

FOR HIGH  
SCHOOL TEACHERS

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# VOICE LESSONS

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

NANCY DEAN

# **V O I C E**

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## **L E S S O N S**

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

*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

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**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:

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.

<b>Verbs expressing the closing of a door</b>	<b>Feeling evoked by the verb</b>
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**

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

# Diction

## Consider:

Wind **rocks** the car.  
We sit parked by the river,  
silence between our teeth.  
Birds scatter across islands  
of broken ice . . .

— Adrienne Rich, “Like This Together, for A.H.C.”

## Discuss:

1. What are the feelings produced by the word *rocks*? Are the feelings gentle, violent, or both?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How would the meaning change if we changed the first line to *Wind **shakes** the car*?

## Apply:

List with the class different meanings for the verb *rock*. How many of these meanings would make sense in this poem? Remember that the poet often strives to capture complexity rather than a single view or meaning.

# 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

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**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:

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, “Musée 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.



# Imagery

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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 crowsfeet, 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

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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 had been prepared to lie, to bluster, to remain sullenly unresponsive; but, reassured by the good-humored intelligence of the Controller's face, he decided to tell the truth, straightforwardly.

— Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*

## Discuss:

1. What effect does the repetition of infinitives (*to lie, to bluster, to remain*) in the first clause have on the meaning of the sentence? How do these infinitives prepare you for the infinitive phrase (*to tell the truth*) in the second clause?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What is the function of the semicolon in Huxley's sentence?

## Apply:

Write a sentence with two independent clauses connected by a semicolon. In the first clause use a series of infinitives (as in Huxley's sentence). In the second clause, use an infinitive to contradict your first clause. Your topic is a movie you have recently seen. Share your sentence with the class.

# 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:

When I am too sad and too skinny to keep keeping, when I am a tiny thing against so many bricks, then it is I look at trees.

— Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*

## Discuss:

1. What kind of grammatical structure is repeated in this sentence? What is the effect of the repetition?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. This is a periodic sentence, a sentence which delays the subject and verb to the end. What idea is emphasized by the end-focus in this sentence?

## Apply:

Write a periodic sentence about getting a bad grade on a test. Use Cisneros' sentence as a model. Share your sentence with a partner.

# 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
<b>Steinbeck's sentence</b>			
<b>New sentence</b>			

## 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**

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**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:

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.

<b>Diction</b>	<b>Detail</b>	<b>Imagery</b>	<b>Syntax</b>

## 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\*, (5) \*deed  
How it did grieve Macbeth! Did he not straight,  
In pious rage, the two delinquents tear (10)  
That were the slaves of drink and thralls\* of sleep? \*slaves  
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.

# **Discussion Suggestions**



# Discussion Suggestions

## Diction

Barbara Kingsolver, “Jabberwocky,” *High Tide in Tucson*

1. An antidote is something that counteracts a poison. By associating *antidote* with the restoration of ability to feel for another, Kingsolver implies that the inability to feel for another is a poison. Further, this poison is so noxious as to take us to the *edge of numbness*.
2. The use of the word *gift* instead of *antidote* weakens the precision of the sentence and takes away its power of association. *Gift* is a much more general word than *antidote*, and it does not offer the implicit judgement about the inability to feel for another.

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

1. *Kindled* implies the beginning of a fire, a glowing of easily ignited material used to **start** a fire. The purpose of the sentence is to capture a moment, a scene of fawns and early morning. The word *kindled* suits the purpose of the sentence because it aptly expresses the glow of the fawns’ white patches and, as with fire, the newness of the fawns.
2. Students could argue convincingly that the change either strengthens or weakens the sentence. If they argue that the change strengthens the sentence, they should emphasize that the verb *burst* connotes the excitement and violent action of a new beginning, a birth. If they argue it weakens the sentence, they should emphasize the newness of the fawns that corresponds to the newness of the sun’s actions: kindling. In any case, with the change, the verb *kindled* would no longer suit the purpose of this sentence. A sun that *bursts* through the clouds does not *kindle*. The verb *burst* suggests strong, decisive action

not the gentle action of kindling. It may *ignite, enflame, scorch, or singe* – not *kindle*. The word must always suit the purpose.

W. B. Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium”

1. *Tattered* connotes torn, ragged, and hanging. The picture created is one of a coat in shreds hanging loosely on a stick.
2. A *tattered* coat connotes hanging disarray. By understanding this, the reader understands the persona’s attitude toward *an aged man*: that he is insignificant, wasted, and of little value.

E. Annie Proulx, *The Shipping News*

1. To sigh hugely is to sigh in a tremendous way. It implies that the sigh is loud, extended, and profound enough to be seen and heard by a casual observer.
2. The change diminishes the precision of the sentence by giving the sigh a more general description. It thus lessens the sentence’s power to recreate the scene in the reader’s mind. Also, the change evokes only one dimension of the sigh – its sound – thereby abridging the word’s complexity and immediacy.

Seamus Heaney, “Song,” *Field Work*

1. Using the word this way connotes a flashiness, a brassy, in-your-face showiness. Because of its unusual usage (using a noun as an adjective) *lipsticked* becomes the focus of both the line and the image of the girl’s appearance.
2. The change would take away the line’s power to surprise and shock us. Words used in an unexpected and unusual way make us rethink the way we see things and re-examine meaning. If the line read *a girl with lipstick on*, we would have no



clear mental picture; the image of the rowan would become less vivid and memorable.

Sandra Cisneros, *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*

1. A ceiling that is *dusty with flies* has so many flies on it that they almost look like particles of dust. The flies are active, moving in a random fashion like dust particles in air. They are evenly distributed and thick on the ceiling, like dust.
2. A *bald* light bulb is one with no shade or cover of any kind. The image it evokes is one of sparseness and poverty. The *bald* light bulb in the sentence thus reveals Abuelito's room to be poor and sparsely furnished.

Dee Brown, *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee*

1. Along with the inclination to drink, *thirsting* connotes insistent desire, craving, and yearning. The feelings evoked here are intense desire, craving beyond a physical need, and frantic action. This search for revenge goes beyond the rational and sinks to the level of animal impulse.
2. *Prowling* connotes stealth, craftiness, and predation. Animals *prowl* that steal up on their prey: coyotes, wolves, lions, and other animals that stalk to hunt. The diction here places the U.S. army squarely in the company of these predatory animals. The connotation is, of course, purposeful; Brown's attitude toward the army is that they *are* predatory animals.

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

1. *Outstanding* usually means prominent, superior or distinguished. The meaning here is large: "standing out" in its literal sense; prominent – not in importance but in size. The pun reveals an accepting, light-hearted attitude about the subject. It also implies pride, an affectionate acknowledgment of an "accomplishment." Keillor makes a gentle joke rather than criticizing or mocking.

2. The level of formality would change from colloquial to simply informal. The use of *suck* and *let them hang free* is conversational, speech-like slang. This low level of formality reinforces the warmth and humor of the first sentence.

John Steinbeck, *Cannery Row*

1. The subject of the verb *broke* is *mind*. The diction in this sentence makes Doc's mind the actor rather than Doc himself. It tells the reader that Doc is unable to control his mind at this point in the story and that his mind seems to have a life and energy of its own.
2. *Surface* refers to the surface of the swimming pool, from the simile in the previous sentence. It also refers to the surface of consciousness, which Doc is struggling to break through.

Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

1. Angelou implies, through diction, that her life is more comfortable than Jane Eyre's is. The warm sounds and scents of her home comfort her as she reads about Jane's difficult and cold life.
2. The difference lies in focus and degree. The cold of the English mansion is both a literal and figurative one. The mansion is cold in temperature; it is also sterile and barren, lacking emotional warmth and ease. The cold of the English gentleman is strictly emotional. This is the worst sort of cold, for he is *colder* than the mansion itself. Angelou's attitude toward Jane Eyre's life is one of sympathy and concern. Also underlying this passage is gladness for her own life, one far removed from Jane Eyre's.

Philip Larkin, "Church Going"

1. A *thud* is a dull sound, like a heavy object striking a solid surface. It evokes feelings of seriousness and finality. Since it is not a sharp sound, *thud* also connotes a feeling of secrecy, a quiet but unequivocal closing.

2. The **slamming** of a door is sharper and louder than a thud. It connotes impatience or anger. It carries none of the secrecy and finality of the thud. Instead, a **slam** announces itself and seeks attention.

William F. Buckley, Jr., “Like it or not, Pat Buchanan’s Political Rhetoric has True Grit”

1. *Dulcify* means to make gentle or agreeable. Buckley uses high diction, which makes his language formal. High diction can be used to belittle readers or to show respect for them. The diction in this passage indicates respect. Buckley assumes his readers have a good vocabulary and can follow his arguments.
2. First, Buckley is acknowledging that *our* Civil War is not the only civil war in history. In addition, he is expressing an ownership of the war as an American.

Adrienne Rich, “Like This Together, for A.H.C.”

