would disappear as his skin filled out.

— Alberto Alvaro Rios, “The Iguana Killer”

Discuss:

1. The first sentence is a general statement. How does the second sentence enrich and intensify the first?
2. Contrast the second sentence with the following:

When he blew the tuba, his face turned purple and his cheeks puffed out.

Which sentence more effectively expresses an attitude toward Tomasito? What is that attitude and how is it communicated?

Apply:

Describe someone jumping over a puddle. Your first sentence should be general, stating the action simply. Your second sentence should clarify and intensify the action through detail. Share your sentence with a partner.

Detail

Consider:

CHARLEY (to WILLY): Why must everybody like you? Who liked J. P. Morgan? Was he impressive? In a Turkish bath he'd look like a butcher. But with his pockets on he was very well liked. Now listen, Willy, I know you don't like me, and nobody can say I'm in love with you, but I'll give you a job because – just for the hell of it, put it that way. Now what do you say?

— Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*

Discuss:

1. Who was J. P. Morgan? What is a Turkish bath? What picture comes to mind when someone is said to look like a butcher? How do these details contribute to the point Charley is trying to make?

2. How would the passage be different if Charley said J. P. Morgan would look like a *baker* in a Turkish bath?

Apply:

Think of someone famous and powerful. Use detail to create an unflattering but accurate description of the physical appearance of this famous person. Model your description on Miller's description of J. P. Morgan. Share your description with a partner.

Detail

Consider:

To those who saw him often he seemed almost like two men: one the merry monarch of the hunt and banquet and procession, the friend of children, the patron of every kind of sport; the other the cold, acute observer of the audience chamber or the Council, watching vigilantly, weighing arguments, refusing except under the stress of great events to speak his own mind.

— Winston Churchill, “King Henry VIII,” *Churchill’s History of the English-Speaking Peoples*

Discuss:

1. Churchill draws attention to the contrasting sides of Henry VIII through detail. How is the impact of this sentence strengthened by the *order* of the details’ presentation?

2. What is Churchill’s attitude toward Henry? What specific details reveal this attitude?

Apply:

Think of someone you know who has two strong sides to his/her personality. Using Churchill’s sentence as a model, write a sentence which captures – through detail – these two sides. Share your sentence with a partner.

Detail

Consider:

The truck lurched down the goat path, over the bridge and swung south toward El Puerto. I watched carefully all that we left behind. We passed Rosie's house and at the clothesline right at the edge of the cliff there was a young girl hanging out brightly colored garments. She was soon lost in the furrow of dust the truck raised.

— Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima*

Discuss:

1. Circle the words that provide specific detail and contribute to the power of the passage.

2. Contrast the third sentence with:

We passed Rosie's house and saw a girl hanging out the clothes.

Explain the difference in impact.

Apply:

Rewrite the passage eliminating the specific detail. Read your rewrite aloud to the class. How does the elimination of detail change the meaning of the passage? Discuss this with a partner.

Detail

Consider:

He went on till he came to the first milestone, which stood in the bank, half-way up a steep hill. He rested his basket on the top of the stone, placed his elbows on it, and gave way to a convulsive twitch, which was worse than sob, because it was so hard and so dry.

— Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

Discuss:

1. How do the details in this passage prepare you for the *convulsive twitch* at the end of the passage?
2. This passage does not describe the character's face at all. What effect does this lack of detail have on the reader?

Apply:

Plan a pantomime of the scene described in this passage and perform it for the class. After several people have performed their pantomimes, discuss the facial expressions they used in their pantomimes. Discuss the similarities and differences and how they relate to the use of detail in the passage.

Detail

Consider:

The dog stood up and growled like a lion, stiff-standing hackles, teeth uncovered as he lashed up his fury for the charge. Tea Cake split the water like an otter, opening his knife as he dived. The dog raced down the back-bone of the cow to the attack and Janie screamed and slipped far back on the tail of the cow, just out of reach of the dog's angry jaws.

— Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Discuss:

1. Which details reveal that the dog has rabies? What effect do these details have on the reader?

2. Contrast the details used to describe Tea Cake (the male protagonist) and Janie (the female protagonist). What do these details reveal about the author's attitude toward these two characters?

Apply:

Think of two contrasting characters. Write a sentence for each showing their reaction to a fight. Do not explain the different reactions; instead, show the different reactions through use of detail. Share your sentences with the class.

Detail

Consider:

MRS. VENABLE: . . . and the sand all alive, all alive, as the hatched sea-turtles made their dash for the sea, while the birds hovered and swooped to attack and hovered and – swooped to attack! They were diving down on the hatched sea-turtles, turning them over to expose their soft undersides, tearing the undersides open and rending and eating their flesh.

— Tennessee Williams, *Suddenly Last Summer*

Discuss:

1. Williams uses the repetition of detail in three places in this passage. Underline the three places and discuss whether the repetition enhances or detracts from the overall effect of the passage.
2. What is Mrs. Venable's attitude toward the scene she describes? Which specific details reveal this attitude?

Apply:

With a partner write a detailed description of a sporting event. Emphasize some violent or extreme action by repeating at least two vivid details. Try to create a feeling of revulsion through your choice of details. Share your description with the class.

Detail

Consider:

If my mother was in a singing mood, it wasn't so bad. She would sing about hard times, bad times, and somebody-done-gone-and-left-me times. But her voice was so sweet and her singing-eyes so melty I found myself longing for those hard times, yearning to be grown without "a thin di-I-ime to my name." I looked forward to the delicious time when "my man" would leave me, when I would "hate to see that evening sun go down . . ." 'cause then I would know "my man has left this town." Misery colored by the greens and blues in my mother's voice took all of the grief out of the words and left me with a conviction that pain was not only endurable, it was sweet.

— Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

Discuss:

1. Why are parts of the passage in quotes? What do the quoted details add to the passage?
2. Which details in the passage contribute to the conclusion that pain is sweet? Fill in the chart below to show how Morrison sets up this oxymoron.

"Sweet" Details	"Pain" Details

Apply:

Think of a paradoxical feeling such as sweet pain, healthful illness, or frightening comfort; then make a chart listing two details for each side of the paradox. Use the chart above as a model. Share your chart with a partner.

Detail

Consider:

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;
— W. H. Auden, “Musee des Beaux Arts”

Discuss:

1. *Suffering* is a general term. What is a general term that sums up the detail in line 4?

2. Compare line 4 with the following:

While someone else is not suffering;

Why is Auden’s line more effective?

Apply:

Substitute the word *laziness* for *suffering* in line one of the poem. Now rewrite line four to complete the following:

While someone else is _____ or _____ or
_____.

Your new line should give details about the *opposite* condition of laziness. Use Auden’s line as a model. Share the “new” stanzas with a partner.

Detail

Consider:

Under the hard, tough cloak of the struggle for existence in which money and enormous white refrigerators and shining, massive, brutally-fast cars and fine, expensive clothing had ostensibly overwhelmed the qualities of men that were good and gentle and just, there still beat a heart of kindness and patience and forgiveness.

— John Okada, *No-No Boy*

Discuss:

1. What does Okada's choice of detail reveal about his attitude toward money?
2. How would the elimination of *and enormous white refrigerators and shining, massive, brutally-fast cars and fine, expensive clothing* modify the meaning and effectiveness of the sentence? Fill in the chart below with details that support your understanding of Okada's attitude toward money.

Money Details	People Details

Apply:

Choose a general noun then list three concrete noun phrases that reflect your opinion of the general noun. For example, Okada uses *money* as a general noun. He then expresses his opinion of money with detailed noun phrases: *enormous white refrigerators*; *shining, massive, brutally-fast cars*; and *fine, expensive clothing*. Share your list with the class.

