

## Literature/Writing Connection: *Ish*

### LESSON FOCUS: IDEAS

#### Lesson Objective

Students list sensory details as a prewriting exercise for a descriptive paragraph.

#### Gathering Details for Descriptive Writing

One goal for early writers is to write well-developed descriptive paragraphs. This can be achieved through a single, strong topic idea and several great details.

Students learn to observe and describe the world through each of their five senses. Utilizing this senses strategy, early writers can brainstorm lists of details useful in writing descriptive paragraphs. It is important, however, to encourage students to brainstorm freely, without self-censorship. Once the details are recorded, students can later evaluate their lists for the details that best support the main idea(s) of the writing assignment.

The book *Ish* by Peter H. Reynolds is an excellent mentor text for illustrating this free-range generation of ideas. Integrate the following Literature/Writing Connections lesson into your instruction on descriptive writing as a way of coaching students as they begin gathering details.

#### Story Overview

Ramon loves to draw, though his creative mind is stifled when his brother Leon laughs at his sketch of a vase. Ramon strives to draw the “perfect” vase, which is a futile effort. Frustrated, he throws all his pictures away.

He finds out, however, that his sister Marisol has a gallery of his work in her bedroom. She describes his work as vase-ish. This realization frees Ramon’s creative mind to once again draw and paint and write poetry, this time without fear of making something “perfect.”

#### An Uncensored Approach to Gathering Details

1. As part of your instruction on the first steps of descriptive writing, hold up a simple classroom object or other object of your choice. Lead your students through a discussion of the object using each of the five senses. How does the object look, sound, smell, feel, and taste?
2. Next, extend beyond the usual descriptive adjectives. Would your students say the pencil sharpener sounds hungry? Or that the door looks squeaky? Or that an apple tastes shiny? Why or why not?
3. Read the book *Ish* to your class. Afterward, ask your students what they thought of Ramon’s realization about his drawings.
4. Revisit the objects from the earlier discussion. Would your students now agree that a pencil sharpener sounds hungry-ish? Or that the door looks squeaky-ish? Or that the apple tastes shiny-ish? Whether they agree or not, highlight the fact that you brainstormed everything that came to mind, regardless of if it sounded silly or not. Your only goal was to write out all the sensory details you could think of first, then choose the best later.
5. Encourage your students to bear this thinking in mind as you transition over to the gathering details portion of prewriting. Once they have selected the topic of their descriptive paragraphs, have them use their five senses to list possible details—without self-censorship. Students can choose their favorite details afterward to craft their first drafts.
6. This exercise can be repeated again later during the revising stage of the writing process. It can be repeated any time that students find they need more or different details to strengthen their writing.