1. The verb *rocks* can produce both a comforting, gentle feeling (as in the rocking of a cradle) and a feeling of impending doom (as in the rocking of a boat). In these lines both connotations are appropriate.
2. Changing the line to *Wind shakes the car* reduces the complexity of the line. No longer does the diction include the possibility of gentle comfort. Instead, the diction indicates only vigorous, jerky motion.

James Boswell, *Boswell’s London Journal*

1. A furrow is a deep wrinkle. It connotes acute distress. The word *furrowed* is specific and concrete, which focuses the reader’s attention and gives emphasis to the distress.
2. The sentence would lack the focus and emphasis of the original. A *lined* countenance shows less distress than a *furrowed* one.

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

1. The word *bone* connotes stark whiteness and smoothness. Because of its association with death, it creates a feeling of ill health. It also connotes impassivity and cool indifference. The face is thus statue-like and expressionless.
2. The picture created by the word *clouding* sets up a contrast to the whiteness of the rest of her description. Her hair is *fine* and *pale*. Her face is *white as bone*. In contrast, her hair *clouds* her neck and shoulders, providing shadows and relief, as the clouds do in a stark, white sky.

Norman Mailer, “Of a Fire on the Moon”

1. The sky is identified with a pond at first because it is simply a container (as the pond contains water, so does the sky contain air), for the Apollo-Saturn to enter. The sky also has the reflective quality of a pond and the same mystery of the unknown. The transformation into a womb happens when the launch is complete. The sky then becomes both receptacle and progenitor for a new era of exploration.
2. His use of the word *womb* tells the reader that Mailer sees great potential in the possibilities of space exploration. The launching of the Apollo-Saturn is viewed like the birth of a baby: full of hope, promise, and joy.

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

1. *Grinding* means to crush or pulverize by friction. A *grinding* sword thus does not produce a clean cut. Instead, it uses a rubbing or crushing motion to inflict its injury. The implication is one of heightened pain brought about by rough motion, the turning and crushing of the sword.
2. *Discontinuous* means marked by breaks or interruptions. The word reinforces the idea of a grinding sword by echoing the motion of the sword. Grinding is an intermittent action, so the wound is discontinuous. The pain is also echoed in the diction.

Relief from intermittent pain carries with it the expectation of more pain: even periods of rest are painful.

Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

1. The difference is one of quality and dimension. *Lighted green* implies a luminescence, a brilliance that almost seems reflected. The diction thus goes beyond color and expresses a relationship with its environment. *Light green* simply expresses a shade of green. *Lighted green* is more specific and exact; it creates a more vivid picture.
2. Since baby hands *do* have fingers, comparing newts' feet to *fingered baby hands* serves to emphasize the fingers, drawing attention to the importance of this characteristic. It is also an unusual use of words. Words used in an unexpected and unusual way make us rethink the way we see things and re-examine meaning.

Langston Hughes, "Today"

1. *Lean* means both inclining for support, and containing little or no fat. Both meanings make sense in this context.
2. *Lean* works as both a verb and an adjective. Hunger can be borne better if

it can *lean* on honor; hunger can make honor *lean*, spare and reluctant; honor and hunger (both physical and emotional) can *lean* on each other; and hunger and honor together can make for a *lean* lifestyle. This uncertainty gives richness and intricacy to the meaning. Poets often strive for multiple meanings of words to give their poetry complexity and depth.

Elie Wiesel, *Night*

1. By referring to the dead men as *bodies* or simply *dead*, Wiesel demonstrates the horror of the experience. Men have become dehumanized both in the eyes of the Nazis and in their own eyes. They have been stripped of all possessions, loved ones, and dignity. When they die, they simply become *bodies*, trash to be discarded. His diction reflects this horror.
2. The passage would lose its power if we substituted *dead people* for *bodies*. The use of *dead people* recognizes a vestige of humanity, which does not suit Wiesel's purpose. The exact diction of the original passage – complete with the horror of its connotation – focuses the reader's attention and allows the reader to respond with conviction to the impact of the scene.

# Discussion Suggestions

## Detail

Thomas Babington Macaulay, “Samuel Johnson”

1. The spoiled hare and the rancid butter add specificity to the general idea that Johnson will eat anything. The other details create a precise, and rather violent, picture of Johnson’s disgusting eating habits. They set up a contrast between his personal habits and his prodigious mind and accomplishments.
2. It takes away the sentence’s power to bring the reader into the scene. It reduces the reader’s involvement and lessens the power to shape the reader’s attitude toward Johnson.

Alberto Alvaro Rios, “The Iguana Killer”

1. It brings the scene into sharp focus. By describing the specific details of his face, the author communicates the intensity of the effort; and the reader can almost hear the sound of the tuba.
2. Rios’s sentence more effectively communicates an attitude toward Tomasito. The attitude is one of admiration. Tomasito is an old man. Nevertheless, he blows into a *huge* mouthpiece, suggesting power. Further, his wrinkles *disappear* as he blows into the trumpet, indicating a timelessness, a return to youthful vigor as he plays.

Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*

1. John Pierpont Morgan (1837-1913) was an U.S. businessman, financier, and steel industrialist. He co-founded the U.S. Steel Corporation in 1901 and served as chairman from 1927 until 1932. He is mentioned here because of his wealth and influence. A Turkish bath is a public bath in which the bather passes through a series of steam rooms of increasing

temperature and then receives a rubdown, massage, and cold shower. A butcher is usually pictured as someone large, strong, and somewhat overweight. The stereotype contrasts with the refined image of someone of great wealth and sophistication, like J. P. Morgan. J. P. Morgan was rich and influential, yet he won no beauty or popularity contest. The details about J. P. Morgan illustrate and exemplify the point that it isn’t necessary for everyone to like Willy or for Willy to be “impressive.”

2. A baker is usually pictured as somewhat overweight; but being a baker does not carry the connotation of brute force, of bone-cracking strength. Further, a baker does not work with raw meat and blood, aspects of a butcher’s job that make him seem more coarse, less refined. A baker is more “earthy.” He creates while a butcher dismembers. If J. P. Morgan “looked like a baker,” the passage would be softened and Charley would have a weaker argument.

Winston Churchill, “King Henry VIII”

1. The lighthearted side of Henry is presented with detail revealing a decreasing absorption with his responsibilities. First, he is a monarch, if a merry one. Next, he is a friend of children, details which give him a softness but keep a connection to his responsibilities. Finally, he is a patron of sports, which shows him to be a fun-loving man, totally detached at times from his responsibilities. Henry’s other side is presented in an order of decreasing importance. He is first an *observer*, which is both passive and detached. He then *watches* vigilantly and *weighs* arguments, acts which are more active and controlling. Finally, he *refuses* to speak, which is almost violent in its effect. The verbs and their accompanying detail are increasingly

active and aggressive. The order of details thus intensifies the description of Henry and gives it focus.

2. Churchill's attitude is detached and fair. He presents the two sides of Henry's personality in clauses which contain detail of equal weight. The *merry monarch* is balanced with the *cold, acute observer*; the *friend of children* is balanced with the *watcher and weigher*; the *patron of sport* is balanced with the *refuser*. This balance of detail allows the reader to reserve judgment and stay open to further character development.

Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima*

1. Students should circle such words as *goat path*, *the edge of the cliff*, *brightly colored garments*, and *the furrow of dust*.
2. Anaya's sentence is specific and concrete; it allows the reader to participate in this particular experience. The clothesline is *at the edge of the cliff*; the girl is *young*; the clothes are *brightly colored garments*; and the bright colors are in sharp contrast to the dust of the next sentence. This detail brings the setting into focus and prepares the reader to join the action.

Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

1. The details of this passage suggest a long, tiring journey. He stops at the *first milestone*, which suggests there will be more. The milestone is *half-way up a steep hill*, which suggests he has a long way to go, and the going will be difficult. He has to rest, which again suggests a difficult journey; and he rests in a *stooped position*, which suggests dejection. All of these details work together to create a picture of weariness and misery, which culminates in the *convulsive twitch* at the end of the sentence.
2. The lack of detail about the character's face states by understatement. The lack of detail is in sharp contrast to intensity of the character's melancholy. The focus is on the character's *convulsive twitch*, his internal pain, his utter dejection. Elaborate

description would turn this pure pain into sentimentality. The lack of detail about the character's face thus makes the description of the character's pain sharper and more meaningful.

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

1. The details that reveal the dog has rabies are the dog's *growling like a lion*, the *stiff-standing hackles*, the *uncovered teeth*, the *fury*, the frantic run to attack Janie, and the *angry jaws*. These details re-create the terror of the scene and make the reader a full participant in the action.
2. The details used to describe Tea Cake show him to be active and in control: He *splits* the water, *opens* his knife, and *dives*. Janie, on the other hand, is described with details that are passive and helpless: She *screams* and *slips* out of reach. These details reveal a traditional attitude toward men, women, and these two characters: men (specifically, Tea Cake) are proactive, purposeful, and protective; women (specifically, Janie) are reactive, passive, and protected.