Detail

Consider:

I rounded the hut and saw a man's dead body sprawling in the mud. He was an Indian, a black Dravidian coolie almost naked, and he could not have been dead many minutes. The people said that the elephant had come suddenly upon him round the corner of the hut, caught him with its trunk, put its foot on his back and ground him into the earth. This was the rainy season and the ground was soft, and his face had scored a trench a foot deep and a couple of yards long. He was lying on his belly with arms crucified and head sharply twisted to one side. His face was coated with mud, the eyes wide open, the teeth bared and grinning with an expression of unendurable agony.

— George Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant"

Discuss:

1. What is the author's attitude toward the coolie's death? What details in the passage reveal this attitude?
2. Examine the last sentence of this paragraph. How would it have affected the overall impact had Orwell written, **his** eyes wide open, **his** teeth bared and grinning. . . ?

Apply:

Think of an event that you have personally witnessed which horrified you. Your job is to describe that event and evoke the horror. Do not state or explain that you were horrified. Instead, use detail to describe the event and reveal your attitude. Share your description with the class.

Detail

Consider:

Until I returned to Cuba, I never realized how many blues exist. The aquamarines near the shoreline, the azures of deeper waters, the eggshell blues beneath my grandmother's eyes, the fragile indigos tracking her hands. There's a blue, too, in the curves of the palms, and the edges of the words we speak, a blue tinge to the sand and the seashells and the plump gulls on the beach. The mole by Abuela's mouth is also blue, a vanishing blue.

— Cristina Garcia, *Dreaming in Cuban*

Discuss:

1. The narrator details the blues of the landscape and the blues of her grandmother (Abuela). What connection is revealed by this juxtaposition of images?

2. Why is the last *blue* in the passage a *vanishing blue*?

Apply:

Choose a color and describe a scene using at least three varieties of that color. Try to mix details of landscape and people. Share your description with the class.

Detail

Consider:

How fine it is to enter some old town, walled and turreted, just at approach of nightfall, or to come to some straggling village, with the lights streaming through the surrounding gloom; and then, after inquiring for the best entertainment that the place affords, to “take one’s ease at one’s inn”!

— William Hazlitt, “On Going a Journey”

Discuss:

1. What details support the generalization, *how fine it is*?
2. What feelings are evoked by the details of the town (*old, walled, turreted*)? How does this selection of detail communicate Hazlitt’s attitude toward the town?

Apply:

Imagine going to a motel after a long day on the road. The motel is the only place to sleep in town, and the next town is 200 miles away. The motel is old and dirty; your room is shabby and dark. Plan a brief monologue which expresses your attitude toward this room. Include specific references to the details that both produce and reveal your attitude. Perform your monologue for the class.

Detail

Consider:

She was wearing her usual at-home vesture. . . . It consisted mostly of a hoary midnight-blue Japanese kimono. She almost invariably wore it through the apartment during the day. With its many occultish-looking folds, it also served as the repository for the paraphernalia of a very heavy cigarette smoker and an amateur handyman; two oversized pockets had been added at the hips, and they usually contained two or three packs of cigarettes, several match folders, a screwdriver, a claw-end hammer, a Boy Scout knife that had once belonged to one of her sons, and an enamel faucet handle or two, plus an assortment of screws, nails, hinges, and ball-bearing casters – all of which tended to make Mrs. Glass chink faintly as she moved about in her large apartment.

— J. D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey*

Discuss:

1. What does the detail in this passage reveal about Mrs. Glass's character? In other words, how does the detail give you a picture of her looks and insight into her character?

2. How would the meaning of the fourth sentence (*With its many . . .*) be different without the detail that follows the semicolon?

Apply:

Sketch a picture of Mrs. Glass. Include in your sketch the details from the passage that you think are most expressive of the author's attitude toward Mrs. Glass.

Detail

Consider:

In fact right behind her Gabriel could be seen piloting Freddy Malins across the landing. The latter, a young man of about forty, was of Gabriel's size and build, with very round shoulders. His face was fleshy and pallid, touched with colour only at the thick hanging lobes of his ears and at the wide wings of his nose. He had coarse features, a blunt nose, a convex and receding brow, tumid and protruded lips. His heavy-lidded eyes and the disorder of his scanty hair made him look sleepy.

— James Joyce, "The Dead"

Discuss:

1. Joyce uses many specific details to describe Freddy's physical appearance. Fill in the chart below and indicate (✓) whether each detail is objective (making an observation) or evaluative (making a judgment).

Detail	Objective	Evaluative

2. What is Joyce's attitude toward Freddy? Which specific details reveal this attitude?

Apply:

Write a paragraph describing a character's personality by describing his/her physical traits. Do not make any direct statements about his/her personality or character. Instead, use detail about appearance to capture character. Read your paragraph to a partner and discuss which physical traits are stereotypes and which traits are valid indications of character.

Detail

Consider:

We went upstairs, through period bedrooms swathed in rose and lavender silk and vivid with new flowers, through dressing-rooms and poolrooms, and bathrooms, with sunken baths – intruding into one chamber where a disheveled man in pajamas was doing liver exercises on the floor.

— F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

Discuss:

1. List three general adjectives that you could use to describe this house. Explain the connection between the detail in Fitzgerald's sentence and the adjectives you have chosen.

2. How does the *disheveled man in pajamas . . . doing liver exercises on the floor* help create the mood and atmosphere of the house?

Apply:

Rewrite the sentence eliminating the specific detail. Read your sentence to a partner and discuss the change in impact and meaning.

Detail

Consider:

My grandfather took me to the back of his house, to a room that my mother said was private, that she had yanked me away from when I once had tried to look. It had a bead curtain at the door and we passed through it and the beads rustled like tall grass. The room was dim, lit by candles, and it smelled of incense, and my grandfather stood me before a little shrine with flowers and a smoking incense bowl and two brass candlesticks and between them a photo of a man in a Chinese mandarin hat.

— Robert Olen Butler, “Mr. Green,” *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*

Discuss:

1. The first sentence states that the room is private. The author then uses specific detail to illustrate the privacy. How does this detail define and focus the privacy of the room?
2. Most of the passage is filled with detail describing the room. Which detail do you think adds most to the impact of the passage? Why?

Apply:

Write a sentence in which you use an action to characterize the state of loneliness. Use the first sentence of this passage as a model. Share your sentence with a partner.

Detail

Consider:

The wild gander leads his flock through the cool night,
Ya-honk he says, and sounds it down to me like an invitation,
The pert may suppose it meaningless, but I listening close,
Find its purpose and place up there toward the wintry sky.

The sharp-hoof'd moose of the north, the cat on the house-sill, the chickadee, the prairie-dog,
The litter of the grunting sow as they tug at her teats,
The brood of the turkey-hen and she with her half-spread wings,
I see in them and myself the same old law.

— Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself,” *Leaves of Grass*

Discuss:

1. What is the conclusion of the last line? Which details in the passage support this conclusion?
2. The animals in these stanzas are specific and detailed. In contrast, the ambience (*the cool night, the wintry sky*) is more general. What attitude is revealed by this difference?

Apply:

Rewrite the passage, describing the night and the sky in great detail and the animals in general terms. Read your version to the class and lead a discussion about how this change shifts the meaning of the passage.

Detail

Consider:

The day has been hot and sultry. The sun has set behind great banks of clouds which are piling up on the northwestern horizon. Now that the light is beginning to fade, the great masses of cumulus, which are slowly gathering and rising higher toward the zenith, are lit up by pale flashes of sheet-lightning.

— W. J. Holland, “Sugaring for Moths,” *The Moth Book*

Discuss:

1. What are the details that contribute to the reader’s mental picture of the clouds? List these details and discuss the significance of the order of their presentation.

2. What is *sheet-lightning*? Why is it more effective to say *sheet-lightning* than *lightning*?

Apply:

Write three sentences that vividly describe a country scene. In your description use at least two details drawn from the world of science. Use your dictionary if you need to. Remember that it is better to name a specific tree than to use the general word *tree*. Share one of your sentences with the class.

