

Minnesota Writing Project

---Demonstration Lesson---

Title of lesson: Revising Personal Essays for Clarity and Style

Suggested grade/age: Grades 9-12

Approximate time needed to complete lesson: two 50-minute class periods

Learning objective(s) and significance of lesson

Standards Covered

11.7.3.3: Write narratives and other creative texts to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

- Use literary and narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, rhythm, repetition, rhyme, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
- Use precise words and phrases, telling details, figurative and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

11.7.5.5 Use a writing process to develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, drafting, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

Rationale

- Students need to feel empowered to find value in their own stories
- Students should recognize the strengths of each other as writers
- Students need to develop persistence in overcoming the challenges of writing effectively
- Students can become more strategic and purposeful in the revision process
- Students will form a connection between their reading and writing, noticing the specific tools that good writers employ

Brief summary/outline of lesson

I have integrated this lesson in the revision process for a personal essay the students write in connection with their reading of *The Great Gatsby*. It can be applied to any creative, personal narrative or essay assignment, though. It is best inserted well into the school year after students have a repertoire of literary devices they have learned about and observed in their reading.

Part 1: Review of Literary Devices

Teacher may hand out a list, ask students to find these terms in their notes, or use student input to populate a list of literary devices they have studied. Examples may include:

Figurative Language:

- Metaphor
- Simile
- Personification
- Irony
- Hyperbole
- Understatement

- Onomatopoeia

- Rhyme

Pattern and Repetition:

- Parallelism (triplets!)
- Anaphora
- Chiasmus
- Climax
- Pacing

Sound:

- Alliteration
- Assonance

And don't forget imagery!

Part 2: Identify Devices in a Text; Analyze + Evaluate their Use

With more time, the teacher may choose a personal essay for this portion of the lesson. Because it is dense, personal, and filled with interesting and artistic devices, I chose the poem, "Shrinking Women" by Lily Myers at the 2013 College National Poetry Slam. Find a link to her performance in the resources below.

While watching the video, assign groups of students to watch for particular devices (e.g. "This row/group looks for sound devices that you notice," etc.)

Post-viewing, students can share within groups or with the whole class. The teacher may choose to guide the students in a discussion of questions like:

- What devices did you notice?
- What were the most interesting or vivid parts of this piece?
- What resonated with you or made you think differently about something?
- How did the devices help Myers make her point, achieve an emotional impact, etc.?

Part 3: Viewing Student Samples

For this part of the lesson, I chose excerpts of student work that were 1-3 paragraphs in length. These samples came directly from the students' rough drafts that they had just completed. Samples can also come from the work of past years' students. Based on the goals for this assignment and the needs I saw in the students' rough drafts, I chose work that would demonstrate for them the types of things they may want to improve upon in their own work. For each sample, I created questions for a small group to discuss about that piece. Examples include:

1. Which parts of this piece feel especially honest and personal to you? Why?
2. How does Darren's "be a simple man" statement express a relatable idea without being a cliché?
3. Highlight three passages you think are especially helpful in creating emotional tension.
4. Find examples of figurative language that Kara has used. Which ones work best for you? Why?
5. Where does Kara use repetition and parallel structure in her writing? How does it impact the sound and meaning of the passage?
6. What words and phrases create strong imagery in the piece? What senses does Maria employ here?

7. How does Maria's pacing create tension and drama here?
8. What emotions does Maria convey here? Where do the emotions shift in the piece?
9. Which details in particular evoke specific emotions for you? What emotions do you feel in reading this?

Part 4: Reflection and Application

After the group work and possible sharing by each group, I asked students to reflect on the activity and how it relates to their work as writers. Here are some possible exit slip/journal questions students may answer:

1. Which of the student examples resonated with you? What did you admire about the writing?
2. What devices have you specifically tried to incorporate in your writing? Which devices do you want to try?
3. What is going well for you on this assignment so far?
4. What has been difficult about revising your work so far?

I think it is important for the teacher to collect this work so that he/she can address student struggles or concerns in future lessons or writing conferences.

Following this, students would work on revising their own personal essays to intentionally incorporate different literary devices that may reinforce the meaning of their work, add unique voice and creativity, and better capture the emotions they wish to convey. The teacher may ask students to do any of the following in that process:

- Highlight or underline passages in your writing that you think need some work, passages that are dull or lifeless, passages where you feel like you're not yet achieving the effect you want
- Highlight or underline passages in a classmate's essay that are effective (or that need revision)
- Submit a copy of the final draft alongside a marked-up rough draft
- Write a paragraph explaining the rationale for your revision (what you added/changed/removed and why)
- On the final draft, mark three (or whatever number) different examples of literary devices you incorporated in your work
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Related Resources

[Literary Devices Website](#): List of terms with definitions and examples
["Shrinking Women"](#) poem by Lily Myers (performance on YouTube)

Possible extensions or adaptations for different purposes/student needs

- Show video of poem more than once, perhaps with subtitles or printout of the words
- Use a different text for study based on student interests or abilities, course goals, etc.
- Use a similar process (identifying devices, looking at a mentor text, analyzing peers' work) with any revision work in a writing context