

TRAIT FOCUS: WORD CHOICE

Lesson Objective

Students write a short paragraph description as a way of practicing metaphor word choices.

Using Metaphors

Expertise in the trait of word choice is not limited to having a broad vocabulary, skill in using a thesaurus, or the ability to collect words in one's memory. At its heart, it is about picking out the best noun, verb, or adjective for the job, even when the chosen word seems to have nothing to do with the context in which it is used—the metaphor.

A majority of High School writers will be familiar with word choice strategies. If this is the case in your classroom, challenge your writers to use metaphors and other figurative language to spice up their word choices. Metaphors can transform a basic idea into a living, breathing picture. Students will find that these poetic words and phrases can help bring their writing to life in a way that traditional word choices cannot.

The soliloquy “What light through yonder window breaks?” from William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* is an excellent mentor text with a clear, central metaphor. Integrate the following Literature/Writing Connection lesson into your discussion of the play as a way of instructing your students on using metaphors as evocative word choices.

Story Overview

Romeo and Juliet is arguably the most famous of William Shakespeare’s tragedies, and Romeo’s balcony soliloquy is arguably the most famous and most beautiful of that play. In it, the passionate lover becomes enamored with the young beauty of the rival family that he has only seen from afar.

She is Romeo’s sun, her beauty rivaling even that of the virgin goddess of the moon, Diana. The speech continues the theme of light and dark—this being a time of light before the tragic dark later strikes.

Juliet Is the Sun

1. As part of your class discussions of the play, incorporate the following writing lesson into your analysis of Act 2, Scene 2, in which Romeo delivers his “What light through yonder window breaks?” soliloquy.
2. Remind students that strong writing has effective word choices in nouns, verbs, and adjectives. However, choosing just the right word for the job can also include using figurative language such as metaphors.
3. Explain that a metaphor describes something by comparing it to something seemingly unrelated. It equates two things to create a powerful picture in the reader’s mind. In its simplest form, a metaphor can be expressed as _____ is a _____.
4. Now your students will see one of the most famous metaphors in the English literary canon. Read and discuss Romeo’s soliloquy on the balcony and the central metaphor: “Juliet is the sun.” What is the basic idea of Romeo’s statement? (that he finds Juliet beautiful) What is the metaphor he employs? (she is so beautiful she brings light to darkness)
5. Discuss with your class how this choice of wording brings the writing to life much more than if Romeo merely said, “Wow, what a hot girl!”
6. Assign the following writing prompt to your class: *Write a paragraph describing someone of importance in your life. First think of the basic ideas you wish to describe, then formulate a central metaphor you can use to enhance your description.*
7. As your students work, encourage them to avoid overused words or phrases in their metaphors that have become clichés. If they have heard something used many times before, it is probably a cliché. Additionally, your writers should avoid mixed metaphors that result from combining different images in a confusing manner.