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Link to Video: <https://youtu.be/owldR7EsLUM>

Descriptive Language: What is it?

Descriptive language is a particular way of writing that grabs a reader's senses: looks, feels, sounds, tastes etc. When used effectively, the reader will feel as if he/she is actually in the piece itself seeing everything unfold, or gain a clearer understanding of what is being said.

What techniques can we use for descriptive language?

- Simile - comparing two things with the words "like" or "as." Ex: He was *as round as a basketball*.
- Metaphor - similar to a simile, except it directly states that one thing is something else. Ex: *The soda was a shot of adrenaline* for the kids.
- Hyperbole - describing something in an exaggerated way. Used for rhetorical effect. Ex: Kevin Durant is *as tall as the Eiffel Tower*.
- Personification - Giving human traits to an inanimate object. Ex: The *clouds shed tears* as they looked ahead to the gloomy day.
- Onomatopoeia - Words that sound like their meaning. Ex: There was a *sharp knife teetering* on the edge of the counter.
- Imagery - a term to describe the language used to depict a situation or scene using descriptive language. Ex: The city skyline was beautiful; the *echo of cars' horns* could be heard on all streets and avenues while the *crisp breeze* blew through the buildings, *tickling my nose*.

** Adjectives are a vital part to piece of writing. Adjectives can help a writer achieve their goal to place the reader in their work. Choose the best-fitting adjectives, and the reader will be invested in your story or description.

List some adjectives for the following scenes:

New York City -

The Grand Canyon -

Mount Everest -

A bustling harbor in Boston -

Once you are done share your adjective choices with a partner.

Homework: Review the techniques listed above. Next class we will be putting these techniques to work in an exercise.

Writing Assignment

Read Aloud Paragraph - Listen to the following paragraph. After, split into groups and choose a sentence from the paragraph to “blow up,” or revise. Essentially, vary sentence length and the content of each sentence with more vivid details and different devices.

After a tiring baseball practice my buddies and I walked back to the locker room. We got changed and hopped in our car. When we got to my house we turned on the TV to SportsCenter and started to make dinner. We ate and my friends went home. I did some of my homework and went to bed. My brother was talking with my dad so I didn't fall asleep for an hour or so.

-Pick one sentence for each group. Add depth, and details to whichever sentence you choose.

- Remember to use the devices we discussed above. These will help capture the essence of each situation (i.e. baseball practice could inhibit a “gritty,” “rough,” “humid” practice).

-In twenty minutes we will come back together as a class and organize the paragraph with the new sentences paying attention to structure and diction.

Reflective Essay

Figurative Language and Its Importance

The third grade was an interesting year for me, I had unintentionally murdered our class venus fly trap by sticking a pencil tip in its mouth (it looked hungry for lead apparently), but it was in this grade where I was first exposed to some forms of figurative language. I can remember learning the simile, and one cocky classmate bragging how she knew what onomatopoeia was and how to spell it. While some of these terms were taught to me in the third grade, I cannot recall touching on these topics again until the sixth grade.

Mr. Quigley, my english teacher, was a brilliant man. The class pretty much revolved around vocabulary, writing, and techniques to enhance writing. It was this year where I learned most of these basic literary devices. I can remember sitting down with him on numerous occasions as he watched me write, and we would go over some of my thoughts and choices as I wrote. From there, every school year that followed only really touched on the notion of literary devices. It was not until junior year and senior year of high school where my teachers really offered new insight and perspective on this matter.

I chose this topic because for me at least, it is a huge part of who I am as writer. I enjoy thinking of new ways to describe a scene or finding new processes to connect with the reader. If I ever become a teacher, I think composition would be my forte. There are so many nooks and crannies and several different routes a writer can take to

achieve his/her goal. Figurative language and literary devices can certainly aid in accomplishing one's goal(s).

