Title of lesson: Snapshots and Sensory Details

Suggested grade/age: 1–12

Approximate time needed to complete lesson: 1-2 days

Learning objective(s) and significance of lesson:
(Why is this lesson important in the development of your students' skills or knowledge? What do you want students to learn or be able to do? What “best practice” does this lesson incorporate?)

The goal for this lesson is that students will be able to use “snapshots” in their writing to add sensory details to their descriptions. This is an important skill for students as they are progressing in their narrative writing skills to be able to move beyond focusing on the plot to the craft of writing vivid narratives that show rather than tell.

Best practices in this lesson include scaffolding by reviewing an old concept and practicing with a familiar skill (sensory details), which students use to build to a new concept of writing snapshots; using a mentor text to explain a new concept (e.g. Little House in the Big Woods); incorporating multiple intelligences through movement, music, and photographs; and collaborative learning with partners.

Brief summary/outline of lesson:
(What steps do you take to implement this lesson in your classroom? Where is this lesson located in the school year or unit—beginning, middle, end? Does this lesson scaffold or build to a culminating assessment or demonstration of learning?)

This lesson is generally taught toward the beginning of the school year and the beginning of the unit. Students in my class are working on writing a personal narrative, but it could be useful with any creative/descriptive writing unit.

This lesson is a formative assessment that is building toward the summative assessment, which is a complete personal narrative.

Step 1: Bellwork — use a writing prompt that will give students a chance to brainstorm memorable/important events and the locations where those events occurred

Step 2: Review sensory details — first, what are they? Then, assign each student a different sense to focus on (excluding taste) by giving them a colored sticky note or a color coded note card. Show students a series of four different images of various settings — each student should list observations for their assigned sense (e.g. smell) for each image. To share, have students walk around the room to music and then when the music stops, get back to back with a partner.
Students then share what they wrote for the first image. Repeat with the music/partner for three more rotations.

Step 3: Snapshots—introduce the new concept of snapshots and practice writing snapshots based on photographs
—A snapshot creates a picture in the reader’s mind. To write a snapshot, you want to zoom in and study the scene you want to recreate closely. Slow down your senses. Really observe the world you are trying to recreate. What do you want your reader to see, hear, taste, smell, or feel?

Discuss examples of snapshots in mentor text (e.g. Laura Ingalls Wilder’s Little House in the Big Woods)

Step 4:
Then, transition to using photographs as inspiration for writing. On the computer, have a photograph prepared ahead of time. This photograph could be anything that you think is interesting, but often photographs involving groups of people who look like they are caught in the middle of something are best. To prepare the photograph, start zoomed in really closely on one particular person or part of the photograph. Do not let the students see the whole photograph yet!

Have students start to try to create a written snapshot (using sensory details) based on this zoomed in image—the teacher can either lead the class through this once orally or have them write first, depending on the age and ability of the students. After students have had a chance to share with a partner and the class, zoom the photo out slightly to include another element of the photograph. Repeat by having students write or discuss what they would include in their snapshot based on the expanded image. Have students share with a partner and the whole class. Repeat the process once more, this time zooming out to let students see the whole image.

Step 5:
Students can then practice writing snapshots in their own writing, either by going back and adding a snapshot to something they were writing before this lesson, or by starting a new piece of writing, intentionally including snapshots.

Related Resources:
(What technology, articles, books, or supplies do you recommend?)

Supplies/technology:
Computer, projector, images, note cards or colored sticky notes, upbeat music

Related/additional books, articles, videos:
• —After the End by Barry Lane
• —http://www.ashland-city.k12.oh.us/staff/jurawson/PDFs/snapshots.pdf
• —Barry Lane’s snapshot—writing his favorite day https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxdrOWUCu48
• —Explode a Moment—Barry Lane https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mA9YeKBRaL8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KykziiIpyuo&feature=endscreen&NR=1
Possible extensions or adaptations for different purposes/student needs:

- This lesson could also be used with artwork instead of photographs
- This lesson could be used to promote revision in writing as well, since the “snapshots” that students created in stages might need to be reordered afterward in order to be most effective
- Encourage students to add dialogue once they are comfortable with sensory details, or to differentiate for more advanced students

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