Tennessee Williams, *Suddenly Last Summer*

1. Students should underline *alive*, *all alive*; *the birds hovered and swooped to attack and hovered and – swooped to attack*; and *to expose their soft undersides, tearing the undersides open and rending . . . their flesh*. The repetition of detail enhances the effect of the passage by emphasizing the scope and power of the scene: the swarm of the sea-turtles, the ferocity of the birds' attack, the relentless of the feeding frenzy. Together the details build and reinforce the speaker's revulsion at the violence of the action.
2. Her attitude is one of horror and revulsion. The repetition of *all alive* creates a feeling of swarming lower life forms. The birds' attack is relentless and fierce; there is no soaring grace here. The birds are predatory and single-minded. But the most revealing details are at the end of the

passage. The hatchlings have soft undersides, which creates a feeling of vulnerability and defenselessness. The birds *expose* the hatchlings' undersides, *tearing* and *eating* their flesh. This juxtaposition of the vulnerable and the violent creates a mood of horror and reveals Mrs. Venable's revulsion.

Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

1. The quoted sections are lines from songs, specifically, blues. The quoted lines add the specificity needed to involve the reader in the scene. The reader becomes an active listener and can then understand the sweet pain of the mother's song.
2. The details that set up the sweet-pain oxymoron are those that contrast the pain of the song's lyrics with the sweetness of the mother's singing, specifically:

<b>"Sweet" Details</b>
Her voice was so sweet Here eyes (were) so melty Delicious time The greens and blues in my mother's voice took all of the grief out of the words
<b>"Pain" Details</b>
Hard times, bad times Somebody-done-gone-and-left-me times Without "a thin di-I-ime to my name" "My man" would leave me I would "hate to see the evening sun go down" "My man has left this town"

W. H. Auden, "Musee des Beaux Arts"

1. Correct answers include such terms as *apathy*, *inattention*, *disregard*, *heedlessness*, *insensitivity*, *impassivity*, *unconcern*, *nonchalance*, *callousness*, or *indifference*.
2. Auden's line makes the impassivity of the fourth line concrete, particular, and unmistakable. Detail gives form to the abstraction. By focusing the reader's attention

on impassive actions, Auden connects the abstraction to the reader's life, to actions he/she participates in and understands.

John Okada, *No-No Boy*

1. Okada chooses details that show the powerful seduction of money as an end and as a means to buy things. He balances this with the constant and immutable kindness of people. His selection of detail reveals the attitude that money is seductive but cannot totally defeat people's basic goodness.
2. Elimination of the details would reduce the power of the passage and distance the reader from the action. Charts should look something like this:

<b>Money Details</b>
enormous white refrigerators shining, massive, brutally fast cars fine, expensive clothing
<b>People Details</b>
heart of kindness and patience and forgiveness

George Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant"

1. At first Orwell seems uninvolved, the objective observer. He talks coolly about the dead body sprawled in the mud. He describes the man and the attack without emotion (*he could not have been dead many minutes, the elephant had come suddenly upon him*). Then the attitude shifts and details begin to reveal horror at the scene: the elephant *ground him into the earth* and his face *scored a trench a foot deep and a couple of yards long*. The description of the crucified arms and the twisted head augments the horror and creates a feeling of a terrible sacrifice (with the reference to the crucifixion). The author's changing attitude – his increasing horror – culminates in the final sentence, with its details about the agony in the victim's face. Here the horror is unchecked

and unfiltered by the journalist's objectivity.

2. By using the definite article instead of the personal pronoun, Orwell depersonalizes the scene and makes it bearable for the reader. The death has clearly happened to someone removed from the narrator and, by transference, the reader. It also dehumanizes the victim, taking away his humanity, turning him into an object.

Cristina Garcia, *Dreaming in Cuban*

1. The narrator connects her grandmother (Abuela) with Cuba. The connection reveals that Abuela is as much a part of Cuba as the water, the shores, the palms, the sand, the seashells, and the gulls. To the narrator, the experience of Cuba is inseparable from the experience of her grandmother.
2. The last blue in the passage, the *vanishing blue*, is the blue of the mole by Abuela's mouth. As part of her grandmother, who is old, the mole's distinctive character is vanishing, fading. That the mole is blue connects Abuela to other aspects of Cuba, all described as tinged with blue. However, Abuela is aging, and her way of life is passing. So although Abuela is connected to Cuba, her life and the Cuba she represents are declining.

William Hazlitt, "On Going a Journey"

1. Details that support the generalization *how fine it is* include entering a *walled and turreted town, lights streaming through the surrounding gloom, and the best entertainment that the place affords*. These details work together to create a feeling of warmth and comfort after a hard day's travel.
2. The details create a romantic picture of a quaint town from another era. That the town is walled and turreted could create a feeling of foreboding and fear; but these details are preceded by an assertion of a *fine* experience, so they create instead a feeling of welcoming protection. Hazlitt's

attitude is thus established: this town will welcome him with warmth, protection, and rest.

J. D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey*

1. Mrs. Glass's clothing reveals several aspects of her personality. That she is wearing a Japanese kimono (not the usual American at-home wear) with *occultish-looking folds* sets her up as odd or, at least, unusual. Her clothes reveal her heavy smoking habit and her avocation as family *handyman*. She is not, then, a traditional housewife. There is a no seeming order or purpose for her tools, an indication of an absent-minded eccentricity. The fact that she *chinks* as she walks around the apartment reveals her essential presence there: she is not easily ignored or dismissed.
2. The details make the general, first part of the sentence specific and concrete. The central quality and significance of her clothing are sharpened and focused by the detail. Sharpening of detail indicates the large scale importance and high value of her clothing and, by implication, the character herself. This emphasis would be lost if the sentence ended with the semicolon.

James Joyce, "The Dead"

1. The chart below may be of help in discussing this question. In general, objective details carry no strong connotation and reveal little about character. Evaluative details carry strong connotations and reveal insights about character. The evaluative details in this passage indicate a weakness in Freddy's character by describing his physical appearance as fleshy and coarse. His face literally sags and indicates (since he is not old) a lack of resolve. Students may disagree as to which details are evaluative, which is excellent and may generate lively discussion.

Detail	Objective	Evaluative
a young man of about forty	X	
of Gabriel's size and build	X	
with very round shoulders	X	
his face was fleshy and pallid		X
(His face was) touched with colour only at the thick hanging lobes of his ears and at the wide wings of his nose		X
He had coarse features, a blunt nose, a convex and receding brow, tumid and protruded lips		X
heavy-lidded eyes		X
disorder of his scanty hair		X

- Joyce's attitude toward Freddy is critical. Freddy's fleshy, pale face indicates weakness and unhealthiness. The touch of color on his nose indicates an over-indulgence in drink, and the coarse features indicate lack of mental and social refinement. The sleepy look of his heavy-lidded eyes and his disordered, scanty hair reveal a character ill-equipped to carry on normal intellectual and social interactions.

#### F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

- Students' lists may include such adjectives as *lavish, ornate, rich, expensive, costly, elegant, grandiose, pompous, flashy, ostentatious, flamboyant, gaudy, decadent,*

*showy, and splendid.* The connections to Fitzgerald's details will vary with the adjectives the students choose.

- Details about the man contribute to the decadent mood of the house. It is as if the man is simply another part of the decor, a guest with little productive to do. The fact that he is *disheveled* hints at overindulgence, a lack of discipline and order.

#### Robert Olen Butler, "Mr. Green," *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*

- Details which support the room's private quality include the mother's protection of the room, indicating a secret and forbidden quality; the bead curtain at the door, marking the room as separate and rather exotic; and the darkness of the room, again indicating secrecy. These details support the feeling of privateness and allow the reader to respond with conviction to the whole impact of a scene.
- This, of course, is an opinion question. Students must be able to support their opinions with reference to the total effect of the passage.

#### Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," *Leaves of Grass*

- The conclusion of the last line is that the "I" or persona of the poem is at one with all creatures and subject to the same laws: life, procreation, and ultimately death. Details that support this conclusion are the perceived invitation of the wild gander; the variety of animal life in line 5 (the lack of detail in this line indicates an equality of the animal forms, the belief that no animal is more important than another); the sow with her young; and the turkey-hen with her brood. The persona of the poem gives equal weight to his own experience and the experience of other animals.
- The difference in the use of detail reveals a difference in attitude. Animals and humans are enmeshed in rhythms of birth, life, and death. The sky and the night are impersonal and impassive: they do not



embody the life and death rhythms of animals. Since the sky and the night are not the focus of these lines, they are best described in general terms. Extensive detail is reserved for what is given higher value in the poem.

W. J. Holland, "Sugaring for Moths," *The Moth Book*

1. The details include *great banks . . . piling up on the northwestern horizon, great masses of cumulus which are slowly gathering and rising higher toward the zenith, and [cumulus] lit up by pale flashes of*

*sheet-lightning*. The details – especially their order – imitate the building of the storm, capturing the tension of a building storm and deepening the reader's involvement.

