



Who's Coming to Dinner?

Descriptive Writing



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Grade Level	8th Grade	Time Frame	2-3 class period(s)
Subject	English/Language Arts	Duration	minutes
Course	Composition, Creative Writing		

Essential Question

What makes writing appealing to a reader? How can we, as writers, paint a picture in our readers' minds?

Summary

This is a quick and simple twist or extension of the lesson "Sweet and Savory Writing" that can be found in the K20 LEARN lesson repository. In this lesson, students will apply knowledge of the five senses to enhance descriptive writing. Students review the five senses, utilize that practice to rewrite existing text passages, then compose a sensory-rich reimagining of Mona Gardner's short story "The Dinner Party."

Snapshot

Engage

Students engage with the five senses through observing a series of photos and brainstorming a rich variety of words used to describe the specific sense featured in each photo.

Explore

Students rewrite several pieces of "bland" text that lack descriptive language to incorporate sensory words and phrases that paint a clearer picture of the scene being described.

Explain

Students read the short story "The Dinner Party" by Mona Gardner, paying attention to the language used to describe the guests, scenes, and illustrative details.

Extend

Having read "The Dinner Party," students revisit their rewritten sentences from the Explore stage as models for rewriting the short story to incorporate similar descriptive, sensory language.

Evaluate

Students read their stories aloud to the class.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards: English Language Arts (Grade 8)

8.4.W.2: Select language in writing to create a specific effect according to purpose.

Attachments

- [-Who's Coming to Dinner-- PowerPoint.pptx](#)
- [The Dinner Party - Spanish.docx](#)
- [The Dinner Party - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [The Dinner Party.docx](#)
- [The Dinner Party.pdf](#)
- [Who'sComingtoDinnerPacket - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Who'sComingtoDinnerPacket - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Who'sComingtoDinnerPacket.docx](#)
- [Who'sComingtoDinnerPacket.pdf](#)

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- "Who's Coming to Dinner?" handout packet (attached)
- "The Dinner Party" by Mona Gardner (full text of short story)

Engage

Begin by displaying **slide 3**, which features the essential questions for this lesson: "What makes writing appealing to a reader?" and "How can we, as writers, paint a picture in our readers' minds?"

With these questions displayed on the board, give students a few minutes (either individually or with an [Elbow Partner](#)), to brainstorm answers. Using the attached "Who's Coming to Dinner?" packet, direct students to write down their ideas to the essential questions on the front page. The discussion of these questions can either be limited to a quick write in the packet or can be expanded to a class conversation, depending on time.

After giving time for students to respond to the essential questions, ask if any students thought or wrote about the five senses. Direct students' attention to the circular graphic at the bottom of the first packet page, and without giving hints or answers, ask them to fill out the five sections with the five senses.

Teacher's Note: Compen"sense"tion!

Even though the five senses (touch, taste, smell, sound, sight) are considered a basic piece of information to recall, sometimes the simplest things can be difficult to remember. Before students attempt to fill in the graphic from memory, consider making it a competition! Who can correctly remember all five senses the fastest? You may even consider making the graphic larger on the board and inviting students to fill in the sections with drawings or descriptions.

After the five senses have been recalled, move through **slides 4-8**. Each of these slides holds a large photograph of an object that illustrates one of the five senses. They are:

- Lemon: Taste
- Grass: Sight
- Baking cookies: Smell
- Toad: Touch
- Fire alarm: Sound

Next to each photograph are directions asking students to describe the image in five words or phrases. These slides correspond with page 2 of the attached packet. Pause on each slide to give students time to reflect on the photograph and come up with five words or phrases to describe the stated sense. Depending on time, consider giving students the choice to work independently, with a partner, or with a group. As each slide and sense is covered, students will write their answers in their packet.

Have fun with students by hearing out loud the words or phrases they came up with to describe each sensory photograph. Revisit the essential questions again; how does a sensory description of grass enhance a reader's experience further than simply using the word "grass"?

Explore

Now that students have practiced descriptive writing a bit by reviewing and writing about the five senses, they will apply this practice to their own writing.

In the packet on page 3, there is a two column chart with the following instructions:

Teacher's Note: Sensory Rewriting

In the table below, there are two columns: one containing a sentence with little detail and one containing a space to rewrite that sentence using description-rich sensory language. In the space provided, rewrite each sentence into one or more sentences to vividly recreate the scene. Think of word choice that involves the senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell); use this language to show the scene in more detail, and feel free to invent new descriptive details.