Imagery

L E S S O N S

Imagery

Consider:

The many men, so beautiful!
And they all dead did lie:
And a thousand thousand slimy things
Lived on; and so did I.

Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire:
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coiled and swam; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

— Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”

Discuss:

1. These stanzas from “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” show the Mariner’s changing attitude toward the creatures of the sea. What is the Mariner’s attitude in the first stanza? What image reveals this attitude?
2. What is the Mariner’s attitude in the second stanza? Analyze the imagery that reveals this change.

Apply:

Think of a cat or a dog you can describe easily. First, write a description which reveals a positive attitude toward the animal. Then think of the same animal and write a description which reveals a negative attitude. Remember that the animal’s looks do not change; only your attitude changes. Use imagery rather than explanation to create your descriptions.

Imagery

Consider:

And now nothing but drums, a battery of drums, the conga drums jamming out, in a *descarga*, and the drummers lifting their heads and shaking under some kind of spell. There's rain drums, like pitter-patter pitter-patter but a hundred times faster, and then slamming-the-door drums and dropping-the-bucket drums, kicking-the-car-fender drums. Then circus drums, then coconuts-falling-out-of-the-trees-and-thumping-against-the-ground drums, then lion-skin drums, then the-wacking-of-a-hand-against-a-wall drums, the-beating-of-a-pillow drums, heavy-stones-against-a-wall drums, then the-thickest-forest-tree-trunks-pounding drums, and then the-mountain-rumble drums, then the-little-birds-learning-to-fly drums and the-big-birds-alighting-on-a-rooftop-and-fanning-their-immense-wings drums . . .

— Oscar Hijuelos, *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*

Discuss:

1. Read the passage aloud. How does Hijuelos create the auditory imagery of drumming? In other words, how do the words imitate the sounds they represent?

2. Hijuelos repeats the word *then* eight times in this passage. What does this repetition contribute to the auditory image of drumming?

Apply:

Write a paragraph in which you capture two different sounds at a sporting event. In your paragraph try to imitate the sounds themselves with your words. Don't worry about correct grammar. Instead, focus on creating a vivid auditory image. Share your paragraph with a partner.

Imagery

Consider:

She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again. Edna heard her father's voice and her sister Margaret's. She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air.

— Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*

Discuss:

1. Although the narrator “looks into the distance,” the images are primarily auditory. What are the auditory images in the passage? What mood do these images create?

2. The last sentence of this passage contains an olfactory image (*the musky odor of pinks fill the air*). What effect does the use of an olfactory image, after a series of auditory images, have on the reader?

Apply:

Write a paragraph in which you create a scene through auditory imagery. The purpose of your paragraph is to create a calm, peaceful mood. Use one olfactory image to enhance the mood created by auditory imagery.

Imagery

Consider:

It was a mine town, uranium most recently. Dust devils whirled sand off the mountains. Even after the heaviest of rains, the water seeped back into the ground, between stones, and the earth was parched again.

— Linda Hogan, “Making Do”

Discuss:

1. What feelings do you associate with images of dusty mountains and dry earth?
2. There are two images associated with land in the third sentence. Identify the two images and compare and contrast the feelings these images evoke.

Apply:

Write a sentence describing a rainstorm using imagery that produces a positive response; then write a sentence describing a rainstorm with imagery that produces a negative response. Share your sentences with the class. Briefly discuss how the images create the positive and negative responses.

Imagery

Consider:

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
And fiddled whisper music on those strings
And bats with baby faces in the violet light
Whistled, and beat their wings
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
And upside down in air were towers
Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours
And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.

— T. S. Eliot, “The Waste Land”

Discuss:

1. Paraphrase the image of the first two lines. What mood does the image create?
2. List the auditory images in these lines. How do these images help create the mood of the passage?

Apply:

Write four or five lines of poetry which create – through imagery alone – a mood of absolute triumph. Do not state the nature of the triumph; do not explain or analyze. Instead, let the images create the feeling of triumph. Use both auditory and visual images. Share your lines with a partner.

Imagery

Consider:

At first I saw only water so clear it magnified the fibers in the walls of the gourd. On the surface, I saw only my own round reflection. The old man encircled the neck of the gourd with his thumb and index finger and gave it a shake. As the water shook, then settled, the colors and lights shimmered into a picture, not reflecting anything I could see around me. There at the bottom of the gourd were my mother and father scanning the sky, which was where I was.

— Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*

Discuss:

1. What kind of imagery is used in this passage? Circle the images.

2. Compare and contrast the imagery of the last sentence with the imagery of the first four sentences.

Apply:

Write a sentence which uses precise visual imagery to describe a simple action. Share your sentence with a partner.

Imagery

Consider:

I sat on the stump of a tree at his feet, and below us stretched the land, the great expanse of the forests, somber under the sunshine, rolling like a sea, with glints of winding rivers, the grey spots of villages, and here and there a clearing, like an islet of light amongst the dark waves of continuous tree-tops. A brooding gloom lay over this vast and monotonous landscape; the light fell on it as if into an abyss. The land devoured the sunshine; only far off, along the coast, the empty ocean, smooth and polished within the faint haze, seemed to rise up to the sky in a wall of steel.

— Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*

Discuss:

1. Fill out the chart below with images from the passage:

Images of Land	Images of Sea

2. What attitude toward the land and the sea do these images convey?

Apply:

Select a partner and describe an utterly silent experience you have had. Your partner should write down one visual (and nonfigurative) image from your description. Switch with your partner and repeat the procedure. Share the images with the class.

Imagery

Consider:

I also enjoy canoeing, and I suppose you will smile when I say that I especially like it on moonlight nights. I cannot, it is true, see the moon climb up the sky behind the pines and steal softly across the heavens, making a shining path for us to follow; but I know she is there, and as I lie back among the pillows and put my hand in the water, I fancy that I feel the shimmer of her garments as she passes. Sometimes a daring little fish slips between my fingers, and often a pond-lily presses shyly against my hand. Frequently, as we emerge from the shelter of a cove or inlet, I am suddenly conscious of the spaciousness of the air about me. A luminous warmth seems to enfold me.

— Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life*

Discuss:

1. Since Helen Keller was blind and deaf, tactile imagery becomes a focus in her writing. Underline the tactile images in this passage.
2. Which images in the passage are more specific: visual or tactile? Support your answers with reference to the passage.

Apply:

Close your eyes and touch some familiar objects at your desk. Then open your eyes and describe to a partner how those objects felt. Be sure to use specific, tactile images, not visual images or figurative language.

Imagery

Consider:

Queen: There is a willow grows askant the brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
There with fantastic garlands did she make
Of crowsflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples . . .
There on the pendent boughs her coronet* weeds (5) *coronet
Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke,
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up,
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds,* (10) *hymns
As one incapable of* her own distress, *insensible to
Or like a creature native and indued* *endowed
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay (15)
To muddy death.

— William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Discuss:

1. Examine lines 8-13. How does the imagery in these lines help the reader understand that Ophelia (the *she* of the lines) is mad?
2. Line 10 is not figurative. Would it strengthen or weaken the line to change the image to a simile such as, “Which time she sang like a flawed recording”? Defend your opinion.

Apply:

Write an image which captures a moment of intense exuberance. Your image should be no more than one sentence and should contain no figurative language. Share your image with the class.

Imagery

Consider:

A ripe guava is yellow, although some varieties have a pink tinge. The skin is thick, firm, and sweet. Its heart is bright pink and almost solid with seeds. The most delicious part of the guava surrounds the tiny seeds. If you don't know how to eat a guava, the seeds end up in the crevices between your teeth.

When you bite into a ripe guava, your teeth must grip the bumpy surface and sink into the thick edible skin without hitting the center. . . .