2. *Sheet-lightning* is a broad, sheet-like illumination, caused by the reflection of a lightning flash. The word *sheet-lightning* is more effective than *lightning* because it creates a precise mental picture, which, in turn, re-creates the scene in the reader's mind, bringing immediacy and interest to the passage.

# Discussion Suggestions

## Imagery

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

1. The Mariner’s attitude in the first stanza is revealed through the contrasting imagery associated with the men and the creatures of the sea. The men are described as *beautiful*. In contrast, the creatures of the sea are inferior to men and not worthy of living when the men are dead. The image that reveals the attitude about the sea creatures is the *thousand thousand slimy things* which live on even though the men have died. The creatures of the sea are not even named. The persona calls them *slimy things*, which diminishes their importance. They are also linked with the narrator (*a thousand thousand slimy things / Lived on; and so did I . . .*), who is reviled at this point in the poem; and they share the narrator’s virulence.
2. In the second stanza the Mariner completely changes his attitude toward the sea creatures. They are no longer *a thousand thousand slimy things*; instead, they have a *rich attire*. The colors used to describe the creatures are specific and positive. The green is *glossy*; the black is *velvet*. They leave a *track of golden fire* as they *coil* and *swim*. The sea creatures are no longer seen as vile; rather, they are resplendent and beautiful.

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

1. Hijuelos creates the auditory image of drumming first by the sound and rhythm of the words themselves. The strong consonant sounds and the hyphenation give the passage a fast-paced, drum-like sound. In addition, each separate, auditory image evokes a specific, concrete sound. From the sharp crash of the *slamming-the-door drums* to the flutter of *the-little-birds-learning-to-fly drums*, Hijuelos constructs

his images with the exact detail needed to re-create the sounds.

2. The repetition of the word *then* acts as another rhythm instrument, holding the drums in counterpoint. It reinforces the auditory image of drumming.

Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*

1. Auditory images include her father’s voice, her sister Margaret’s voice, the barking of a dog, the spurs of a cavalry officer, and the hum of bees. These images create a mood of loneliness. All of the images of ordinary life are in the distance, audible but not immediate. Nothing directly interacts with Edna. She is a watcher and a listener, removed from the homely action of the passage.
2. The olfactory image brings the reader back to Edna. The auditory images are all in the distance. However, the olfactory image *fill[s] the air*. It shifts the reader’s attention and concern back to Edna and her loneliness.

Linda Hogan, “Making Do”

1. Feelings will vary. Common associations include feelings of hopelessness, futility, the relentless despair of poverty, emptiness, anxiety, and longing.
2. The first image is of the water seeping back into the ground. This image offers some hope of regeneration. After all, although the water does go back into the ground, it *seeps*; it doesn’t flow or rush. In the second image, the ground is *parched again*. This image offers no hope of regeneration. The ground is called *earth*, which gives the image a wide-ranging permanence. It is *parched*, dry to the extreme. And it is *parched again*, intimating that the earth has been parched in the past and will be parched in the future.

T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land"

1. Students' paraphrases will vary. A paraphrase might read something like this: "A woman pulled her long black hair out to the side and held it taut. Then she plucked at her hair in such a way as to make a whispering sound." The image creates a mood of eerie strangeness.
2. The auditory images include *a woman . . . fiddled whisper music on those strings, bats . . . whistled and beat their wings, towers tolling reminiscent bells, and voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells*. The images help create the mood of the passage by reinforcing and intensifying the mood of eerie strangeness and desolation. None of the sounds are harmonious or uplifting. The woman *fiddles* on her hair, and the sound she produces is barely audible. Bats *whistle and beat their wings*, sounds without melody or harmony. The *tolling of the bells* evokes the past only and offers no hope for the future. *Voices* come from *empty cisterns and dry wells*. These images offer no hope: only decay, dissipation, and futility.

Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*

1. The imagery used in this passage is visual. Images include clear water which magnifies the fibers of the gourd, the narrator's reflection, the old man shaking the gourd, the colors and light shimmering in the water as it settles, and the picture – in the bottom of the gourd – of the narrator's mother and father scanning the sky.
2. The imagery of the last sentence is full of precise and exact details, just like the imagery of the first four sentences. In addition, the whole passage is dominated by visual imagery. The difference lies in the visual imagery's subject matter. The first four sentences offer concrete and realistic images, an exact representation of a scene. The last sentence, however, delves into a different reality. The imagery of the last sentence reveals the magic that is central to this passage: the narrator sees her parents, who are not there, reflected in

the gourd. The use of consistent precision and exactness of imagery makes the magic of the last sentence believable and enables the reader to participate in the vision.

Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*

1. The chart should include the following:

<b>Images of the Land</b>
The stump of a tree The great expanse of the forests Forests, somber under the sunshine Forests, rolling like a sea Glints of winding rivers Grey spots of villages A clearing, like an islet of light amongst the dark waves of continuous tree tops A brooding gloom . . . over this vast and monotonous landscape The land devoured the sunshine
<b>Images of the Sea</b>
The empty ocean, smooth and polished within the faint haze, seemed to rise up to the sky in a wall of steel.

2. All of the descriptive power of this passage is bound to images of the sea. Most of the images of the land are dark and monotonous: the *great expanse of the forests; forests, somber under the sunshine; grey spots of villages; a brooding gloom; the land devouring the sunshine*. The only active images of the land refer to the sea: *forests, rolling like a sea; the glints of winding rivers; and a clearing, like an islet of light amongst the dark waves of continuous tree tops*. The land is gloomy, inactive, and full of foreboding. The sea, on the other hand, is *smooth and polished* and *rises up to the sky in a wall of steel*. The ocean is an actor, an equal participant with the sky. It rises on its own, generating its own strength; and its power is prodigious: a wall of steel. The attitude conveyed is that the land is to be endured. The sea, however, is to be celebrated; for in the sea lies life and power.

Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life*

1. Tactile images are I . . . *put my hand in the water; a darling little fish slips between my fingers; a pond-lily presses shyly against my hand; I am suddenly conscious of the spaciousness of the air around me; and a luminous warmth seems to enfold me.*
2. The tactile images are more specific than the visual images. The *moon climbing up the sky behind the pines* creates only a generic picture for the reader. The moon has no phase; the pine has no particulars. Even the moon's path is general and abstract: shining and shimmering with no color or shape. The tactile images, on the other hand, are specific, concrete, and exact. The fish *slips between [her] fingers*; the plant she touches is a *pond lily*; the warmth that *enfolds* her is *luminous*. The tactile imagery allows the reader to fully participate in the scene and empathize with one who is limited to certain senses.

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

1. The imagery shows Ophelia's madness by revealing that she does nothing to save herself from drowning. She is kept afloat only by her clothes (*Her clothes spread wide,/And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up*). She sings songs as she floats, buoyed up by her clothes, certain to drown (*Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds*). And she is totally oblivious to her own danger (*As one incapable of the own distress/Or like a creature native and indued/ Unto that element*).
2. The plaintive simplicity of the line – the image of Ophelia singing as she drowns – makes no judgment. Therein lies its strength. The image captures and reflects her simplicity and her oblivion to her own impending doom. A figure of speech would be, as the Bard himself says, *gilding your fine gold*.

Esmeralda Santiago, *When I Was Puerto Rican*

1. The simple, direct image of the second sentence creates a clear and accurate

picture for the reader. It allows the reader to fully participate in the scene and brings immediacy and interest to the work.

2. The use of *sour* as a noun introduces an element of surprise and forces the reader to understand the taste of the guava in a new way. Words used in an unexpected and unusual way make us rethink the way we experience things and help us to re-examine meaning.

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

1. The image produces feelings of horror and disgust. The grass is sparse, so sparse that there are only *thin dry blades*, indicating barrenness and dissipation. Further, the grass is compared to *hair in leprosy*. The association with leprosy suggests people with skin rotting off their bodies, excluded from the company of others. This association is compounded by the image of the mud *kneaded up with blood*. The imagery's total effect is one of revulsion and horror.
2. The imagery of the horse in lines 4-6 does not inspire sympathy. While it is true that his looks are pathetic (*One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare*), the rest of the imagery does not produce a sympathetic reaction. The horse is *stupefied*, dull and lacking animation. This image is in keeping with the *thin dry blades* of line two and indicates waste and dissolution. The final image of the passage removes what sympathy the reader might still have. This image (*Thrust out past service from the devil's stud!*) reveals that the horse comes from a world of evil. He is past service now, but his work was engendering evil, and his ruin springs from his work.

Rita Dove, “Notes From a Tunisian Journal”

1. The image of the boy with the lemons (line 2) picks up the color of the yellow birds from line one. The color of the yellow birds becomes more specific and definite: it is the color of lemons.

2. A boy with apples produces an image that jars with the image of line one. In the first place, it introduces a new color and distracts the reader from the yellow of the first line. In addition, the apple does not have the connotations of zest and zing. The lines are exuberant, in keeping with the zing of lemons. Apples detract from the first image instead of intensifying it.

