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ENG 480
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Mini-Lesson: How to Create Emphasis

(9-10.W.3)
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
b. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
d. Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

How to Emphasize

SWBAT write an outline of a comic page, script (news or play), textbook page, short story, or piece of academic writing to convey an experience by using the three narrative techniques of pacing, description, and sensory language.

Standards:

(9-10.W.3)

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

b. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

d. Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

Objective:

SWBAT write an outline of a comic page, script (news or play), textbook page, short story, or piece of academic writing to convey an experience by using the three narrative techniques of pacing, description, and sensory language.

Justification:

The objective is explicit and measurable, and given at the start of the lesson so that students know what to expect. Studies show that displaying the daily objective at the start of a lesson increases student engagement and achievement. The teacher will verbally explain the standards and objective, and the written version will be displayed on screen, thereby giving students multiple formats through which to access the information. The pairing of written words and verbal explanations helps students with different learning styles, as well as students with learning disabilities or who have English as their second language.

Agenda

Intro

Explaining how emphasis works

Activity

Also, this is relevant to your lives.

Give a brief explanation of the plan for the lesson, and specifically mention that the content is useful to all forms of writing, whether academic or creative or functional, and therefore applicable to everyone in the room.

Iconic Moments

(inspired by a lecture by Benjamin Percy, author of Red Moon)

Introduction:

The teacher will ask for students to indicate by raising their hands if they recognize the movie poster on the left. (Hopefully, either very few or none of them will.) Then, the teacher will ask who recognizes the image on the right. (Hopefully, the majority of them will.) Then, the teacher will ask one student to quickly explain what is occurring in this scene.

Repeat the exercise for each subsequent slide, but without a student's summary of each scene. Explain that the images on the left were used to advertise these extremely successful movies, but the images, ideas, and stories that have stuck with us culturally are not what corporations promoted, but what audiences connected with. The iconic scenes lasted, not the promotional materials.

Justification:

By having students raise their hands to indicate their familiarity with the two images, all students will get a visual representation that signifies how well-known one image is over another, as opposed to the teacher simply stating, "This image is more well known." Additionally, this experience will solidify the connection in their brains more solidly first, because it stems from social interactions with peers instead of simple memorization, and secondly, because it requires students to interpret the meaning of the raised hands.

Spectacles

- Stick with you
- Talk about later
- Referenced in other movies
- Iconic

What attributes turn a scene into a spectacle?

Main Content:

Explain that each iconic scene, or “spectacle,” as Benjamin Percy calls them, is a moment that sticks with the audience, that the audience talks about with their friends long after the scene has passed and the movie ended, and that gets alluded to in other movies and TV shows because writers know that the audience is familiar with it.

Ask students what attributes they think turns a regular scene into a spectacle.
(Ex. Emotional in some way or another, suspenseful, out of the ordinary, original, etc.)

Relate all of this back to the idea of emphasis—each spectacle is emphasized. Use the movie quote from Syndrome to explain that emphasis creates variety, and makes one scene, idea, or element of a story stick out above the others, thus making it more important to the overall meaning of the thing being presented.

How do we create spectacles in writing?



Justification:

Engaging students in the discussion and building on the ideas they present will engage them, encourage them, and make the content more accessible. Using examples that students are already familiar with grounds this idea in their background knowledge, and makes it easier to focus on the content of the lesson without having to introduce too many new concepts all at once.

“Narrative Real Estate”

“There is a direct correlation between the time spent on a scene and its function.”

--Benjamin Percy

- comic book pages
- seconds in movies or TV shows or news broadcasts
- length in textbooks or encyclopedias
- amount of description in creative writing (books, short stories)
- amount of analysis in essays
 - Pacing
 - Description
 - Sensory Information

Introduce the idea of “narrative real estate,” which is a slightly more nuanced concept than emphasis. Basically, “narrative real estate” is the idea that emphasis in a story comes from the amount of time, attention, and emotional impact given to a single moment within that story. This emphasis comes from a combination of pacing, description, and sensory information, to name a few techniques.

Then, give and explain several examples in multimedia formats, and explain how the amount of narrative real estate a certain topic, idea, or scene within each example dramatically changes the meaning of the piece of writing.

Justification:

Giving concrete examples solidifies an abstract concept and makes it more accessible to students. Using real-life examples makes the information grounded in students’ experiences, which makes it more personally meaningful to them, and thus more memorable. Including visuals—both written and image-based—makes the information easier to understand, especially for ELL students and students with learning disabilities.