A green guava is sour and hard. You bite into it at its widest point, because it's easier to grasp with your teeth. You hear the skin, meat, and seeds crunching inside your head, while the inside of your mouth explodes in little spurts of sour.

— Esmeralda Santiago, *When I Was Puerto Rican*

Discuss:

1. The imagery in the second sentence is simple and direct. What effects do such simplicity and directness have on the reader?
2. Santiago uses an adjective (*sour*) as a noun in her final image. What effect does this have on the meaning of the image?

Apply:

Write a sentence which contains an image that captures the taste of something you hate. Your image should contain an adjective used as a noun. Share your image with a partner.

Imagery

Consider:

As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair
In leprosy; thin dry blades pricked the mud
Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood.
One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare,
Stood stupefied, however he came there:
Thrust out past service from the devil's stud!

— Robert Browning, “Child Roland to the Dark Tower Came”

Discuss:

1. What feelings are produced by the image of the grass in lines 1-3?
2. Does the imagery of the horse (lines 4-6) inspire sympathy? Explain your answer with direct references to specific images.

Apply:

Write a description of an old, sick person. Convey an attitude of horror through the imagery of your description. Do not explain the sense of horror; do not use figurative language. Instead, use specific imagery to convey the meaning of your description. Share your description with the class.

Imagery

Consider:

All the hedges are singing with yellow birds!
A boy runs by with lemons in his hands.

— Rita Dove, “Notes From a Tunisian Journal”

Discuss:

1. How does the image of the boy in the second line intensify your understanding of the hedges in the first line?

2. How would the effect be different if the second line read, “A boy runs by with apples in his hands”?

Apply:

Write a sentence that conveys a feeling of extreme exuberance through the image of someone walking and carrying an object. Use only images, no figurative language. Share your sentence with a partner.

Imagery

Consider:

In the midst of poverty and want, Felix carried with pleasure to his sister the first little white flower that peeped out from beneath the snowy ground.

— Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

Discuss:

1. What do you understand about Felix from the imagery of this sentence?

2. How would the effect be different if Felix carried his sister a big bouquet of spring flowers?

Apply:

Write a sentence which expresses the joy of renewal through a visual image. Share your sentence with a partner.

Imagery

Consider:

This is the time of year
when almost every night
the frail, illegal fire balloons appear.
Climbing the mountain height,

rising toward a saint
still honored in these parts,
the paper chambers flush and fill with light
that comes and goes, like hearts.

— Elizabeth Bishop, “The Armadillo (for Robert Lowell)”

Discuss:

1. Read the two stanzas aloud. What kind of imagery does Bishop use in these lines? How does the use of imagery contribute to the reader’s understanding of the lines?

2. The image of the balloons rising and filling with light ends with a simile (*like hearts*). How is the effect of the simile different from that of the image?

Apply:

Write an image of an unusual sight you have witnessed on a vacation. Use ten words or less. Now describe the same sight using a simile. Discuss the differences in effect with a partner.

Imagery

Consider:

There were some dirty plates
and a glass of milk
beside her on a small table
near the rank, disheveled bed –

Wrinkled and nearly blind
she lay and snored
rousing with anger in her tones
to cry for food.

— William Carlos Williams, “The Last Words of my English Grandmother”

Discuss:

1. These stanzas contain visual, olfactory, auditory, and gustatory images. Fill in the chart below with concrete images from the poem.

Visual	Olfactory	Auditory	Gustatory

2. Contrast the attitude toward the old woman in the two stanzas. How does it change? What images create this change in attitude?

Apply:

Think of a group of young people cheering at a sporting event. Write a paragraph describing them in a positive way; then write another paragraph describing them in a negative way. Use at least two types of imagery in your descriptions. Post your descriptions around the room.

Imagery

Consider:

The *egwugwu* house was now a pandemonium of quavering voices: *Aru oyim de de de dei!* filled the air as the spirits of the ancestors, just emerged from the earth, greeted themselves in their esoteric language.

— Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

Discuss:

1. Read this passage aloud. How does Achebe’s use of the Ibo language contribute to the reader’s ability to “hear” the auditory images?

2. Compare Achebe’s passage with:

The “egwugwu” house was now full of voices which filled the air as the spirits of the ancestors, just emerged from the earth, greeted themselves in their esoteric language.

In which passage can the reader “hear” the voices? How does the ability to “hear” the voices help readers understand the passage?

Apply:

Write a sentence about a parade. Create an auditory image by capturing sounds and actions. Use Achebe’s sentence as a model. Share your sentence with a partner and see if your partner understands the image.

Imagery

Consider:

The rainy night had ushered in a misty morning – half frost, half drizzle – and temporary brooks crossed our path, gurgling from the uplands.

— Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*

Discuss:

1. Brontë uses both visual and auditory imagery in this passage. Which words create visual images? Which words create auditory images? Which words create both?

2. What feelings are traditionally associated with rain, mist, and frost? How would the feeling of this passage be different if the *rainy night had ushered in a brilliant, sunny morning*?

Apply:

Write two sentences that create a mood of terror. Use visual and auditory imagery to describe the weather, thereby setting and reinforcing the mood. Share your sentences with the class.

Imagery

Consider:

I was born the year of the loon
in a great commotion, My mother –
who used to pack \$500 cash
in the shoulders of her gambling coat,
who had always considered herself
the family’s “First Son” –
took one look at me
and lit out again
for a vacation in Sumatra.
Her brother purchased my baby clothes;
I’ve seen them, little clown suits
of silk and color.

— Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, “Chronicle”

Discuss:

1. Examine the image of the baby clothes in lines 11-12: *little clown suits of silk and color*. No specific color is mentioned. What effect does this have on the meaning of the lines?
2. Contrast the description of the mother’s *gambling coat* in lines 3 and 4 with the image of the baby clothes in line 11. What attitude do these images reveal about the mother?

Apply:

With a partner, think of items of clothing that can suggest either seriousness or frivolity. Identify four such items of clothing then fill in the following chart:

Item of Clothing	Images Expressing Seriousness	Images Expressing Frivolity

Imagery

Consider:

Part of a moon was falling down the west,
Dragging the whole sky with it to the hills.
Its light poured softly in her lap. She saw it
And spread her apron to it. She put out her hand
Among the harp-like morning-glory strings,
Taut with the dew from garden bed to eaves,
As if she played unheard some tenderness
That wrought on him beside her in the night.
“Warren,” she said, “he has come home to die:
You needn’t be afraid he’ll leave you this time.”

— Robert Frost, “The Death of the Hired Man”

Discuss:

1. Identify the visual, auditory, and tactile images in the lines above.
2. How does the poet use imagery to prepare the reader for the announcement in lines 9-10?

Apply:

Write a one-sentence description of some element in a garden or yard. Be certain your sentence contains a visual or tactile image. Share your sentence with a partner.

Syntax

L E S S O N S

Syntax

Consider:

The impact of poetry is so hard and direct that for the moment there is no other sensation except that of the poem itself. What profound depths we visit then – how sudden and complete is our immersion! There is nothing here to catch hold of; nothing to stay us in our flight. . . . The poet is always our contemporary. Our being for the moment is centered and constricted, as in any violent shock of personal emotion.

— Virginia Woolf, “How Should One Read a Book?”

Discuss:

1. Woolf uses a variety of sentence types in this selection. Among them is the exclamatory sentence. Identify the exclamatory sentence and explain its effect.

2. Classify each sentence as to length: short, medium, or long. How is the meaning of the passage reinforced and clarified by sentence length?

Apply:

Write a declarative sentence about college entrance examinations. Then write an exclamatory sentence which amplifies or clarifies the declarative sentence. Share your sentences with the class.

Syntax

Consider:

Brother, continue to listen.

