

Minnesota Writing Project

--- Demonstration Lesson Template ---

Voice Out/Voice In: Developing Personal Voice

Suggested grade/age:

High school

Approximate time needed to complete lesson:

Two 48-minute class periods for complete instruction

Learning objective(s) and significance of lesson:

During second semester, my students write a critical review paper on a film or novel for their common assessment. Voice is especially important when reviewing art because they should be engaging readers and convincing them to agree with their evaluations. They struggle with switching out of the pedantic tone of academia that they think teachers want to hear into writing honest opinions with their own voice. Usually, I explain this by telling them that they should write to their peers, neighbors, and parents who might pick up the Variety section of the newspaper on a Friday morning before work or school to help them decide which movie to see that weekend. This lesson helps them reach that more conversational, persuasive tone.

Brief summary/outline of lesson:

This lesson occurs during a critical review unit after the students have written a rough draft. I've mentioned voice before when we read student examples right away, but this is our first in-depth study of the topic. This lesson works well when they already have a rough draft written because then they can immediately try to apply what they've learned to concrete examples in their own work. Please see the student handout on the final page for the directions students receive. Also, the directions below illustrate a follow-up lesson that can be done on the second day.

Teacher Instructions – After Step 7

1. When the students have finished looking at their “chain” of passages – original voice, voiceless, and new voice – ask them to read their three passages aloud to the class. This works well if the teacher knows which groups have been particularly successful and can prompt a few groups to share stellar examples. Sometimes I collect them at the end of the hour and scan/type a few so that I can easily show them visually to the class on the projector the next day.
2. Next, brainstorm a list of elements that create voice. Write these on a white board as you go, and ask students to take notes. These might include word choice, sentence structure, dialect, references/analogies, etc. Hopefully, the students will be able to move from a generalized look at character to a more specific concept of what tools can be used to create voice by the end of this lesson.

3. Finally, the students should spend quality time looking for examples of voice in their own work. They examine their rough drafts for places where they can add in more voice and record suggestions for revising their writing.

Related Resources:

Teachers could use different passages with good voice to start with. For example, younger students might need pieces with less complex vocabulary. Or, teachers might choose to include passages from texts or authors studied in class. Also, examples of great student reviews from past years can illustrate how these characteristics of good voice can be found in their own work. Professionally written reviews or any other creative writing would work for this, too.

Possible extensions or adaptations for different purposes/student needs:

In different grades, teachers might consider using different original texts based on the age and reading level of the students. For example, children’s books might be used in elementary classrooms, and middle level teachers might consider adolescent literature. When students are in elementary and middle school, they will most likely find it helpful to see their teacher model an example of this process. This will help them to see good examples of these different voices. Finally, although this lesson was originally intended to help with critical review writing, it can be used with many other genres. Teachers might even use this three-part “chain” format to approach other elements of writing.

For additional information, contact: Marie Hansen at mchansen@burnsville.k12.mn.us

CRITICAL REVIEW PAPER – VOICE OUT/VOICE IN ACTIVITY

NAME _____ HOUR _____

Objective: A truly effective review will draw readers in – make them laugh, cry, and roll their eyes. Ultimately, you will persuade them to see your movie or read your book (or not!). You can only accomplish this by using a strong personal and creative voice. Today, we will determine what gives writing voice by looking at professionally written texts and manipulating them to illustrate a different voice.

VOICE OUT:

Step 1: Read the example you have been given out loud as a group. Discuss what type of character would have said or written the words in this passage. Who is speaking to you? What is their story? What makes them individual?

Step 2: Rewrite the passage without any voice. Take out as many individual distinctions as you can. Your new passage will probably be shorter, boring, and sound like a dry textbook.

Step 3: Switch your rewritten voiceless passage with another group (wait until Ms. Hansen tells you to do this!).

VOICE IN:

Step 4: Read the voiceless paragraph as a group. Think about how you could add personality to this text. Is there a particular character or type of person you could use to interpret the story? Create an idea of what voice you will use when writing.

Step 5: Rewrite the passage to reflect this voice. When you review the finished product, it should sound like your intended character is speaking the words. It's okay if you choose to focus on one part of the passage or change the structure a bit to fit your new voice.

Step 6: Send this new passage back to its original group (wait until Ms. Hansen tells you to do this!).

IN CONCLUSION:

Step 7: Review your original paragraph and rewritten voiceless paragraph. Then, read the new paragraph that your group has received. Discuss what type of voice this new passage reflects. Is it different or similar to the original? In what ways? Why do you think so?