Comic Book



Scripts

Half hour:

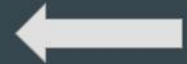
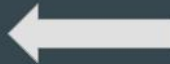
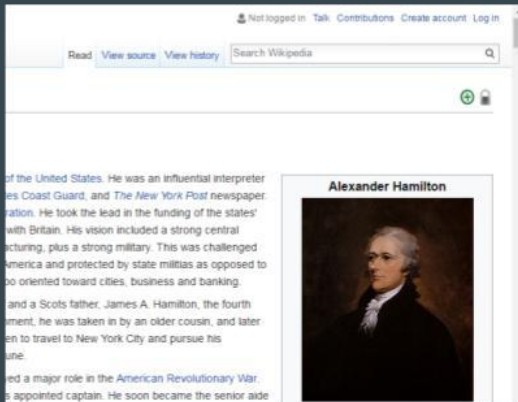
Trump didn't shake Merkel's hand!!!

Twenty five seconds:

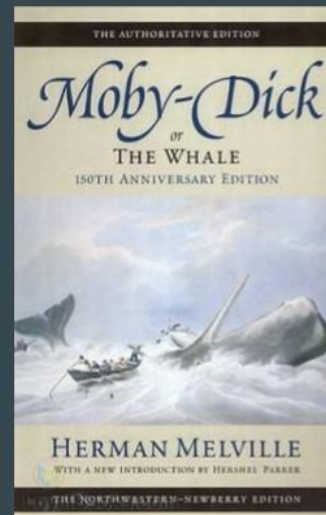
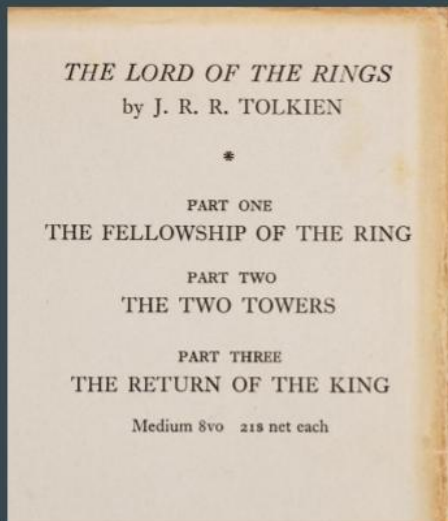
By the way, North Korea has concentration camps, and publicly executes whole families for expressing doubt in the regime.



Textbook or Encyclopedia



Creative Writing



Academic Writing

Causes of the Civil War

- One 3-page paragraph about corruption in the Senate
- Two lines tacked onto the conclusion about states' rights

Your Job

Five minutes!

Outline, draft

Topic: "The best thing about college is..."

- Comic Page
- Script (news or play)
- Textbook Page
- Short Story
- Academic Writing

Evaluation:

I am looking to see what you are emphasizing and how you are emphasizing it.

- Narrative Real Estate
- Pacing
- Description
- Sensory Language

Activity:

Students have five minutes to create an outline or draft of a comic book page, script, textbook page, short story, or piece of academic writing based on the topic, "The best thing about college is..." They will be evaluated based on the objective presented at the beginning of class, which

looks for how students plan to use pacing, description, and sensory language to give their main point the proper “narrative real estate” it requires.

Students may use any form of media to complete this assignment, digital or hard copy. Specifically reference Google Slides for the comics, Google Docs for the written versions, Paint for creating storyboards for any of the assignments, etc. Doing so will “embed digital literacy in [the] classroom” using the “multiple resources for students and teachers to best navigate the Internet” that Google has created (Crowley).

Justification:

Allowing for the incorporation of digital technologies in this assignment gives students the opportunity to develop digital literacy naturally embedded in the content. Giving students this opportunity elevates their learning to more accurately reflect the demands of today’s 21st century job market.

Additionally, making the knowledge relevant to real life and taking it out of a purely academic sphere gives students the opportunity to see and use different kinds writing language, and engage in a composition exercise that uses expressive writing (Dornan, 234).

Modeling Time: Short Story

Introduction: one paragraph

- I remember a time when I was full of hope and life
- describe academic expectations
- never thought about exposure to new things

Quick contrast: one paragraph

- falling asleep at 3am, waking up at 7am
- reliance on artificial substances to function
- stress out the wazoo

Conclusion: one line

- Didn't get what I expected out of college, got something better

Main point, emphasize: paragraph per point

- Dude from Palestine and culture shock
- Rainbow liberty spikes and a wizard robe
- An actual communist coworker
- Military vets in their twenties
- Chinese business students
- Study nature of the human soul
- Social controls and how to escape the system
- Discover history hidden from our textbooks
- App developer--hospital drug monitoring
- Creative writer--career options
- Engineering--co-worker bash safety in piping

Model the assignment for students, and verbally explain it.