You say that you are sent to instruct us how to worship the Great Spirit agreeably to his mind; and, if we do not take hold of the religion which you white people teach, we shall be unhappy hereafter. You say that you are right and we are lost. How do we know this to be true?

— Chief Red Jacket, “Chief Red Jacket Rejects a Change of Religion”

Discuss:

1. The words *you say* are repeated several times in the sentence. What is the repetition’s function?

2. The question at the end of the passage is a rhetorical question. What attitude toward the audience is expressed by the use of a rhetorical question?

Apply:

Write a three-sentence paragraph modeled after Chief Red Jacket’s passage. The first two sentences should contain repetition; the third sentence should be a rhetorical question. Your topic is school uniforms. Share your sentence with the class.

Syntax

Consider:

No sooner had the reverberation of my blows sunk into silence, then I was answered by a voice from within the tomb! – by a cry, at first muffled and broken, like the sobbing of a child, and then quickly swelling into one long, loud, and continuous scream, utterly anomalous and inhuman – a howl! – a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of hell, conjointly from the throats of the damned in their agony and of the demons that exult in the damnation.

— Edgar Allan Poe, “The Black Cat”

Discuss:

1. The dashes in this long sentence set off a series of appositives. (An appositive is a noun or noun phrase placed beside another noun or noun phrase and used to identify or explain it.) What noun phrase is explained by the appositives?
2. This sentence makes syntactic and semantic sense if it ends with the first exclamation point. What do the appositives add to the meaning and effectiveness of the sentence?

Apply:

Rewrite Poe’s sentence, changing it into a series of short sentences. Read your sentences to the class and discuss how the use of short sentences changes the overall meaning of the original.

Syntax

Consider:

Now, the use of culture is that it helps us, by means of its spiritual standard of perfection, to regard wealth but as machinery, and not only to say as a matter of words that we regard wealth but as machinery, but really to perceive and feel that it is so. If it were not for this purging effect wrought upon our minds by culture, the whole world, the future as well as the present, would inevitably belong to the Philistines.

— Matthew Arnold, “Sweetness and Light,” *Culture and Anarchy*

Discuss:

1. Put the first sentence into your own words. How does the sentence’s complexity add to its impact?
2. Where are the most important words in the second sentence of this passage – at the beginning or at the end? What effect does this have on the reader?

Apply:

Listen to people’s sentences as you talk to them today and keep a record of where speakers place important words: at the beginning or the end of a sentence. Come to the next class with a record of at least 5 sentences and notation indicating where the important words in those sentences were placed. Which is most common, beginning or end weight? Compare your results with the results of others in your class and discuss the implication of these results for analyzing prose.

Syntax

Consider:

The seven years' difference in our ages lay between us like a chasm: I wondered if these years would ever operate between us as a bridge.

— James Baldwin, “Sonny’s Blues”

Discuss:

1. What function does the colon serve in this sentence?
2. How would the meaning and impact of the sentence change if the sentence read as follows:

The seven years' difference in our ages lay between us like a chasm, and I wondered if these years would ever operate between us as a bridge.

Apply:

Write two independent clauses; join the two with a colon, giving emphasis to the independent clause which follows the colon. Use Baldwin’s sentence as a model. Share your sentence with the class.

Syntax

Consider:

I slowed still more, my shadow pacing me, dragging its head through the weeds that hid the fence.

— William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*

Discuss:

1. In this sentence, form imitates meaning. How does Faulkner slow the sentence down, reinforcing the sentence's meaning?

2. How would the impact of the sentence change if we rewrote the sentence to read:

I slowed still more. My shadow paced me and dragged its head through the weed-obscured fence.

Apply:

Using Faulkner's sentence as a model, write a sentence that expresses reluctance. Use at least two phrases and one subordinate clause to reinforce the meaning of your sentence. Share your sentence with the class and explain how your syntax reinforces your meaning.

Syntax

Consider:

I hear an army charging upon the land,
And the thunder of horses plunging, foam about their knees:
Arrogant, in black armor, behind them stand,
Disdaining the reins, with fluttering whips, the charioteers.
— James Joyce, “I Hear an Army Charging Upon the Land”

Discuss:

1. The subject of the verb *stand* in line 3 is *charioteers* at the end of line 4. How does this inversion of the normal word order (subject-verb) affect the impact of those lines?
2. Examine the adjectives and adjective phrases in lines 3 and 4: *arrogant, in black armor*. What word do these adjectives modify? How does this unusual word order affect the impact of the lines?

Apply:

Write a sentence about a car crash. In your sentence invert the normal order of subject and verb. Try to make your sentence sound natural and powerful. Share your sentence with a partner.

Syntax

Consider:

“I’m clean, Carlito, I’m not using.” My voice dropped to a whisper. “I’m not using.” And oh, God, I found my mind, thinking, *Wonder what it would be like again? Wonder what it would be like again? Wonder what it would be like again? Wonder . . .*

— Piri Thomas, *Down These Mean Streets*

Discuss:

1. Thomas repeats the question *Wonder what it would be like again?* three times in the passage. What effect does this repetition have on the impact of the passage?

2. At the end of the passage, Thomas uses ellipses to indicate an omission of words required for complete syntactical construction but unnecessary for understanding. What words are missing? What impact does this omission have on the passage?

Apply:

Imagine that you are very hungry and are on the way to the best restaurant in town. Describe what you feel as you anticipate a great dinner. In your description use questions and ellipses, as Thomas does. Share your description with the class and explain the impact the questions and ellipses have on the description.

Syntax

Consider:

He slowly ventured into the pond. The bottom was deep, soft clay, he sank in, and the water clasped dead cold round his legs.

— D. H. Lawrence, “The Horse-Dealer’s Daughter”

Discuss:

1. What effect does sentence length have on this passage?

2. Examine the second sentence. How does the structure of the sentence reinforce the meaning?

Apply:

Write a sentence in which you make an inanimate object active by using an active verb. Remember that your verb is not just an action verb (like *talk* or *flow*). The verb must make your inanimate object into an actor, a doer. Share your sentence with the class.

Syntax

Consider:

The graces of writing and conversation are of different kinds, and though he who excels in one might have been with opportunities and application equally successful in the other, yet as many please by extemporary talk, though utterly unacquainted with the more accurate method and more laboured beauties which composition requires; so it is very possible that men, wholly accustomed to works of study, may be without that readiness of conception and affluence of language, always necessary to colloquial entertainment.

— Samuel Johnson, “An Author’s Writing and Conversation Contrasted”

Discuss:

1. The main idea of this sentence is stated in the first ten words. What purpose does the rest of the sentence serve?

2. What is the purpose of the semicolon? How does the use of a semicolon reinforce the meaning of this sentence?

Apply:

Rewrite this sentence in modern English, retaining its meaning and basic structure. Your sentence may be shorter than Johnson’s! Share your sentence with a partner.

Syntax

Consider:

But George sat stiffly on the bank and looked at his right hand that had thrown the gun away.

— John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*

Discuss:

1. The subordinate clause, *that had thrown the gun away*, is used as an adjective to modify the word *hand*. What effect does this have on the meaning of the sentence?

2. Compare Steinbeck's sentence with the following:

George, who had thrown the gun away, sat stiffly on the bank and looked at his right hand.

Both sentences have subordinate clauses that modify nouns, but the clauses modify different nouns. Fill out the following chart indicating the subordinate clauses, the nouns they modify, and the effect of this focus on meaning.

	Subordinate Clause	Noun	Effect on Meaning
Steinbeck's sentence			
New sentence			

Apply:

Write a subordinate clause that completes the following sentence:

Sarah gazed at the road and thought about her plans _____

_____.

Your clause should modify the word *plans* and give meaning to the sentence. Share your sentence with a partner.