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

1. The imagery of this sentence shows Felix to be generous and loving. He is poor (*In the midst of poverty and want*), so any gift he gives is a gift from the heart. He carries the flower *with pleasure*, which indicates a generous nature. Further, his gift is the **first** little white flower that peeped out from beneath the snowy ground. This demonstrates his eagerness to give his sister something.
2. The mood created by the image would be completely different if Felix carried his sister a *big bouquet of spring flowers*. It would be an expression of abundance rather than a small expression of hope and an indication of generosity in the midst of poverty.

Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*

1. The scene created by the images in this selection is disorderly and poor. Adjectives may include *cluttered, disorganized, untidy, slovenly, messy, chaotic, poverty-stricken, indigent, destitute, and needy*.
2. The final image (*notebooks and whisker hairs*) reveals an attitude of disdain. The notebooks represent the memories and

mementos of a life. However, the image of the *notebooks* is trivialized by equating them with *whisker hairs*. The memories are thus reduced to the worthless remnants of a whisker trim.

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

1. Bishop uses primarily visual imagery in these lines. Imagery reveals both the function and form of the fire balloons. The fire balloons occur at a certain time of the year (*this time of year*), probably associated with some holiday or ceremony. They are *frail* and *illegal*. When they are released, they rise toward the top of a mountain. In lines seven and eight, the reader becomes fully involved in the scene because of specific imagery: *the paper chambers flush and fill with light/that comes and goes*. The visual imagery re-creates the sight and allows the reader to experience it.
2. The simile startles the reader and introduces an affective dimension to the scene. It reinforces the idea of the light’s *coming and going* with the auditory image of the heartbeat. In addition, it intimates that hearts (in the sense of love and loyalty) come and go, echoing the visual image of the paper chambers.

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

1. Image charts help students identify images and understand their significance. Students’ charts should include the following images:

Visual	Olfactory	Auditory	Gustatory
Dirty Plates	Rank, disheveled bed	Snored	A glass of milk
A glass of milk		Anger in her tones	
Small table		Cry for food	
disheveled bed			
Wrinkled and nearly blind			

2. The attitude toward the old woman in the first stanza is only slightly judgmental. She is a neutral participant in a filthy environment (*some dirty plates, the rank, disheveled bed*). In the second stanza, however, the attitude toward the old woman becomes harsh and critical. She is the center of the room's disorder. She is *wrinkled* (like the bed) and *nearly blind*. However, she is no pathetic victim. The auditory imagery (*rousing with anger in her tones/to cry for food*) reveals her to be demanding and self-centered, the embodiment of the room's decay. Indeed, she becomes a participant in the decay rather than a victim of it.

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

1. Achebe's use of the Ibo language recreates the scene in the reader's mind, bringing immediacy and interest to the work. Rather than referring to the language, Achebe uses actual Ibo words. This causes the reader to pause and "listen" to the auditory imagery as he or she reads.
2. The reader can "hear" the voices in Achebe's passage. The *pandemonium of quavering voices* sets the rhythm and timbre of the voices, and the use of Ibo words allows the reader to fully participate in the scene.

Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*

1. A chart is helpful in sorting imagery. Images include the following:

<b>Visual Images</b>
Misty morning – half frost, half drizzle Temporary brooks crossed our path
<b>Auditory Images</b>
Gurgling from the uplands
<b>Both</b>
Rainy night Temporary brooks crossed our path

2. The feelings traditionally associated with rain, mist, and frost are depression, dejection, and melancholy. That *mist* and *frost* follow a rainy night offers neither relief from the weather nor the corresponding hope for better times in general. A *brilliant, sunny morning* sets a tone of hopefulness and optimism.

Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, "Chronicle"

1. That no specific color is mentioned with respect to the baby clothes has several effects on the meaning. First, it is an unusual use of the word *color*. The suits are *of color*, not *colorful* or of a specific color. The shock value emphasizes the importance of the image. Second, it gives the impression that the color is an essential component of the fabric. The color is given equal weight to the silk: both define the baby clothes.
2. The mother's gambling coat is functional: no color or fabric is specified. It is used to hide cash. Very little else is known about it. The baby clothes, on the other hand, are described only in terms of texture and color. Nothing is known about function. These images reveal a matter-of-fact attitude about the mother: she is brusque, practical, and self-serving. It also shows how little connection exists between the narrator and her mother.

Robert Frost, "The Death of the Hired Man"

1. A chart facilitates the examination of imagery. Images include:

<b>Visual</b>
Part of the moon was falling down the west, /Dragging the whole sky with it to the hills 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  <i>(continued next page)</i>

<i>(continued from previous page)</i>
<b>Auditory</b>
As if she played unheard some tenderness/ That wrought on him beside her in the night.
<b>Tactile</b>
Light poured softly in her lap She . . . 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

2. The poet prepares the reader for the announcement at the end by weaving a background of gentle images that center on the woman and prepare her to make her proclamation. The light from the moon *pour[s] softly in her lap*, offering comfort; and she welcomes it with her apron. She also utilizes the *morning-glory strings* to play *tenderness*, preparing Warren for her announcement. The simple, gentle ambience of the scene allows Warren to accept the impending death in the same way the woman accepts the moon's light and spreads her apron to it.

# Discussion Suggestions

## Syntax

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

1. The exclamatory sentence is *What profound depths we visit then – how sudden and complete is our immersion!* The exclamatory sentence here serves to emphasize the immediacy and complete involvement found in reading poetry. Exclamatory sentences in general show deep feeling, excitement, and passion. When used sparingly, they provide contrast for the more decorous declarative sentences, and they express the strong feelings of the writer.
2. There are five sentences in the passage. The first and second sentences are medium in length; the third and fifth sentences are long; and the fourth sentence (*The poet is always our contemporary*) is short. Placing a short sentence amidst several longer sentences serves to emphasize the short sentence and give it weight. The central idea of the passage is carried by the short sentence and is intensified by its contrast with the longer sentences.

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

1. Chief Red Jacket repeats the words *you say* to mark a refutation and to emphasize the words. Everything that follows the *you say* is denied. The conscious repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of several successive verses, clauses, or paragraphs is called *anaphora*. Functions of anaphora vary: emphasis, irony, and/or refutation of what follows.
2. A rhetorical question is one for which no answer is expected. The answer is assumed. In this case the answer is obvious: *we cannot know this* to be true. The rhetorical question reinforces the refutation of the anaphora and conveys a clear feeling of mistrust for the audience.

Edgar Allan Poe, “The Black Cat”

1. The noun phrase explained by the appositives is *a voice from within the tomb*.
2. The main clause of this sentence is *I was answered by a voice from within the tomb*. It carries both the syntactic and semantic weight of the sentence. Syntactic closure (the completion of a grammatical structure) is thus achieved very early in the sentence. Syntactic closure relieves tension and allows the reader to explore the complex description of the voice in the tomb. Through the appositives, Poe increases the intensity of the cries. He moves from a *voice* (the main noun), to a *cry*, then to a *howl*, then to a *shriek*. The increasing intensity creates the mood of terror and reflects the narrator’s increasing madness.

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

1. Students’ sentences should be something like this: “Culture helps us, because of its high standards, to fully understand and accept the fact that wealth is an unworthy goal.” The complexity of Arnold’s sentence intensifies the tone of seriousness, alerting readers to the highly formal language of the passage.
2. The words that complete the meaning of the second sentence (*the future as well as the present would eventually belong to the Philistines*) are at the end of the sentence. Sentences that delay closure until the end (the period) of the sentence 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 of the sentence. Periodic sentences are used frequently in formal prose and are often very complex. This sentence withholds syntactic closure, increasing the tension of the sentence and



keeping the reader's attention until the meaning is fully disclosed at the end of the sentence.

James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues"

1. Colons direct the reader's attention to the words that follow and emphasize those words. The purpose of this colon is to indicate that closely related information will follow. The *chasm* of the first clause is connected to the *bridge* of the second clause, and the possibility of reconciliation for the characters in the sentence is raised through syntax.
2. The change would shift the meaning and lessen the impact. Two independent clauses joined by a comma and conjunction indicate equal weight of both clauses; this syntax does not assume a prescribed relationship between the two clauses. Two independent clauses joined with a colon have a prescribed relationship: the second clause explains, summarizes, or amplifies the first. Baldwin's sentence draws the connection between the *chasm* and the *bridge* with the colon and emphasizes the possibility of bridging the relationship. His syntax indicates semantic possibilities. The new version reduces the second clause to speculation and diminishes the connection between syntax and meaning.

William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*

1. Faulkner slows the sentence down by layering participial phrases (*padding me, dragging its head*) that modify *shadow*. This technique slows the reader down, echoing the meaning of the sentence itself.
2. The rewritten sentence lacks the power of Faulkner's. The pace of the words no longer matches the meaning, and the reader's attention is distracted by the abrupt shift from the *I* of the sentence to the *shadow*.

