

## TRAIT FOCUS: VOICE

## Lesson Objective

Students write a personal definition of voice to use as a reference tool.

## Solidifying an Understanding of the Voice Trait

As middle school students mature into more sophisticated writers and thinkers, they will have been exposed to many different genres of reading with many different voices. However, it may still be a challenge for them to employ a voice in their own writing. The concept can still be an abstract one, and while they may recognize voice when they hear it, they may not have yet found their own voices.

Exposing writers to a text with a strong voice will help bring the concept to the forefront of their minds. That is the best time to help them craft their own definitions of voice. Having students define voice in their own words holds extra significance for them. It will also stay with them as they begin to evaluate their own work and discover that they too have a writer's voice.

The short story "The Tell-Tale Heart" by Edgar Allan Poe is an excellent mentor text with a distinct and memorable voice. Integrate the following Literature/Writing Connection lesson into your discussion of the short story as a way of instructing your students on defining the trait of voice for themselves.

## Story Overview

Poe opens his famous short story with the classic line:—"why *will* you say that I am mad?" It's an ambiguous question the reader is left asking throughout the story. The unnamed narrator claims to have a disease which heightens his senses. As a result, the vulture-like eye of his housemate haunts him. He feels his only recourse is to murder the old man, dismember the body, and hide him under the floorboards.

Afterward, however, a new turmoil plagues the narrator—"It is the beating of his hideous heart!"

## What Voice Means to Me

1. As part of your class discussion of the short story, incorporate the following lesson into your analysis of the narrator's disturbed voice and from where it comes.
2. Explain that writers give each of their narrators a distinct voice that is separate from their own personal voice. For instance, even though a piece is written in first person with "I", it is not necessarily the writer himself speaking.
3. Ask your students: "What is voice?" Allow for a bit of discussion, but do not agree on an official definition.
4. Read portions of the story together as an example. Discuss what words and phrases the narrator uses that "sound" like him. How do they act to form the narrator's voice?
5. Direct your class to a writer's rubric that includes the trait of voice. Have your students "grade" Poe's writing using the rubric. Is the voice individual like a fingerprint? Is it distinctive?
6. Give your writers some time to reflect on the class discussion and the analysis with the rubric. Then, tell them to craft a definition of what voice means to them. The definition can be one sentence or more. It can include what makes a voice unique, how to recognize voice in a piece of writing, or how the student would personally like to employ voice in his or her own writing.
7. Pair students up and have them share their definitions. After they've exchanged thoughts and feedback, allow them some time to revise. Encourage them to keep the definition handy to use any time they are writing with a focus on voice.