Syntax

Consider:

When the moment is ripe, only the fanatic can hatch a genuine mass movement. Without him the disaffection engendered by militant men of words remains undirected and can vent itself only in pointless and easily suppressed disorders. Without him the initiated reforms, even when drastic, leave the old way of life unchanged, and any change in government usually amounts to no more than a transfer of power from one set of men of action to another. Without him there can perhaps be no new beginning.

— Eric Hoffer, “The Fanatics”

Discuss:

1. This passage uses the phrase “without him” three times. What effect does this have on the overall impact of the passage?

2. How does the length of the last sentence affect the meaning of the passage?

Apply:

Start with the following sentence.

Of all the instruments of modern technology, only the computer brings people closer together.

Now add two sentences which amplify the first sentence. Each of these sentences should begin with a prepositional phrase. Share your sentences with the class.

Syntax

Consider:

There is another and curious class of cases in which close external resemblance does not depend on adaptation to similar habits of life, but has been gained for the sake of protection. I allude to the wonderful manner in which certain butterflies imitate . . . other and quite distinct species. . . . The mockers and mocked always inhabit the same region; we never find an imitator living remote from the form which it imitates. The mockers are almost invariably rare insects; the mocked in almost every case abound in swarms.

— Charles Darwin, “Analogical Resemblances,” *The Origin of Species*

Discuss:

1. Why does Darwin use a semicolon rather than a period in the last two sentences of this passage?

2. What effect does the sentence structure have on the meaning of the passage?

Apply:

Write a sentence with two independent clauses describing two schools in your area. Join the two clauses with a semicolon. The two clauses should emphasize the differences between the two schools. Remember not to use a conjunction to join the two clauses. Share your sentence with a partner.

Syntax

Consider:

HIGGINS: Yes: that's what drives me mad: the silly people don't know their own silly business.

— George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*

Discuss:

1. What is the purpose of the two colons in this sentence?
2. What function does the *yes* at the beginning of the sentence serve?

Apply:

Write a sentence about a TV show you deplore. Using Shaw's sentence as a model, state what you don't like about the show in a succinct clause following a colon. Share your sentence with a partner.

Syntax

Consider:

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death; nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure, then from thee much more must flow;

— John Donne, “Death be not Proud”

Discuss:

1. What is the effect of opening the first sentence with the imperative mood of the verb *to be*?
2. In the first clause of the second sentence (lines 5-6), the verb is understood: in the second clause of this sentence, the subject is understood. What verb is omitted? What subject is omitted? What effect does this have on the meaning of the lines?

Apply:

Write a sentence about credit cards which begins with a verb in the imperative mood. Share your sentence with a partner and discuss the attitude toward credit cards your opening verb reveals.

Syntax

Consider:

It occurs to her that she should record this flash of insight in her journal – otherwise she is sure to forget, for she is someone who is always learning and forgetting and obliged to learn again – but the act of recording requires that she remove her gloves, rummage through her bag for her pen and for the notebook itself. This is more than she is capable of doing.

— Carol Shields, *The Stone Diaries*

Discuss:

1. What is the purpose of the dashes in the first sentence?
2. A short sentence follows a much longer sentence in this passage. What effect does this have on the reader?

Apply:

Write a short, emphatic sentence to follow the long sentence below.

It seems inevitable that the Internet, with all of its potential, will be ubiquitous in the future – for technology can both distract us and focus us, make our lives easier and clog our lives with a perplexing array of choices – but the effect it will have on the quality of our lives is still undetermined.

Share your sentence with the class and discuss its effect on the passage.

Syntax

Consider:

While we do these things, these deeply momentous things, let us be very clear, and make very clear to all the world, what our motives and our objects are.

— Woodrow Wilson, “President Woodrow Wilson Presents an Ideal to the War Congress”

Discuss:

1. This is a periodic sentence, one in which the subject and verb are delayed until the final part of the sentence. This creates syntactic tension and emphasizes the ideas at the end of the sentence. What ideas are stressed in this periodic sentence?

2. How would it change the effectiveness of the sentence if we rewrote it as:

Our motives and objects must be clear to all the world while we do these deeply momentous things.

Apply:

Using Wilson’s sentence as a model, write a periodic sentence about music censorship. Read your sentence to the class and explain how the syntax of your sentence affects the meaning.

Syntax

Consider:

She is a woman who misses moisture, who has always loved low green hedges and ferns.

— Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*

Discuss:

1. Both of the subordinate clauses in this sentence modify *woman*. What effect does this parallel structure have on the sentence?

2. How would it change the feeling evoked by the sentence if it read:

She misses moisture and has always loved low green hedges and ferns.

Apply:

Write a sentence like Ondaatje's which layers two or more subordinate clauses to evoke a sharp image. Begin with "She was a friend who . . ." Share your sentence with the class.

Tone

L E S S O N S

Tone

Consider:

It's true. If you want to buy a spring suit, the choice selection occurs in February: a bathing suit, March: back-to-school clothes, July: a fur coat, August. Did I tell you about the week I gave in to a mad-Mitty desire to buy a bathing suit in August?

The clerk, swathed in a long-sleeved woolen dress which made her look for the world like Teddy Snowcrop, was aghast. "Surely, you are putting me on," she said. "A bathing suit! In August!"

"That's right," I said firmly, "and I am not leaving this store until you show me one."

She shrugged helplessly. "But surely you are aware of the fact that we haven't had a bathing suit in stock since the first of June. Our – no offense – White Elephant sale was June third and we unload – rather, disposed of all of our suits at that time."

— Erma Bombeck, *At Wit's End*

Discuss:

1. What is the attitude of the writer toward the subject matter?

2. What diction and details does Bombeck use to express this attitude? In other words, what diction and details create the tone of the passage?

Apply:

Write down two words that describe the tone of this passage. Begin a class chart of tone descriptors, listing the tone vocabulary you and your fellow students have collected. Add to the chart as you discover new tone words throughout these exercises.

Tone

Consider:

But that is Cooper's way; frequently he will explain and justify little things that do not need it and then make up for this by as frequently failing to explain important ones that do need it. For instance he allowed that astute and cautious person, Deerslayer-Hawkeye, to throw his rifle heedlessly down and leave it lying on the ground where some hostile Indians would presently be sure to find it – a rifle prized by that person above all things else in the earth – and the reader gets no word of explanation of that strange act. There was a reason, but it wouldn't bear exposure. Cooper meant to get a fine dramatic effect out of the finding of the rifle by the Indians, and he accomplished this at the happy time; but all the same, Hawkeye could have hidden the rifle in a quarter of a minute where the Indians could not have found it. Cooper couldn't think of any way to explain why Hawkeye didn't do that, so he just shirked the difficulty and did not explain at all.

— Mark Twain, "Cooper's Prose Style," *Letters from the Earth*

Discuss:

1. What is Twain's tone in this passage? What is central to the tone of this passage: the attitude toward the speaker, the subject, or the reader?

2. How does Twain create the tone?

Apply:

Write a paragraph about a movie you have recently seen. Create a critical, disparaging tone through your choice of details. Use Twain's paragraph as a model. Share your paragraph with the class.

Tone

Consider:

It's his first exposure to Third World passion. He thought only Americans had informed political opinion – other people staged coups out of spite and misery. It's an unwelcome revelation to him that a reasonably educated and rational man like Ro would die for things that he, Brent, has never heard of and would rather laugh about. Ro was tortured in jail. Franny has taken off her earphones. Electrodes, canes, freezing tanks. He leaves nothing out. Something's gotten into Ro.

Dad looks sick. The meaning of Thanksgiving should not be so explicit.

— Bharati Mukherjee, "Orbiting"

Discuss:

1. What is the narrator's attitude toward Brent (Dad)? Cite your evidence.
2. How does the syntax in this passage help create the tone?

