

Who's Coming to Dinner?

Descriptive Writing

Jane Baber
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Grade Level	8th Grade	**Time Frame**	1-2 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 lesson builds on the K20 LEARN lesson Sweet and Savory Writing by adding a creative twist. 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 create a sensory-rich version of Mona Gardner's short story "The Dinner Party."

Snapshot

Engage

Students engage with the five senses by observing a series of images and brainstorming descriptive words or phrases that correspond to the featured sense in each photo.

Explore

Students rewrite "bland" text passages by adding sensory words and vivid imagery to bring each scene to life.

Explain

Students read the short story “The Dinner Party” by Mona Gardner, focusing on how descriptive language reveals character, setting, and tone.

Extend

Using their rewritten sentences as models, students rewrite “The Dinner Party” with enhanced sensory language.

Evaluate

Students reflect on their final draft by analyzing how their added sensory language improved the story’s appeal.

Standards

ACT College and Career Readiness Standards - Reading (6-12)

CLR401: Locate important details in somewhat challenging passages

ACT College and Career Readiness Standards - Writing (6-12)

L&C 501: A score in this range indicates that the writer is able to: -Make precise word choices that work in service of the argument -Make stylistic choices, including voice, tone, and diction, that are effective for the given writing purpose and topic
L&C 502: A score in this range indicates that the writer is able to: -Compose sentences with clear and often varied structures -Produce writing that has only minor errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

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

- Lesson Slides—Who's Coming to Dinner.pptx
- Sensory Language Packet—Who's Coming to Dinner.docx
- Sensory Language Packet—Who's Coming to Dinner.pdf

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Sensory Language Packet (attached; one per student)
- highlighters

15 minutes

Engage

Pass out the attached **Sensory Language Packet** to each student. Use the attached **Lesson Slides** and display **slide 3** to review the essential questions for this lesson:

- What makes writing appealing to a reader?
- How can you, as a writer, paint a picture in your reader's mind?

Ask students to turn to their Elbow Partner and take a few minutes to discuss these questions.

Instruct students to write their responses to the essential questions on the front page.

Facilitate a whole-class discussion and invite students to share their responses, ask if anyone considered any of the five senses when responding. Direct attention to the circular graphic at the bottom of the first packet page, and without giving hints or answers, ask students to fill out the five sections with the five senses.

Teacher's Note: Scaffolding Recall of Prior Knowledge

Even though the five senses (touch, taste, smell, sound, sight) are commonly known, they can be easy to forget. Consider turning this into a class competition: Who can correctly recall all five senses the fastest? You might also enlarge the graphic on the board and let students fill in each section with drawings or examples.

After recalling all five senses, move through **slides 5–9**. Each slide shows an image illustrating one of the senses:

- Slide 5: Tacos – Taste
- Slide 6: Window – Sight
- Slide 7: Pie – Smell
- Slide 8: Dice – Touch
- Slide 9: Microphone – Sound

Next to each photo, are directions instructing students to describe the image using three words or less. Have them record their responses in the provided space on page two of the Sensory Language Packet. Pause on each slide to allow time for students to reflect and write. Ask for volunteers to share their descriptive words with the class.

25 minutes

Explore

Move to **slide 10**. Ask students to turn to page three of the Sensory Language Packet, where they'll find a two-column chart. One column contains sentences with little detail.Direct students to rewrite these sentences to include sensory language that creates a more vivid scene.

Teacher's Note: Sensory Rewriting

Encourage students to focus on language that uses all five senses—taste, sight, smell, touch, and sound—but don't limit them. Additional sensory details can help create even richer descriptions.

Read the first example in the chart together as a class:

- **Example:** The old man stood in the grass and relaxed as the sun went down.
- **Sensory rewriting:** Warm blades of grass curled between his toes, the last light of day sinking into his skin. A breeze drifted over his face, carrying the scent of distant jasmine, while the sky melted from gold to blood-orange, then settled into a deep violet hush.

Ask the following questions:

- Which of the five senses were highlighted and how?
- What additional sensory language is included?
- How do the sensory details create a more vivid scene?

Point out that the original sentence simply states the man is standing in grass, while the rewritten version shows how he feels. the grass becomes part of the moment, gently interacting with him and enhancing the emotional tone. The colors and textures of the sky complement the man's expression, creating a gentle, immersive tone.

Place students into pairs and have them complete the remaining examples on page three. If time allows, ask students to share one or two of their rewritten examples with the class.

Teacher's Note: Foreshadowing the Story

Students don't yet know that the examples in the chart are drawn from "The Dinner Party." Since they'll use these same sentences later, encourage them to put effort into crafting rich rewrites that could carry through into their own version of the story.

25 minutes

Explain

Now that students have completed the sensory rewriting activity, explain that they will analyze similar sensory language in the short story “The Dinner Party” by Mona Gardner.

Teacher's Note: Short Story Access

The full text of the short story is included on page four of the Sensory Language Packet.

You can also access it online here: https://bit.ly/4jwLDz2

Move to **slide 11** and pass out highlighters to each student. Review the Categorical Highlighting strategy with students. Instruct students to use color-coded highlighting to identify the following:

- **Five senses**: Use one color to highlight sensory language directly tied to taste, sight, smell, touch, or sound.
- **Additional sensory details**: Use a different color to highlight any other vivid language that adds texture or depth to the scene.

Allow students time to read and highlight the story individually.

Teacher's Note: Read Aloud

Because the goal is to notice both existing sensory detail and where it might be lacking, consider reading the story aloud. Pause periodically to prompt discussion or reflection when descriptive language appears—or when it could be strengthened.

After students finish reading and highlighting, have them discuss their annotations with their Elbow Partner.

Move to **slide 12** and ask students to respond to the reflection questions on page five of the Sensory Language Packet:

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

30 minutes

Extend

Display **slide 13**. Instruct students to work independently to rewrite “The Dinner Party” by Mona Gardner, using the sensory-rich sentences they wrote on page three of the Sensory Language Packet as inspiration.

Let students know they can be creative with their retelling. They may keep as much or as little of the original wording as they choose, but their rewritten story must meet two requirements:

1. The basic plot structure should remain the same.
2. The length should be comparable to the original.

Students should write their new version on the blank pages provided in the packet.

Teacher's Note: Individual or Partner Work

Depending on your class and students’ comfort level with writing, consider allowing them to work in pairs instead of independently. This can help students brainstorm ideas and boost confidence as they develop their rewritten drafts.

15 minutes

Evaluate

Display **slide 14,** pass out highlighters to each student and review the Why-Lighting strategy with students. Instruct them to use color-coded highlighting to identify how the five senses are used in their rewritten draft of "The Dinner Party:"

- **Pink:** taste
- **Yellow:** sight
- **Blue:** smell
- **Orange:** touch
- **Green:** sound

Teacher's Note: Highlighting

Edit slide 14 to advise students to use the colors you give them to highlight the five senses.

Once students finish highlighting their rewritten stories, move to **slide 15** and lead a whole-class discussion using the following prompt:

- How did adding sensory language and details enhance the story?

Encourage students to share examples from their drafts and reflect on how descriptive language can shape a reader's experience.

Resources

- Gardner, M. (1941). *The dinner party* [PDF]. Voorhees Township Public Schools. https://www.voorhees.k12.nj.us/cms/lib/NJ01000237/Centricity/Domain/2779/The%20Dinner%20Party.pdf?
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Categorical highlighting. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/192
- 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