A big problem in today's classroom at all levels is the neglect to teach grammar. Grammar is often being replaced by literature, which don't get me wrong is definitely important, but how will students learn to write or analyze this literature if they are not proficient in writing? This is something that the instruction of grammar can solve. As Dr. Devet writes in her article, *Welcoming Grammar Back into the Writing Classroom*, "how can grammar be reintroduced...in order to help students write more effectively?" (9). One way in which students can be "reintroduced" to the world of grammar is to go over literary techniques on how to write. For example, figurative language. Figurative language features many devices that can make one paper stand out from the next. These devices offer readers insight as to what something looks, feels, or smells like. They liven the writing up with words or phrases that appeal to the reader and make he/she feel as if they are actually there (if the piece being written is of fiction).

Dr. Devet is trying to convey the importance of teaching students how to write because it is a skill that is being lost in today's society. Implementing these literary devices is a step in the right direction for students. Figurative language is important because it sheds light on a more creative side to writing. Students can really find themselves through composing some of the devices I discussed in my handout. The exercise I designed for this technique should help students gage

the difference between bland, dry sentences, and sentences that are woven together and feature different lengths, as well as more vivid details to provide the reader with as much information as possible.

Just to recap the assignment, students are given a paragraph. They will then split into groups and pick a sentence to modify with the examples of figurative language on the handout. After about fifteen or twenty minutes the class will reconvene and we will go over the sentences they formulated. After each new sentence has been read aloud, we will arrange them into a new, more clear, descriptive paragraph. The point of the exercise is to see how these devices can paint a picture when utilized correctly. Figurative language is not just about using the devices correctly, but rather weaving the devices throughout one's work that captures the essence of the situation through the senses and appeals to the reader. As Dr. Devet mentioned, "reintroducing" writers to aspects of writing like these is great, because, frankly, students in today's world of writing are not getting the exposure they need.

Dr. Devet's arguments actually bring me to a point Yancey brought up in her article. Yancey argues that we as teachers must "develop a major in composition and rhetoric" (308). This is interesting, because just last semester I took a course taught by Dr. Devet entitled *Advanced Composition*. Throughout the course we went over several nuances of writing and how to write for specific audiences. This closely relates to what I am trying to do with my lesson plan and topic. I want to devise a lesson that goes over the fundamentals and

technicalities of writing. In short, how to formulate a piece that flows, and utilizes several literary devices that emit powerful, appealing descriptions to the reader. Not necessarily a fiction writing course, but a course that just teaches students the different ways in which they can pull their audience in and make them want to keep reading. This is the type of challenge I enjoy as a writer and I want to pass it down to students as best as I can. Yancey suggests that a class strictly about composing and the different elements of composing would be beneficial to students. I think if there were any way to sum up my writing theory or pedagogy, that would be it. Teaching figurative language is a great tool that could be used in a composition class. I know when I took Dr. Devet's class last semester we read two books: one with exercises in it called *Rhetorical Grammar*, and *On Writing Well* by William Zinsser. Both books served well as complements to the materials and strategies that Dr. Devet taught us. If I were to ever plan a curriculum and class built around my beliefs with composition and student writing, I think I would model it of Dr. Devet's class last semester. I believe she planned the course very well and went over aspects of writing that actually helped us as writers. A student will only get better at writing by actually writing pieces, and this is exactly what we did.

Now that I have mentioned William Zinsser, I'd like to mention one of his quotes in *On Writing Well*: "bear in mind, when you're choosing your words and stringing them together, how they sound" (35). I think this quote is especially useful for a writing class. Not only is Zinsser informing writers about being

careful with what words they choose, but he also raises the question of what to do with form and how the reader perceives this form.

Zinsser brought up some interesting points regarding diction, and as he states, sometimes one should keep in mind how a collection of words sound because they might appeal to the reader. But, enough about the word choice, let's shift gears and focus more on the style of writing that descriptive language goes along with. One would have to imagine the style would be somewhat of a leisurely tone, certainly not an academic tone; however, descriptive language can be utilized in academic writing, but only in limited amounts. When writing academically, it's more about arguments and maintaining a straightforward manner. So when using descriptive language what should the writer keep in mind for style? The handbook, *They Say, I Say* is a perfect read for writers who are in doubt about their audience or form. This book tackles these questions and offers writers a fresh view on how to formulate their work. For our purposes, we are going to take a look at it through the lens of descriptive language and see how we can benefit from its tips and strategies.