Apply:

Rewrite the last five sentences in the first paragraph, making the five short sentences into two longer sentences. Read your rewritten sentences to a partner and discuss how the longer sentences affect the tone of the passage.

Tone

Consider:

Microphone feedback kept blaring out the speaker's words, but I got the outline. Withdrawal of our troops from Vietnam. Recognition of Cuba. Immediate commutation of student loans. Until all these demands were met, the speaker said he considered himself in a state of unconditional war with the United States government.

I laughed out loud.

— Tobias Wolff, "Civilian"

Discuss:

1. What is the attitude of the narrator toward the political speaker in this passage? How do you know?

2. How does the use of a short, direct sentence at the end of the passage (*I laughed out loud*) contribute to the tone?

Apply:

Substitute a new sentence for *I laughed out loud*. Your new sentence should express support for the political speaker. Read the passage – with your new sentence – to a partner and explain how your sentence changes the tone of the passage.

Tone

Consider:

What a thrill –
My thumb instead of an onion.
The top quite gone
Except for a sort of a hinge

Of skin,
A flap like a hat,
dead white.
Then a red plush.

— Sylvia Plath, “Cut: For Susan O’Neill Roe”

Discuss:

1. What is the poet’s attitude toward the cut? What words, images and details create the tone?
2. In the second stanza, Plath uses colors to intensify the tone. The flap of skin is *dead white*, the blood is *a red plush*. What attitude toward the cut and, by implication, toward life itself, does this reveal?

Apply:

Write a short description of an automobile accident. Create a tone of complete objectivity – as if you were from another planet and had absolutely no emotional reaction to the accident. Read your description to a partner and discuss the details, images, and diction that create your tone.

Tone

Consider:

I perceived, as I read, how the collective white man had been actually nothing but a piratical opportunist who used Faustian machinations to make his own Christianity his initial wedge in criminal conquests. First, always “religiously,” he branded “heathen” and “pagan” labels upon ancient non-white cultures and civilizations. The stage thus set, he then turned upon his non-white victims his weapons of war.

— Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Discuss:

1. What is the author’s attitude toward *the collective white man*?

2. What is the tone of the passage? Circle and discuss the words that reveal the tone of this passage.

Apply:

Rewrite the first sentence of the Malcolm X passage to read like positive propaganda for “the collective white man.” Your sentence should have the same basic meaning as Malcolm X’s sentence, but the tone should be positive and noncritical. Share your sentence with a partner and discuss the power words have to reveal and shape attitudes.

Tone

Consider:

There is no drop of water in the ocean, not even in the deepest parts of the abyss, that does not know and respond to the mysterious forces that create the tide. No other force that affects the sea is so strong. Compared with the tide the wind-created waves are surface movements felt, at most, no more than a hundred fathoms below the surface.

— Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us*

Discuss:

1. What is Carson's attitude toward the tide?
2. Carson uses negative constructions several times in this paragraph (“There is **no** . . . , **not** even in the . . . , that does **not** know. . . . **No** other force....”). Yet her tone is uniformly positive and reverential. How does the use of negatives create such a positive tone?

Apply:

Rewrite the first sentence of the passage, changing all of the negative constructions to positive ones. What effect does it have on the tone? Share your sentence with a partner and discuss the effect.

Tone

Consider:

I can't forget
How she stood at the top of that long marble stair
Amazed, and then with a sleepy pirouette
Went dancing slowly down to the fountain-quieted square;

Nothing upon her face
But some impersonal loneliness, – not then a girl,
But as it were a reverie of the place,
A called-for falling glide and whirl;

As when a leaf, petal, or thin chip
Is drawn to the falls of a pool and, circling a moment above it,
Rides on over the lip –
Perfectly beautiful, perfectly ignorant of it.

— Richard Wilber, “Piazza Di Spagna, Early Morning”

Discuss:

1. What is the speaker's attitude toward the woman he describes? List the images, diction, and details that support your position.
2. Consider the last line of the poem. How does the repetition of the syntactical structure (adverb adjective, adverb adjective) support the tone of the poem?

Apply:

Using Wilber's poetry as a model, write a sentence which expresses stunned admiration for a stranger. Use repetition of syntactical structure to create your tone. Share your sentence with the class.

Tone

Consider:

Proper Presents for the Wedding Party

DEAR MISS MANNERS:

What are the proper presents to give bridesmaids and my fiancé's ushers? Is something so untraditional as a good book – different books for each, of course, according to their tastes – all right instead of things like bracelets and cuff links they may never use?

GENTLE READER:

Are you trying to give these people something they might enjoy, or are you trying to do the proper thing by them? Books, at best, are only read, but useless, monogrammed silver objects that cannot be returned serve to remind one of the occasion of their presentation every time one sees them tarnishing away, unused. Cuff links and bracelets are all right, since everyone has too many of them, but silver golf tees or toothpaste tube squeezers are ideal.

— Judith Martin, *Miss Manners' Guide to Excruciatingly Correct Behavior*

Discuss:

1. What is Miss Manners' attitude toward gifts for bridesmaids and ushers? What is her attitude toward gifts in general?
2. What is the tone of the passage? Note that the attitude toward gifts does not determine the tone of this passage. What attitude does determine the tone? Circle and discuss the details, images, and diction that reveal the tone.

Apply:

Write an answer to the following request for advice. The tone of your reply should be critical and condescending. Express your attitude through details, images, and diction; do not be openly critical. Share your reply with the class.

DEAR ADVICE PERSON:

I like to go to school, but I hate homework. My parents and teachers say I have to do my homework. But it takes way too much of my time. I would rather watch T.V. Most of my friends hate homework too. What should I do?

Tone

Consider:

Certainly we must face this fact: if the American press, as a mass medium, has formed the minds of America, the mass has also formed the medium. There is action, reaction, and interaction going on ceaselessly between the newspaper-buying public and the editors. What is wrong with the American press is what is in part wrong with American society.

Is this, then, to exonerate the American press for its failures to give the American people more tasteful and more illuminating reading matter? Can the American press seek to be excused from responsibility for public lack of information as TV and radio often do, on the grounds that, after all, “we have to give the people what they want or we will go out of business”?

— Clare Boothe Luce, “What’s Wrong with the American Press?”

Discuss:

1. What is Luce’s attitude toward the American press?

2. How does the use of rhetorical questions help express this attitude? In other words, how do the rhetorical questions help set the tone?

Apply:

Write an answer to the rhetorical questions in the passage. Adopt a tone of sneering derision as you express the attitude that the American press can indeed be excused from responsibility in order to make more money. Use at least one rhetorical question in your reply. Share your answer with the class.

Tone

Consider:

The best part of human language, properly so called, is derived from reflection on the acts of the mind itself. It is formed by a voluntary appropriation of fixed symbols to internal acts, to processes and results of imagination, the greater part of which have no place in the consciousness of uneducated man; though in civilized society, by imitation and passive remembrance of what they hear from their religious instructors and other superiors, the most uneducated share in the harvest which they neither sowed nor reaped.

— Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*

Discuss:

1. What is Coleridge's attitude toward the uneducated man?

2. How does Coleridge's choice of details, diction, and syntax reveal his attitude toward the uneducated man?

Apply:

Rewrite the first sentence of this passage. Keep the same basic ideas that Coleridge expresses, but change the tone. Your tone should express contempt for academic elitism. Choose details, diction, and syntax that support your tone. Share your sentence with the class.

Tone

Consider:

The dry brown coughing beneath their feet,
(Only a while, for the handyman is on his way)
These people walk their golden gardens.
We say ourselves fortunate to be driving by today.

That we may look at them, in their gardens where
The summer ripeness rots. But not raggedly.
Even the leaves fall down in lovelier patterns here.
And the refuse, the refuse is a neat brilliancy.

— Gwendolyn Brooks, “Beverly Hills, Chicago”

Discuss:

1. Who is the *we* (line 4) of the poem? Who are *these people* (line 3)? What is the poem’s attitude toward *these people*?

