

Minnesota Writing Project

--- Demonstration Lesson ---

Title: Setting Tone in the Classroom and Incorporating Tone in Student Writing (Beginning of the school year activity.)

Grade appropriate: 10 -- Approximate Length of time to complete lesson/unit: 2-3 days

Learning objectives and significance of lesson:

- Students will establish classroom tone of acceptance of multiculturalism.
- Students will identify tone in music and writing.
- Students will identify words and phrases that convey tone.
- Students will generate tone words and incorporate them in their writing.
- Students will practice the revision process in a small group setting.
- Students will share their writing.

Brief summary/outline:

This lesson is the beginning of a five-week short story unit where students will begin to identify tone and diction in short stories. It is a difficult concept, so I try to scaffold them at the very beginning of the year. The Culture Shock activity is something I received from one of my CIS Literature colleagues (who I cannot remember, I apologize) some time ago. I use it as a fun activity to break the ice at the beginning of the school year, but it is also a great way to talk about the diversity at Como Park, so that we can establish a culture of respect when they enter my classroom.

Culture Shock

1. Break the class into four groups.
2. Hand out each group's culture description.
3. Find a way to differentiate the group (I use index cards).
4. Begin exercise.

Culture #1: You are a proud, if not ignorant, people. You think our opinions are the only things worth hearing—so in order to avoid having to hear what others have to say, you started sticking your fingers in your ears. This has served you well, so you do it in every conversation you have. Also, because you think that you are so darn good, you always need to be higher than others are—you naturally seek out shorter people than you are and try to make yourself look bigger. If someone is your height, you tend to stand on a chair to make yourself look like a big person. Finally, you state your opinions loudly and everything has to be about you—to do otherwise would be rude.

Culture #2: You are a very humble people. Whenever you speak to someone, you do so in a whisper—as not to insult them or make them feel uncomfortable. Also, you don't like to draw attention to yourself—so whenever you are asked a question, you always change the subject.

Culture #3: You are a wonderful and amazing people. Your history goes far back, and your people have always held positions of power. Because of this, it is important for you—when you are in a conversation—to maintain eye contact at all costs. Also, you are amazingly interested in what other people are thinking so that every time you are asked a question you always answer with another question.

Culture #4: You are a humble, shy, and proud people. Because of this, communicating with others is very difficult. In order to compensate for these feelings, whenever someone talks to you, you lower your eyes, bow your head, and fold your hands. And most importantly, you always keep your back to whoever you are talking to—this is to let them know how humble you truly are.

Playing the Game

1. Once your set up is complete, remind each culture group to remain in character.

2. Give the class a topic to discuss. Give them two minutes to discuss the topic. Their goal is to have at least three different conversations with the three other cultures.
3. After the two minutes are up, have them get into their cultural group.
4. Going one group at a time, ask them to describe the other cultures—try to tease out value judgments with your questioning.
5. After each culture has described their impressions of the other cultures, ask each group to describe their own cultures and what is important to them.
6. Next, open discussion with the class at large and have them suggest different things the cultures could do to bridge the gaps.
7. Use the same question as before, but now allow a one-minute interaction—hopefully the various groups have found ways to interact.
8. Have another class discussion about why cultures clash and what leads to misunderstanding and mistrust.

Use this discussion as a basis for the kind of environment you would like to have in the classroom where it may be diverse with students from different backgrounds or where you will be reading about various cultures and opinions. This is setting the tone for a classroom environment of respect so students can feel safe to share their voices and writing with each other.

Transition into a discussion on tone.

1. Using a cluster map on the board, ask students to define the word tone.
2. Ask where they see or hear tone (music, voices, and color often come up).
3. Select a variety of music with different tones. Put the lyrics on an overhead transparency.
4. Show each song lyric at a time and ask a student volunteer to read it aloud. Invite students to suggest the tone of each song by pointing out the text that support their assertions.
5. Next, ask students to set the lyrics to music—what instrument(s), pace, type of voice, etc. would be appropriate to convey the tone of the song?
6. Play each song to see how accurate student predictions were.
7. Discuss how the melody—use of instruments, pace, etc. impact the tone of each song.

Transition to students incorporating tone into their own writing.

1. Pass out a tone vocabulary sheet.
2. On a sheet of paper, have students write down one tone word that conveys how they felt or what they thought about their first day of school.
3. Then have students list ten words that are sub-emotions of that tone word. They may take words from the tone vocabulary list.
4. Students write a one-page essay about another experience in which they felt or thought the way they felt or thought on their first day of school. They must incorporate and underline at least five tone words from their list above. They may not use their original tone word in the essay. At the end of the essay, relate back to how such an experience was like their first day of school.
5. Students will be placed in groups of three the next day to revise each other's paper.
6. Students will share their final drafts in the group. Each group can either vote for one paper to be read aloud to the class, or everyone can take turns stating their tone word out loud.

***Assessment will be a rubric that evaluates for completeness, neatness, and effectiveness in conveying tone.

Related Resources:

Rhonda Brandon at Rice University for College Board, Pre-AP training, 1999
College in the Schools Literature Workshop resources

Possible extensions or adaptations for different purposes/student needs:

For an intermediate or lower level class, I would have students reduce their list of ten words to five and have them incorporate them into their writing. Students may have a choice between writing about their first day of school or another experience.