

TRAIT FOCUS: WORD CHOICE

Lesson Objective

Students freewrite with a focus on utilizing strong sensory words.

The Skill of Sensory Words

Descriptive, evocative language is not necessarily limited to narrative and creative writing. Sensory words are effective in both fiction and nonfiction...when used strategically. They can enhance any piece of writing that relies on description, careful explanation, or clear setting.

Students in High School sometimes forget to use the tried-and-true strategies they learned in the primary grades: describe using each of the five senses. It never hurts to remind your students to refer back to this strategy when writing descriptions with strong sensory word choice.

The short story “A Rose for Emily” by William Faulkner is an excellent mentor text with vivid use of sensory language. Integrate the following Literature/Writing Connection lesson into your discussion of the story as a way of instructing your students on revising text for evocative word choices.

Story Overview

Emily Grierson has passed away and the whole town has come out to see. Like many of Faulkner’s old, southern families, the Griersons have a long and colorful past.

Emily falls in love with a man named Homer Barron, but time passes and he does not propose to her. When she buys arsenic from the druggist, the townspeople suspect that she is going to kill herself. She does not, however, and for decades she stays in her secluded home, barely seeing or speaking to anyone.

After her death, however, the house is searched, and what the townspeople find in Emily’s bedroom paints this “fallen monument” in quite a different light.

Painting the Artist’s (Writer’s) Picture

1. As part of your class discussions of the story, incorporate the following into your analysis of section V, the climax in which the contents of Emily’s bedroom are described.
2. As the name suggests, sensory words are descriptions that utilize the five senses. Explain that an author’s word choice is important in painting a vivid picture in the reader’s mind. It puts the reader right in the middle of the scene.
3. Reread section V of the story, calling special attention to Faulkner’s vivid word choices (*acrid, faded rose, tarnished, fleshless grin*). How do these words help bring the reader into the story? Ask your students to close their eyes as you read to them. What about the scene seems clearest in their minds?
4. Have your students freewrite for 10 to 15 minutes on the following writing prompt: *Write about a time when you sat around a campfire or a lit fireplace. Where were you and what was the occasion? Describe the scene and the fire itself.*
5. Once their initial thoughts are down on paper, have them rewrite their paragraphs, focusing on using vivid sensory words. Tell them to describe the scene using each of the five senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell.
6. Read a few examples to the class. Discuss how the writer’s word choices affect the mood. Is the fire peaceful, cheery, serene? How might the writer use a different choice of words to create a different mood: somber, depressed, worrisome?