Many people perceive academic writing as literary devices that can strictly be used in creative writing; however, this is not the case. Literary devices used in descriptive language are often used in academic writing, just not as frequently as other styles of writing. The authors of *They Say, I Say*, Graff and Birkenstein, urge to "mix" styles. What does this mean? Well, say you are writing an assignment in a more academic style. You will obviously be spewing some facts

and trying to eventually persuade the reader that your point is correct, but how will you do this? You could mix styles and implement some of the devices found in figurative language.

Graff and Birkenstein talk a great deal about audience in relation to the type of language one should use. They note that “to succeed as a writer...you need not abandon your own voice at the classroom door” (121). So, in essence what the two authors are trying to say is that your voice still has a place in different styles of writing, in this case it’s academic. They even go further as to say that “It is the blending of these languages...” that will open possibilities “to all writers” (122). So, in short, the blending or mixing of these different languages and styles will open up many different possibilities for writers and what they can accomplish with their work. Figurative language can and should be incorporated into every piece of writing, in varied amounts of course depending on the style. Graff and Birkenstein are right, one should not stray away from their voice, because their voice is what makes each and every paper different. Figurative language is a big component of voice too.

When I gave my presentation to the class I harped on the notion of a strictly writing, composition-based class. A class free of literature, but with the occasional writing manual or article here or there pertaining to writing form and style. I took a class like this last semester and let me tell you it was a pleasure to take. Dr. Devet was very keen on us writing, and writing, and writing. In addition to some of the readings we had for homework, our homework was, you guessed

it, writing. The amount of writing we did was plentiful as well as beneficial. I don't think I've changed my writing as much as I did that semester. I tried new techniques, wrote more, wrote less, it was amazing. Students should enroll in a class like this. One of the pieces we read in class this semester was Lindemann's *Freshman Composition: No Place for Literature*. Lindemann argues that literature should not be taught in freshman english classes in college. I completely agree with him because if a few pieces of literature are incorporated into the curriculum, students tend to focus more on the readings than the writing aspects. There should be more classes like Dr. Devet's that I took last semester. Composition classes like those are great for students because it exposes them to all the different technicalities of writing that they may be unaware of. Lindemann states that "The sort of writing course I have described neither requires nor finds particularly relevant a significant role for literature" (313). I agree with him in the sense of little to no literature, but if writing handbooks or relevant articles pertaining to style etc. were implemented, I think that would prove to be beneficial for the students.

If students had supplementary reading that involved style and mechanic of writing, they could easily enhance their skills as writers applying what they have read to their writing very easily. The turnaround rate would be miniscule. Figurative language could easily be taught through the supplementary reading in class or for homework. The readings would be short, nothing crazy as opposed to books or anthologies used with literature classes. This would be a perfect step

in teaching the different elements of figurative language like the devices that can be employed. Literature can definitely be involved in the freshman composition class, as long as it involves tips and new material on how to better one's writing.

For me, the part I love about writing is the challenge of putting the reader within the writing; seeing everything through my eyes. I relish that challenge and that's why I enjoy descriptive language so much. Deciphering which device to use is fun because you have to think to yourself which one is going to make the most sense to the reader; which one will make them go, "Ah, I see!" So, when I chose my topic I decided to model my "class" after Dr. Devet's composition class because it was so writing-heavy, which is great.

To recap my exercise, I devised a concise, bland paragraph and my goal is to have the students use the devices we discussed on the handout to make a more vivid, lucid, and descriptive paragraph, which should wind up being longer than the original. I think this exercise would work well because it will show the students what a descriptive, well-strung together paragraph looks like.

If I were to select one of my sources that strongly put my theory into words, it would be Lindemann. The idea of strictly-writing classes and curriculums is great because it offers no distractions to students, just writing. And, if there is reading, it is very light and beneficial to their writing development. All in all, I want my potential students to focus on the fundamentals of writing rather than try and analyze texts. I believe that many people are losing their touch with writing, and a class that focuses on the inner workings of writing and

different forms, would help bring writing back out of the hole it has found itself in.

Writing is a blessing, let's learn to use it instead of shrugging it off with meaningless texts. Figurative language is a good place to start.