James Joyce, "I Hear an Army Charging Upon the Land"

1. Inversion of normal word order shocks or surprises the reader and emphasizes the inverted words of the sentence. The inversion here also delays syntactic closure, increasing the tension of the sentence and holding the reader's attention until the sentence is complete.
2. *Arrogant* and *in black armor* modify *charioteers*. The unusual word order heightens and directs the reader's attentiveness. The word order forces the reader to examine the line closely in order to determine the subject and holds the reader's attention until the end of the fourth line.

Piri Thomas, *Down These Mean Streets*

1. The repetition of the question emphasizes his thought process and re-creates his obsession with trying drugs again. Balanced with the repeated *I'm clean . . . I'm not using . . . I'm not using*, it reflects the struggle between his pride in being drug free and his desire to use the drug again. The movement of the sentence, however, leans toward trying the drug again. Repetition with no variation in syntax increases the importance of the repeated clause and parallels the narrator's growing concern.
2. The missing words are *what it would be like again*. The omission emphasizes the narrator's growing concern with what it would be like to try drugs again. The ellipses leave the paragraph open, which implies that the question could be asked yet again, reinforcing the emphasis on the narrator's struggle.

Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*

1. By repeated use of infinitives, Huxley balances the parallel ideas, responses the speaker had prepared for the Controller, and gives them equal weight. The repeated infinitives also create the foundation for the contrast, completed in the second clause with another infinitive: *to tell the truth*.

2. The semicolon joins two independent clauses containing internal punctuation. The semicolon gives equal weight to both independent clauses, directing the reader to pay equal attention to the ideas in both.

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

1. This passage has a short sentence followed by a much longer one. The introductory, short sentence states the main idea of the passage. It is simple, straightforward prose and prepares the reader for the descriptive sentence that follows. The longer sentence amplifies the first sentence, developing and expanding its ideas (the pond, his venturing into the pond).
2. The structure of this sentence is convoluted and irregular. The clause *he sank in* seems out of place syntactically (Does it modify bottom? Is it adverbial? Is it a misprint?) But the sentence works because its structure reflects its meaning. He sinks into the pond as we sink into the sentence. The form of the sentence is as amorphous as the soft clay and the claspings water.

Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*

1. The grammatical structure repeated here is a dependent clause. Since a dependent clause cannot stand on its own, it creates syntactic tension: a need for completion. This leads the reader to the focus point of the sentence: the main clause (*then it is I look at trees*).
2. The idea that the sentence’s end-focus emphasizes is that looking at trees can offer comfort and reassurance. The sentence structure leads to this contention by balancing the dependent clauses, which impart the feeling of helplessness, with the independent clause, which offers the comfort of trees.

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

1. The rest of the sentence extends and exemplifies the main idea of the sentence.

2. The semicolon balances independent clauses of equal weight. Here, it gives equal consideration to a person who excels in conversation but falls short in written composition and another who excels in written composition but falls short in lively conversation.

John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*

1. The subordinate clause makes George’s right hand into an independent actor. **George** does not throw the gun away. Instead, his **hand** does the work. The implication is that the hand could also **shoot** the gun independently. This syntactic structure removes the responsibility and control from George.
2. The chart reveals how syntax can manipulate locus of control:

<b>Steinbeck’s Sentence</b>
<p><b>Subordinate Clause</b> that had thrown the gun away</p> <p><b>Noun it Modifies</b> hand</p> <p><b>Effect on Meaning</b> Places the responsibility for action on the hand, absolving George of any responsibility</p>
<b>New Sentence</b>
<p><b>Subordinate Clause</b> who had thrown the gun away</p> <p><b>Noun it Modifies</b> George</p> <p><b>Effect on Meaning</b> Places the responsibility for action on George instead of his hand</p>

Eric Hoffer, “The Fanatics”

1. The phrase *without him* links each supporting sentence to the main idea (*only the fanatic can hatch a genuine mass movement*). The repetition continually brings the reader back to the essential: that the fanatic, the person him- or herself, is requisite to a new beginning. Repetition

focuses the passage's impact and both clarifies and emphasizes the main idea.

2. The last sentence is short, much shorter than the other sentences. It thus provides contrast and emphasis. It sums up the other sentences and strengthens the meaning of the paragraph.

Charles Darwin, "Analogical Resemblances,"  
*The Origin of Species*

1. The independent clauses in each of these sentences contain closely connected ideas and are thus best joined by a semicolon. A period would be too strong a separation. The independent clauses are of equal weight, and the clauses amplify and complement each other.
2. The sentences are balanced and orderly, reflecting the logical development of the passage. In addition, the sentence structure helps the reader see connections. The parallel structure of the last two sentences adds to the coherence of the passage, which reflects the cohesiveness of his thinking.

George Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*

1. All colons direct the reader's attention to the words that follow it. The purpose of the first colon is just that: to direct the reader's attention to the words that follow. The purpose of the second colon is to indicate that an explanation follows. A colon may separate independent clauses if the second clause explains or summarizes the first one. This colon prepares the reader for the explanation which follows the colon.
2. The *yes* at the beginning of the sentence intensifies and affirms the rest of the sentence. It also reveals Higgins' character: his exuberance and self-assurance.

John Donne, "Death Be Not Proud"

1. The imperative mood is used for orders and advice. When the persona tells Death *to be not proud*, he is demonstrating his

own power and control. Death cannot conquer the persona in this poem, because he can surmount death through his religion. The effect of the imperative is to startle the reader and emphasize the power of faith.

2. The understood verb is *must flow*, and the understood subject is *pleasure*. By leaving out words in the first clause that are stated in the second clause (and vice versa), Donne connects the ideas of the two clauses. His syntax reflects his meaning: we get pleasure from rest and sleep. Rest and sleep are only reflections of death. Therefore, we will get even more pleasure from death than from rest and sleep.

Carol Shields, *The Stone Diaries*

1. The dash marks a sudden break in thought. The weight of the sentence is carried by the words outside the dashes. The words inside the dashes give insight into her character. They are parenthetical to the action (or lack of action in this case) and amplify a dimension of her character.
2. A short sentence following a much longer sentence startles the reader and shifts his or her attention. Such variety in sentence length serves to emphasize the meaning of the short sentence, as is the case in Shields' passage. Many contemporary writers place their main ideas in short sentences. Historically, this has not always been true.

Woodrow Wilson, "President Woodrow Wilson Presents an Ideal to the War Congress"

1. Wilson stresses, by using this periodic sentence, that our motives and objects must be clear.
2. The new sentence reduces the syntactic tension, diminishes the interest of the sentence, and changes the focus of the sentence. The stress is no longer on the *motives and objects*. Instead, it is on the *deeply momentous things*.

Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*

1. The use of two subordinate clauses to modify *woman* emphasizes the qualities the narrator has isolated: the love of moisture and plants. The sentence gives equal weight to her missing moisture and loving green hedges and ferns. However, both of these attributes are secondary to her being a woman, the focus of the sentence. The layering of subordinate clauses also gives grace to the sentence, reinforcing the image of a woman of considerable sensitivity and charm.
2. Main clause positions indicate main ideas. The new sentence transforms the subordinate clauses into parts of the main clause, thereby transforming the meaning of the sentence. The key idea in the new sentence is that the character misses moisture and loves green plants. In the original sentence, the main clause states that she is a **woman**. The focus of Ondaatje's sentence is her womanness; the love of moisture and green plants is secondary. The feeling of the original is more sensuous and centered on the woman herself.

# Discussion Suggestions

## Tone

Erma Bombeck, *At Wit's End*

1. The subject matter of this passage is the seasonal buying of clothes. Bombeck explores the absurdity of the fashion industry, an industry which markets items long before they are needed and makes these items unavailable when they are needed. She makes it clear that this is silly, but not a serious and grave issue.
2. The tone of this passage is genial and satirical rather than harshly critical. Her desire to buy a bathing suit in August is a *mad-Mitty desire*, a reference to the Thurber story ("The Secret Life of Walter Mitty") about a mild, mousy man with exotic and heroic fantasies. The clerk, *swathed in a long-sleeved woolen dress* in August, expresses her horror: "A bathing suit! In August!" And there have been no bathing suits in the store since June: the *White Elephant sale* (a sale of useless items) was *June third*. With a lighthearted barb about the narrator's own appearance in a bathing suit (the clerk says, *Our – no offense – White Elephant sale*, referring to her size), Bombeck keeps a consistent tone and assures the reader that her playful barbs are general and benign.

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

1. Twain's tone in this passage is contemptuous and sarcastic. Central to the tone is Twain's attitude toward the subject: Cooper's writing, which he finds inconsistent and irresponsible.
2. Twain creates his tone through diction and selection of detail. He criticizes Cooper and states, *but that is Cooper's way*, generalizing the criticism. He accuses Cooper of *shirk[ing]* difficulties in writing. He calls Hawkeye that *astute and cautious person* then shows him to be *heedless*. Through

detail he contrasts Hawkeye's reputation as a character (*astute and cautious*) with Hawkeye's careless actions: *Hawkeye, [throws] his rifle heedlessly down and leave[s] 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*. He supports the contrast with the contention that the carelessness has no cogent motivation: *Hawkeye could have hidden the rifle in a quarter of a minute where the Indians could not have found it*. Further, Twain's contempt for Cooper's writing is underscored by direct criticism of Cooper's style. He states: *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 and 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*.

