

Minnesota Writing Project

--- Demonstration Lesson Template ---

Title of lesson: Writing the Prairie—Diction and Author Perspective

Suggested grade/age: High school (can be modified for other grades)

Approximate time needed to complete lesson: 45-60 minutes

Learning objective(s) and significance of lesson: I want students to be able to identify the words (diction) that reveal an author's perspective on a place.

This lesson also reinforces students' understanding of the elements of author's style.

The complex relationship between people and places is revealed in connotative language. Places, like people, are more than one thing—both people and the landscape are shaped by an interactive relationship.

Students' own writing will exhibit more connotative diction, especially in writing about place.

Brief summary/outline of lesson:

1. Distribute a positive image of the prairie to three groups of students and a negative image of the prairie to three other groups.
2. Students generate a list of 10 descriptive phrases rich in adjectives and connotative words.
3. Groups should use their lists to write a descriptive paragraph of the prairie titled "Prairie".
4. Share paragraphs aloud and record key words on the board. They are all writing about the same place, but they will notice the different impressions of the prairie they've created for the reader through word choice.
5. Briefly discuss which of these images is more accurate, more "true".
6. Project "Under Holdrege, Nebraska" (Holm) on the whiteboard and read aloud to students. Ask students to identify words/phrases that reveal author's perspective—circle them in marker on the whiteboard and discuss how author perspective is revealed. What is Holm's perspective on the prairie? How does he show this? What can we say about his words?
7. Project more literature, preferably with a different perspective. Have the same discussion.

Related Resources:

Illinois State Museum website; the works of Holm, Cather, and Rolvaag; photos or artworks of the prairie printed from the Internet along with credits/references.

Possible extensions or adaptations for different purposes/student needs:

Environmental science classroom—ethics discussion—Leopold's *Sand County Almanac* and Dillard;

Parts of speech lesson/review; other authors: Galt, Paul Gruchow, Sara Plan and Tall, Ignacia Broker—*Night Flying Woman*; other biomes like wetland, desert, city, Upper Midwest winter; Native American literature.

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