Justification:

Students perform better when they have a concrete example of the type and quality of work they are expected to produce, a similar effect to providing a rubric.

Questions?

(Check for understanding)

In addition to asking for questions throughout the presentation, explicitly give students the opportunity to ask questions to clear up any confusion about the requirements of the assignment. After asking for questions, display the directions again so that students can refer to them while completing their assignment.

Justification:

Giving students the space to voice their concerns or misunderstandings encourages a welcoming classroom community that is open to group learning, and therefore more conducive to student participation (“Appendix: NCTE Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing,” 91).

While this assignment is used to measure students’ understanding and mastery of the presented material, the act of applying the gained knowledge frames writing as a means to create learning, instead of using writing solely as a way to measure it.

Partner Time

1 minute: Describe your plan (what you are emphasizing and how you are emphasizing it).

30 seconds: Give feedback.

switch

2 minutes to edit.

Turn in.

Justification:

Using partner feedback gives students more than one means to create learning. Engaging peers in the revision process at the thematic level—as opposed to the surface, lexical level—allows students to hone in on what is important in their own writing (Sommers, 51).

Works Cited

- Crowley, Brianna. "What Digital Literacy Looks Like in a Classroom." *Education Week Teacher*. Editorial Projects in Education, 29 Apr. 2016. Web. 23 Mar. 2017.
- Dornan, Reade W., Lois Matz. Rosen, and Marilyn J. Wilson. *Within and beyond the Writing Process in the Secondary English Classroom*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003. Print.
- Sommers, Nancy. *Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers*. N.p.: College Composition and Communication, 1980. Print.
- The Writing Study Group of the NCTE Executive Committee. "The Writing Study Group of the NCTE Executive Committee." *Appendix: NCTE Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing*. N.p.: n.p., 2004. 89-104. Print.

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Mini-Lesson Reflection

Creating this mini-lesson was relatively easy once I picked an idea and committed to sticking with it. Examples came quickly, ideas flowed, and structuring the lesson to pair with a PowerPoint was a very natural process. The PowerPoint was actually a very practical tool for this lesson instead of a flashy add-on, because it allowed me to chunk information and provide visual examples, which were very applicable to the lesson's content. I think the biggest problem for me was narrowing down the topic, and in retrospect, I would have chosen a smaller concept to convey in this brief amount of time. I would like to teach this topic at some point to my future students—albeit in a longer lesson form—because after having seen some of our class readings, I conceive of writing a little bit differently. I see it as functionally and practically useful in more settings than just academic or creative, and the skill to emphasize particular points in writing is a valuable skill to have, no matter your profession.

Presenting the mini-lesson was enjoyable for me. I tried to demonstrate my enthusiasm for the topic, and crack a few jokes to keep the audience interested, but stay just serious enough to guide the atmosphere of the room to stay focused on the content. The more I teach, the more it feels like a calculated performance. The only thing I wish I could retract or change about the presentation was my comment about finding a lack of questions encouraging, because even though I truly believe the class was up to speed, I very much want to encourage an atmosphere of inquisition and open discussion whenever I teach. That being said, based on the class' reactions,

I think they enjoyed the presentation and got something valuable out of it, so in my mind, the lesson was a big success.

Because the content of this lesson is more suited for a full day's instruction instead of a fifteen-minute segment, the following revisions reflect that change. First, I would go through the initial content a little slower. Then, after having given the main instruction but before I moved us on to the activity, I would go over a few more examples of emphasis so that students could mentally apply the concepts and have time to process it all. Additionally, I would have handed out a printed copy of my model, so that students didn't have to scan so much text on the one PowerPoint slide. I read the following idea in your feedback email, and I would definitely like to use it: Before I had students produce their own examples of emphasis, I would have them scan through some sample writings (comics, news broadcasts, short stories, textbook pages, etc.) and determine what elements, scenes, or ideas within these samples should be more or less emphasized to better illustrate the piece's intended message. This activity for high school students would need a lot of scaffolding, including a handout to guide the process. Students would first read through the sample, then identify the main argument, and then list the main ideas, concepts, topics, or pieces of evidence within the sample. Next, students would describe how much narrative real estate was given to each idea/ concept/ topic/ evidence within the sample, and finally, analyze how that emphasis could be shifted to better convey the main message. This would take a lot of time, and only after students had completed it would I ask them to move on to the activity I had originally included with this lesson.

Overall, I am very satisfied with the way the lesson turned out, and I look forward to implementing the revised version in my future classroom. The revision process alone has been helpful, and I plan to reflect on and update my lessons throughout my career.