In this sensory rewriting exercise, students will apply the same practices followed for the writing about the five senses. Students will first read a sentence that lacks descriptive language, and will then rewrite the sentence to include richer description. Read the first example together as a class after explaining the directions. The first example reads:

- Example: The old man stood in the grass and relaxed as the sun went down.
- Sensory rewriting: The grass caressed his feet and smile softened his eyes. A hot puff of air brushed against his wrinkled cheek as the sky paled yellow, then crimson, and within a breath, electric indigo.

Notice that, in the sensory rewriting, the description of the man standing in the grass is elaborated. The grass now is not merely underfoot, but it is caressing them. The reader can sense the old man's feelings of ease. The description of the beautiful sky is rich but not overdone, using colorful yet calming adjectives that match the old man's soft smile and the gentle grass.

Instruct students, either working independently or with a partner, to complete the remaining examples on page 3 of the packet. Share these examples, if time allows, aloud in class once complete.

Teacher's Note: Who's Coming To Dinner... Foreshadowed!

Students do not know this, but the examples on page 3 of the packet are from the short story "The Dinner Party," which will be read later in the lesson. Since students will need to use these sentences later, urge them to focus on making these rewrites rich.

Explain

Now that students have completed their sensory rewritings, they will look for similar language in the short story "The Dinner Party" by Mona Gardner. The full text for this short story is included in the attachments, on page 4 of the packet, and can be found online [here](#).

To front-load the reading of this story, inform students that while they read, they are to enjoy the sequence of events in the story but not solely focus on the plot. Rather, they ought to be concerned with the language used in the writing.

This is a very short story, so it should not take much time to read. The teacher may consider reading the story out loud to the class, popcorning the reading with students reading out loud, having students read in partners, or asking them to read individually.

Teacher's Note: Modification Mention

Since the end goal of reading "The Dinner Party" will be to notice which specific details in the story are missing or lack detail, consider reading the story together with students and pausing at moments where more detail could be added to enhance the story.

After students have had time to read the story, have a class discussion to revisit the essential questions from the beginning of the lesson. These questions are in the packet on page 5 and on **slide 11**:

- What makes the style of this short story either appealing and/or not appealing to the reader?
- How could you, as a writer, paint a clearer picture of specific elements in the story?

Extend

Now that students have practiced writing with sensory detail and have read "The Dinner Party" they will connect their practice with the text. In the packet on page 5 are the following instructions:

On the blank paper provided, use the descriptive sentences you wrote on page 3 as inspiration to rewrite "The Dinner Party" by Mona Gardner. You may take creative license with this rewritten story, choosing to keep as much or as little of the original descriptions and adding your own where you see fit. For this rewritten version, there are two requirements: the basic plot structure should remain similar and the length should be comparable. You may use the space below to plan your rewritten version.

In this fun twist on the short story, students will utilize the sentences they rewrote earlier to enhance "The Dinner Party" while also using feedback from the discussion following the read-through of the story. Explain to students that while many pieces of writing are strong in their simplicity, sometimes, there are readers who may have trouble envisioning the details of a story if the task is left to their imagination. With this in mind, students will add details, not necessarily length, to make the writing of this story more descriptive. There is blank paper provided in the packet to do so.

The teacher may consider giving students the choice either to write independently, with a partner, or in small groups.

Evaluate

The evaluation for this lesson may either be as simple or as developed as needed. If not assessing the rewritten short stories, they may merely be read aloud in class to share how the writing was enhanced through descriptive language.

Teacher's Note: Roundabout Reading

The teacher may consider having all students read out loud—but only one passage of text at a time. For example, one student may start reading until the teacher says, "Stop," and then another student would pick up reading in approximately the same place. This would create a comical (but hopefully not too chaotic) synthesis of a range of students' twists on the story.

Another idea for a casual assessment of this rewrite would be to apply the [Why-Lighting](#) strategy. When doing this strategy, assign a different color to each sense (sight/blue, taste/yellow, sound/pink, touch/orange, smell/green). Once students have completed their rewritten story, they should go back through and highlight each instance of new sensory description added. This not only shows students how much they have elaborated on the story, but it also makes it simpler to assess.

Resources

- Gardner, M. (1941). The dinner party. The Saturday Review of Literature, 25(5).
http://www.waupaca.k12.wi.us/ms_pie_documents/The%20Dinner%20Party%20%20%20by%20Mona%20Gardner.pdf
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Elbow partners. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/116>
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Why-Lighting. Strategies. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/128>