Bharati Mukherjee, "Orbiting"

1. The narrator's attitude is disparaging but not condemnatory. Tone is established through diction, detail, imagery, and syntax (see Question 2). First, the narrator establishes Brent's narrow-mindedness through diction and detail. He thinks *only Americans [have] informed political opinion*. He thinks *other people[stage] coups out of spite and misery*. He would rather *laugh about* the things that Ro would *die for*, and he believes the *meaning of Thanksgiving should not be so explicit*. Further, it is *unwelcome* news that he might be wrong. Brent's prejudice is in sharp contrast to the images of Ro's torture: *electrodes, canes, freezing tanks*. The simple concreteness of these images makes Brent's opinions and laughter hollow. The tone of the passage is not

completely disparaging, however. Since this is Brent's *first exposure to Third World passion* and he *looks sick* after the encounter, there is some built-in forgiveness for his narrow-mindedness and some acceptance for his provincialism.

2. Syntax helps create the tone through the author's control of sentence length. Short sentences are used to emphasize the main ideas: *Ro was tortured in jail. He leaves nothing out. Something's gotten into Ro. Dad looks sick.* Longer sentences are used to build background and set up Brent's provincialism. The real horror of the passage is presented in a sentence fragment: *electrodes, canes, freezing tanks.* The sentence fragment carries a shock value, which emphasizes the horror of the torture. In addition, short sentences build tension and passion, as the conversation gets more and more one-sided and passionate.

#### Tobias Wolff, "Civilian"

1. The attitude of the narrator toward the political speaker is sardonic. The fact that the microphone feedback was *blaring out the speaker's words* but the narrator still *got the outline* indicates that it is not necessary to hear all of the speech to get the gist, that much of it is rant and rhetoric. The sentence fragments give the main ideas of the speech: slogans without substance. And the speaker's declaration that he alone is *in a state of unconditional war with the United States government* makes the speaker look pretentious and ridiculous.
2. The short, direct sentence at the end of the passage makes a mockery of the political speech and fixes the sardonic tone of the passage. Not only does the narrator laugh at the speech, he *laughs out loud*, a clear dismissal of the rhetoric and a public acknowledgement of his scorn.

#### Sylvia Plath, "Cut: For Susan O'Neill Roe"

1. The poet's attitude toward the cut is ironic, stating one thing and meaning

quite another. Through the trivialization of the cut, the poet creates a scene of such sharp detail that she renders the cut horrific. She calls the cut a *thrill* and compares her thumb to an onion, *the top quite gone/Except for a sort of hinge/Of skin*. Giving her thumb the same value as a slice of onion serves the opposite purpose: it affirms the value of her thumb and acknowledges the horror of the cut. The ironic tone works the same way with the image of the partially severed top of her thumb: *a flap like a hat*. Comparing the partially severed skin to a hat increases the horror of the cut by trivializing it through imagery and detail.

2. *Dead white* modifies *hat*, and, by implication, *flap* and *skin*. *White* here is associated with death, dissolution, and the pallor of corpses. It generalizes the cut and forces the reader to consider death itself. The *red plush* of the blood indicates a luxurious lushness, almost seductive. The attitude revealed here is a dual one: fear of death and attraction to it.

#### Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

1. The author's attitude toward the *collective white man* is one of virulence and contempt.
2. The tone – the expression of attitude – is denunciatory and indignant. The white man is called a *piratical opportunist*. He uses *Faustian machinations*, going so far as to sell his soul for power. He uses Christianity as a *wedge* in *criminal conquests* to subjugate *non-white cultures and civilizations*. These non-white *victims* are called *ancient* and, by implication, cultured and civilized, in contrast to *the collective white man* who deals only in power and *weapons of war*.

#### Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us*

1. Carson's attitude toward the tide goes beyond respect: she writes of the tide with reverence and veneration.
2. The negative constructions serve to reinforce the positive tone by underscoring the

absolute power of the tide. There is *no drop* of water resistant to the tide. Not even the *deepest* parts of the ocean are resistant to the tide. *No other force is so strong*. By negating the possibility of freedom from the tide, Carson reinforces its absolute and ubiquitous power.

Richard Wilber, “Piazza Di Spagna, Early Morning”

1. The speaker’s attitude is one of wonder and fascination. The author *can’t forget* the image of the woman coming down the *long marble stair*. The woman is *amazed*, but the speaker is *amazed* as well and watches her in rapt attention. As she *dances* down to the square with a *sleepy pirouette*, it is as if the speaker dances with her, dancing through the lines of his poem. The speaker sees *nothing on her face* except a kind of impassivity, an *impersonal loneliness* that makes her as much a part of the place as the *leaf, petal, or thin chip* which that rides over the edge of a waterfall. She is *perfectly beautiful* and *perfectly ignorant* (ignorant in the sense of being uninformed) of her beauty and grace. Only the speaker is aware of her perfection and watches, absorbed.
2. The repetition emphasizes both her perfection and her insensibility. She is *perfectly beautiful*, but she is also *perfectly ignorant of it*. The repetition emphasizes her oneness with the scene and the author’s fascination with her movements.

Judith Martin, *Miss Manners’ Guide to Excruciatingly Correct Behavior*

1. Miss Manners’ attitude toward gifts for bridesmaids and ushers is that they are usually *useless, unused, and cannot be returned*. Miss Manners’ attitude toward gifts in general is that they should be selected to please the recipient and given with the goal of the recipient’s pleasure.
2. Although Miss Manners has a positive attitude toward gift-givers that try to

please, the tone of the passage is not positive. In fact, the tone here is imperious, even withering. That is because the tone reflects her attitude toward the *gentle reader* not the ideal gift-giver. The gentle reader is inclined to *do the proper thing*, not give these people *something they might enjoy* (or why would she have taken the time to write Miss Manners?) Since the giver fails to focus on the recipient’s pleasure, Miss Manners haughtily (and ironically) suggests that books are *at best only* [to be] *read*. Better to get *useless monogrammed silver objects that cannot be returned*, the more useless (*silver golf tees and toothpaste tube squeezers*) the better. Miss Manners never answers the question directly. Instead, she uses sarcasm and scorn to dismiss the question and the *gentle reader’s* concern altogether.

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

1. Luce’s attitude toward the American press is reproachful. She states that the American press has been irresponsible. The American press has shaped *the minds of America*, but American taste has also shaped the press, exerting market pressures. She does not *exonerate* the American press, however, but holds them responsible for more *tasteful and illuminating reading matter* despite business pressures.
2. The rhetorical questions in the second paragraph emphasize the American press’s responsibility to provide *tasteful and illuminating reading matter* and *information*, despite the taste of the American public. The questions assume an answer: no. The questions also hold up TV and radio as examples of mass media which have succumbed to American taste. The questions raise the expectation that the American press should rise above TV and radio.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*

1. Coleridge's attitude toward the uneducated man is condescending and patronizing.
2. Coleridge states that uneducated men are neither capable of reflection on thought nor of participation in acts of the imagination. They can only benefit from association with educated men. This is clearly supported by details, diction, and syntax. The *best part of human language has no place in the consciousness of uneducated man*. Coleridge calls educated men *superiors* and states that uneducated men can participate in the life of the mind only by *imitation and passive remembrance of what they hear from their religious instructors and other superiors*. Further, he calls this participation a *harvest which they neither sowed nor reaped*. The syntax of the second sentence also reveals Coleridge's attitude toward the uneducated man. The sentence is composed of two, long clauses connected by a semicolon. The first clause has an independent clause (*it is formed*), which carries the weight and focus of the sentence (the educated man). The second clause is a subordinate clause (*though the most uneducated share*), which underscores the dependency of the uneducated on the educated. The two clauses are joined by a semicolon, reiterating the close connection between the educated and uneducated man (one learns by *imitation and passive remembrance* from the other).

Gwendolyn Brooks, "Beverly Hills, Chicago"

1. The *we* in line four is the persona and her companions. The poem is told in the persona's voice, and the scene is observed through her eyes. The *we* in the poem are observers of the wealthy, not wealthy themselves. *These people* are the wealthy people of the *golden gardens*. They are people of privilege, to be observed not admired; for although the persona proclaims *ourselves fortunate to be driving by today*, the good fortune is mixed with irony. *These people* walk with a *dry brown coughing beneath their feet* and are unable

to solve their own problems (*the handyman is on his way*). They may have *golden gardens*, but even there the *summer ripeness rots*. The refuse may be a *neat brilliancy*, but there **is** refuse. *These people* are too perfect. They have no vitality and ring as hollow as the *dry brown coughing beneath their feet*.

2. The image is of perfect order and sterility. The leaves are *patterned*, *summer rot* is *not raggedy*, and the refuse is *neat*. These images reinforce the ironic tone of the poem. The *we* of the poem are allowed to look at *them*, as if *these people* are superior, set apart. But their *patterned leaves* and *neat refuse* only serve to fix the image of their lives as sterile, impassive, and unreal.