2. Examine lines 6-8. Even *rot* and *refuse* is *neat* and *brilliant*, and *leaves fall down in lovelier patterns here*. What image does the diction create? How does that image contribute to the tone?

Apply:

Write two or three sentences which reveal a tone of disdain in describing a clique at school. Use imagery or concrete detail to create the tone. Do not directly state your disdain; the images and detail should carry the tone. Work with a partner. Share your sentences with the class.

Tone

Consider:

Everybody latched on to you during these trips, congressmen, businessmen and directors and presidents of this and that. Every hotshot in town wanted to be next to *the astronaut*. For the first ten or fifteen minutes it was enough for them to breathe the same air you breathed and occupy the same space as your famous body. But then they began looking at you . . . and waiting . . . Waiting for what? Well, dummy! – waiting for you to say a few words! They wanted something hot! If you were one of the seven greatest pilots and seven bravest men in America, then obviously you must be fascinating to listen to.

— Tom Wolfe, *The Right Stuff*

Discuss:

1. What is Wolfe's attitude toward the astronaut? How do you know?

2. What is Wolfe's attitude toward the people who come to see the astronaut? What diction and syntax reveal this attitude?

Apply:

Think about your favorite musician or movie star. Using Wolfe's paragraph as a model, write a paragraph, addressed directly to the star, about his/her relationship with the fans. Your tone should be conversational and enthusiastic. Share your paragraph with a partner.

Tone

Consider:

And I started to play. It was so beautiful. I was so caught up in how lovely I looked that at first I didn't worry how I would sound. So it was a surprise to me when I hit the first wrong note and I realized something didn't sound quite right. And then I hit another and another followed that. A chill started at the top of my head and began to trickle down. Yet I couldn't stop playing, as though my hands were bewitched. I kept thinking my fingers would adjust themselves back, like a train switching to the right track. I played this strange jumble through two repeats, the sour notes staying with me all the way to the end.

— Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*

Discuss:

1. How does the narrator's attitude toward her performance change in the passage?
2. How does the author's use of detail, diction, and imagery reveal the narrator's changing attitude?

Apply:

Write a paragraph about an outing that turned out badly. In your paragraph, express a change in tone. Begin with a positive tone and end with a tone of disappointment. Use detail, diction, and imagery to create the changing tone. Share your paragraph with a partner.

Tone

Consider:

DiMaggio burst upon the nation just nine years after Charles Lindbergh almost inadvertently invented celebrity of a degree – of a kind, really – never before experienced. DiMaggio played a team game but somehow knew, in the intuitive way an artist has of knowing things, that our rough-and-tumble democracy, leveling though it is, responds to an individual with an aura of remoteness.

— George F. Will, “The First Michael Jordan”

Discuss:

1. What is Will’s attitude toward DiMaggio?
2. Fill out the following chart with specific diction, detail, imagery, and syntax that create the tone.

Diction	Detail	Imagery	Syntax

Apply:

Write a paragraph about a personal hero. In your paragraph create a tone of admiration and respect. With Will’s paragraph as a model, try to utilize all of the elements – detail, diction, imagery, and syntax – to create the tone. Share your paragraph with the class.

Tone

Consider:

In Pride, in reasoning Pride, our error lies;
All quit their sphere, and rush into the skies.
Pride still is aiming at the best abodes,
Men would be Angels, Angels would be Gods.
Aspiring to be Gods, if Angels fell,
Aspiring to be Angels, Men rebel:
And who but wishes to invert the laws
Of Order, sins against th' Eternal Cause.

— Alexander Pope, “An Essay on Man”

Discuss:

1. What is Pope’s attitude toward pride, the subject matter? Cite your evidence.
2. What is the tone of this passage? What attitude underlies the tone?

Apply:

Write a short paragraph of advice about drinking and driving. Show through your diction and choice of detail that you believe yourself superior in every way to your reader. Never directly state your superiority. Instead, let the tone of your paragraph carry your haughty attitude.

Tone

Consider:

Indeed, it strikes me that to lay this obscenity off to some mitigating factor, no matter how worthy, is to make the crime smaller than it is and offer rationalizations that insult the sufferers.

Meaning that I don't care what video games these wretches played. Don't give a damn if they were picked on by other kids.

It makes no difference.

This was a special category of evil.

— Leonard Pitts, Jr., “Why? Maybe It’s a Blessing Not to Know Why Those Two Boys Did It”

Discuss:

1. What is Pitts’ attitude toward the perpetrators of the crimes in Littleton, Colorado? What words reveal his attitude?

2. In the second paragraph of this passage, Pitts uses two incomplete sentences. How does his syntax contribute to the tone?

Apply:

Think of an issue for which you have a decided opinion. Write a paragraph defending this opinion. Create a tone of righteous indignation. Use at least one incomplete sentence to help create your tone. Use Pitts’ passage as a model. Share your paragraph with the class.

Tone

Consider:

JACK (slowly and hesitantly): Gwendolen – Cecily – it is very painful for me to be forced to speak the truth. It is the first time in my life that I have ever been reduced to such a painful position, and I am really quite inexperienced in doing anything of the kind. However I will tell you quite frankly that I have no brother Ernest. I have no brother at all. I never had a brother in my life, and I certainly have not the smallest intention of ever having one in the future.

— Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Ernest*

Discuss:

1. What is Wilde's attitude toward Jack? What specific diction and detail reveal this attitude?

2. What is Wilde's attitude toward the reader? How do you know?

Apply:

Rewrite Jack's lines to reflect the attitude that lying is terribly wrong. Adopt a disdainful attitude toward your audience and a scornful attitude toward Jack. Share your lines with the class.

Tone

Consider:

. . . The gracious Duncan
Was pitied of Macbeth. Marry, he was dead.
And the right valiant Banquo walked too late;
Whom, you may say (if't please you) Fleance killed,
For Fleance fled. Men must not walk too late. (5) *can avoid thinking
Who cannot want the thought* how monstrous
It was for Malcolm and for Donalbain
To kill their gracious father? Damned fact*, *deed
How it did grieve Macbeth! Did he not straight,
In pious rage, the two delinquents tear (10) *slaves
That were the slaves of drink and thralls* of sleep?
Was not that nobly done? Ay, and wisely too,
For 'twould have angered any heart alive
To hear the men deny't. So that I say
He has borne* all things well; and I do think (15) *carried off
That, had he Duncan's sons under his key
(As, an't* please heaven, he shall not), they should find *if it
What "twere to kill a father. So should Fleance.

— William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

Discuss:

1. The speaker in this passage is a lord in Macbeth's court. His attitude is critical of Macbeth, but his tone is not critical, angry, or vengeful. How would you characterize the tone of this passage? Defend your views.
2. Shakespeare uses the simple image of a man walking in lines 3 and 5. How does this image contribute to the tone of the passage?

Apply:

Write a paragraph which, in a direct and angry manner, states that Macbeth is a tyrant who killed Duncan and Banquo to gain power. Read your paragraph to the class and discuss the effect this change in tone has on a reader.

Tone

Consider:

Shug come over and she and Sofia hug.

Shug say, Girl, you look like a good time, you do.

That when I notice that Shug talk and act sometimes like a man. Men say stuff like that to women, Girl, you look like a good time. Women always talk bout hair and health. How many babies living or dead, or got teef. Not bout how some woman they hugging on look like a good time.

— Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

Discuss:

1. What is the tone of this passage: what attitude toward Shug, toward men, and toward women underlies the passage?
2. Walker repeats the phrase, *look like a good time*, three times in the passage. How does this use of repetition help create the tone of the passage?

Apply:

Write a short paragraph about someone you know which, through the use of repetition, expresses a tone of admiration. Share your paragraph with a partner.