Tom Wolfe, *The Right Stuff*

1. Wolfe's attitude toward the astronaut is one of enthusiastic fascination, and his tone is spirited and conversational. He addresses the astronaut informally and directly (*you, well, dummy!*), but his diction and use of detail show that Wolfe reveres the astronaut. He is **the** astronaut. He has a *famous body* and *is one of the seven greatest pilots and seven bravest men in America*. Everyone assumes the astronaut *must be fascinating to listen to*.
2. Wolfe's attitude toward the people who come to see the astronauts is good-natured mockery. The tourists are fawning hero-worshipers, as the diction clearly indicates. They are *hotshots* who *latch on* to the astronaut; they want to *breathe the same air* as the astronaut; they want to *occupy the same space* as the astronaut. They *want something hot*, and they assume that the astronaut *must be fascinating to listen to*. The tourists are shallow and impatient, quick to demand a "show." The syntax also reinforces the tone. It is informal and conversational, capturing the enthusiasm of the tourists. The short sentences and the punctuation (ellipses, dashes, exclamation points) also create a mood of excitement and reflect the enthusiasm of the crowd.



Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*

1. In the beginning of the passage, the narrator is caught up with a romanticized image of how she looks and plays. She is enamoured with the image of herself playing beautifully and looking lovely. However, the tone changes as she begins to hit wrong notes. With her inability to correct her playing, the tone changes from upbeat admiration to horror.
2. Every element of the paragraph supports the changing tone. The diction in the beginning of the paragraph is positive but general. The recital is *beautiful*. The narrator looks *lovely* and doesn't worry about her performance. As the description shifts to the debacle that follows, diction, detail, and imagery become more specific, reflecting the narrator's building horror. She realizes *something [doesn't] sound quite right*. She gets a *chill that start[s] at the top of her head and trickle[s] down*; her *hands [are] bewitched*; she plays a *strange jumble with sour notes*. She even helplessly searches for an outside control of her actions: *I kept thinking my fingers would adjust themselves back, like a train switching to the right track*. However, nothing comes to her aid, and she is left with her *strange jumble* and its accompanying horror until the end of her performance.

George F. Will, "The First Michael Jordan"

1. Will's writing about DiMaggio is quite informal, but underlying his description is an attitude of respect and esteem.
2. Discuss the chart below. Of course answers may differ: there is much crossover among diction, detail, and imagery. All parts of this paragraph contribute to the tone. Note and discuss the boldface parts of the syntax. These are parenthetical elements that amplify the reverential attitude toward DiMaggio.

<b>Diction</b>
Burst Celebrity Intuitive Rough-and-tumble democracy Aura Remoteness
<b>Detail</b>
DiMaggio burst upon the nation Charles Lindbergh almost inadvertently invented celebrity of a degree – of a kind, really – never before experienced. DiMaggio played a team game
<b>Imagery</b>
An individual with an aura of remoteness A team game DiMaggio burst upon the nation
<b>Syntax</b>
DiMaggio burst upon the nation just nine years after Charles Lindbergh almost inadvertently invented celebrity of a degree – <b>of a kind, really</b> – never before experienced. DiMaggio played a team game but somehow knew, <b>in the intuitive way an artist has of knowing things</b> , that our rough-and-tumble democracy, <b>leveling though it is</b> , responds to an individual with an aura of remoteness.

Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Man"

1. Pope's attitude toward pride, typical of neoclassical writing, is that there is a natural order to things; and anyone who tampers with the natural order is guilty of pride. Pride, according to Pope, is the cause of much suffering and evil in the world. He states this simply in the first line of the passage: *In Pride, in reasoning Pride, our error lies*. He compares the pride of men to the pride of angels with the intent of stressing the dangers of perverting the "natural order" of things: *Aspiring to be Gods, if Angels fell,/Aspiring to be*

*Angels, Men rebel.* Pope furthers his argument by comparing Satan's fall from grace (when he rebelled against God) to man's fall to his ruin if he gives in to pride: *And who but wishes to invert the laws/Of Order, sins against th' Eternal Cause.*

2. The tone of this passage is didactic. In other words, the intent of the passage is to instruct. The attitude that underlies the tone is the attitude toward the reader, his audience. Pope assumes a superiority and views the reader as one needing instruction and edification. That is why Pope's writing often sounds preachy. He emphasizes words with capital letters and speaks with great authority and certainty: *In **P**ride, in reasoning **P**ride, **o**ur **e**rror **l**ies.* And he assumes an absolute knowledge of God's plan: *who but wishes to invert the laws/Of Order, **s**ins **a**gainst **t**h' **E**ternal **C**ause.* Tone can be shaped by the author's (or narrator's) attitude toward subject matter, the audience, or both. Here tone is determined by the author's attitude toward the audience.

Leonard Pitts, Jr., "Why? Maybe It's a Blessing Not to Know Why Those Two Boys Did It"

1. Pitts' attitude toward the perpetrators of the crimes in Littleton, Colorado, is one of complete disgust. His tone is contemptuous and angry. Words that reveal this attitude include calling the crime an *obscenity*, discounting *mitigating factors* as an *insult to the sufferers*, calling the perpetrators *wretches*, and calling the crime *a special category of evil*.
2. The incomplete sentences in paragraph two contribute to the tone by adding a shock value and emphasis to Pitts' anger and disgust. It is as if Pitts is so outraged that he cannot even bother to complete his sentences. The fragments give the passage a fast pace, reinforcing surety of judgment, and lend a passionate intensity to Pitts' anger.

Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Ernest*

1. Wilde characterizes Jack as a frivolous, silly man with weak morals. It is *painful* for him *to speak the truth*. It is the first time in his life that he has spoken the truth, and it is *painful* for him to do so. Further, his reference to having a brother, *I have not the smallest intention of ever having one in the future*, as if it were in his control, underscores his shallow pretentiousness.
2. Wilde's tone is satirical: he mocks Jack and his whole world of superficial, pretentious compatriots. His attitude toward the reader – conspiratorial and concurrent – sets the tone. Wilde assumes an audience in concord. Jack's seriously delivered lines (*. . . 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*) would fall flat without an audience that 1) recognizes the familiarity of people like Jack; 2) sees the comic potential of someone who admits to putting pretense and the appearance of virtue over real virtue; and 3) recognizes the ironic honesty of stating truthfully the preference for pretense over truth. The interplay of attitudes toward the subject and the audience accounts for the humor of the passage, creates the satire, and sets the tone of the passage.

William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

1. The tone of this passage is ironic. The speaker says one thing – that Macbeth is pious and honest – and means quite another – that Macbeth is ruthless and cruel. The key to the irony of the passage is in line 17, the reference to the Macbeth's possible capture of Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain. The speaker says parenthetically: *As, an't please heaven, he shall not.* This line is not ironic; it reveals the speaker's true attitude: he fears Macbeth and hopes Donalbain and Malcolm will not fall under

his power. The speaker uses diction, detail, and imagery to reinforce the irony of the rest of the passage. He says *the gracious Duncan/Was pitied of Macbeth*, but Macbeth killed Duncan. Malcolm and Donalbain flee after their father's murder and are implicated in the murder. The speaker shows the absurdity of this by comparing Fleance's flight from his father's murderers to Malcolm and Donalbain's flight and saying ironically that Fleance probably murdered his father too: *right valiant Banquo walked too late;/ Whom, you may say (if't please you) Fleance killed,/For Fleance fled*. The speaker also describes Macbeth's killing of the guards, the only possible witnesses to the murder, *in pious rage*. We know this is ironic, because the speaker says it was *wisely* done by Macbeth, implying that it would have been unwise to let the guards live, that they could have incriminated Macbeth. Further, Macbeth has *borne all things well*, diction that reveals Macbeth had a plan.

2. The image of a man walking late at night is innocent and benign. Yet the speaker refers to it as if it were the cause of the murders (*Banquo walked too late . . . Men must not walk too late*). The image reinforces the ironic tone of the passage by making the trivial (walking too late) important and making the important (the ruthless murders) trivial.

Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

1. The narrator's attitude toward Shug is one of wonder and veneration. She describes Shug with exuberance and power, comparing Shug's actions to those of men, those with power. *Shug talk and act sometimes like a man. Women always talk bout hair and health. How many babies living or dead, or got teef*. Women reflect with their conversation. Their concerns are not active, but rest with accepting things that happen to them and those they love. Men, on the other hand, are active. Their words are lively and suggest activity and fun: *Girl, you look like a good time*. By allying Shug with men, the narrator gives her power and life and establishes her reverential tone.
2. The use of repetition reinforces the narrator's tone of wonder. The first mention of the phrase is a direct quote, Shug's words: *Girl, you look like a good time, you do*. The second and third mentions are reflections on Shug's character. The use of repetition recreates the narrator's surprise at Shug's power and strengthens the reader's understanding of the narrator's wonder.

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