

The Purpose in Our Stars

Exploring Word Choice and Meaning through "The Fault in Our Stars"

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Grade Level	8th Grade	**Time Frame**	75 minutes
Subject	English/Language Arts	**Duration**	1-2 Class Periods

Essential Question

How can your word choice create a specific effect in writing?

Summary

This lesson serves as an activity that should be completed after reading the novel "The Fault in Our Stars" by John Greene. This lesson highlights how authors use word choice to create specific effects and convey meaning in their writing, and guides students to do the same in their own writing. Students will learn how to communicate with someone experiencing grief, then use their knowledge to write a letter to the character from the novel.

Snapshot

Engage

Students complete a Quick Write reflecting on one impactful moment from the *The Fault in Our Stars* and share their responses.

Explore

Students discuss, in small groups, how a quote from the novel connects to a theme and how the author's word choice creates that connection.

Explain

Students Why-Light an article about grief and loss in preparation for writing a letter and share their notes with a partner.

Extend

Students write a letter to a character from *The Fault in Our Stars,* choosing specific words to offer advice on how to help the character deal with grief.

Evaluate

Students reflect on their word choice in their letters and share their letters and word choice with a partner.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards: English Language Arts (Grade 8)

8.3.R.8: Compare or contrast two or more texts, providing textual evidence to support their inferences.
8.4.W.2: Select language in writing to create a specific effect according to purpose.

Attachments

- How to Talk to a Friend Who is Grieving—The Purpose in Our Stars.docx
- How to Talk to a Friend Who is Grieving—The Purpose in Our Stars.pdf
- Lesson Slides—The Purpose in Our Stars.pptx
- Letter Planning—The Purpose in Our Stars.docx
- Letter Planning—The Purpose in Our Stars.pdf
- Theme Posters—The Purpose in Our Stars.docx
- Theme Posters—The Purpose in Our Stars.pdf

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Theme Posters (attached)
- How to Talk to a Friend Who is Grieving article (attached; one per student)
- Letter Planning handout (attached; one per student)

5 minutes

Engage

Use the attached **Lesson Slides** to guide your facilitation of the lesson. Display **slide 2** to introduce the lesson. Move through **slides 3–4** to share the essential question and lesson objective with students.

Transition to **slide 5** and review the Quick Write strategy with students. Ask students to take out a piece of paper and respond to the following prompt on the slide:

- What is one moment from *The Fault in Our Stars* that impacted you? Why did it impact you?

Emphasize that the goal of the activity is for students to write for the entire length of the timer. Encourage students to write in-depth responses, and share that it is okay if students need to write about more than one moment to fill the time.

Begin the five-minute timer on the slide and allow students time to respond.

Once time is up, invite students to share their thoughts with the whole class. Then, have students set their writing to the side.

15 minutes

Explore

Display **slide 6** and give each student one of the prepared quotes. Direct students' attention to the posters around the room that are labeled with the themes “love,” “loss,” “identity,” and “meaning of life.”

Have students read their quote and consider which of the four themes it most relates to. Then, have them stand near the poster labeled with the theme they chose.

Move to **slide 7** and ask students to discuss the following questions with those gathered around their same poster.

- Who is the speaker of your quote?
- What is the quote describing or referencing?
- What about the quote made you think it relates to this theme or topic?
- Which specific words and phrases used by the author illustrate the theme you chose?

Begin the eight-minute timer on the slide and allow students time to discuss the questions. Then, ask each group to share out some of their quotes and responses. Specifically focus on the author’s word choice and emphasize how word choice can portray different themes or ideas.

Have students return to their seats. Display **slide 8** and have students retrieve the Quick Write paper that they used earlier in the lesson. Have students review what they wrote and respond to the following questions on their same Quick Write papers:

- What theme did your selected moment represent?
- How did that moment reflect that theme?

20 minutes

Explain

Give each student one highlighter and one copy of the attached **How to Talk to a Friend Who is Grieving** article.

Move to **slide 9** and ask students to imagine that they are writing a letter to a character from *The Fault in Our Stars* who has experienced loss. Share the Why-Lighting strategy with students. Explain that, as students read the article, they should highlight advice or insights that could help them communicate with a character. Near the text they highlighted, have them describe why they highlighted that information.

Give students about 15 minutes to independently read and annotate the article. Encourage them to highlight at least four pieces of information and ask them to be specific when writing their rationale in the margins.

After students have read and annotated the article, have them find a partner. Have pairs discuss the information they highlighted and the notes they recorded. If time allows, invite students to share their findings with the whole class.

Optional Career Focus Activity

Consider extending students' understanding of career fields that involve professional counseling during this phase of the lesson. Have students watch the video *K20 ICAP - Licensed Professional Counselor - Are We Okay?*

Consider creating a 3-2-1 prompt to accompany the video that students can respond to as they watch. Invite students to share out their responses.

25 minutes

Extend

Give each student one copy of the attached **Letter Planning** handout. Display **slide 10**. Share that students should choose one character from *The Fault in Our Stars*, such as Hazel, Augustus, or another character of their choice, and write a letter to that character using at least one piece of advice from the article. Emphasize that students should refer to at least one moment from the novel that illustrates why this character needs to hear this advice. Share that the letter should be a minimum of two paragraphs.

Have students use this information to complete their Letter Planning handouts. As they work, remind students that the fourth question on the handout is particularly important. Ask them to consider how they want the letter to feel because they are not just communicating information; they are making specific word choices to craft impactful writing. Encourage them to consider the effect they want the letter to have and to choose language that intentionally creates that effect. Give students about 5 minutes to work on their planning document.

Once time is up, transition to **slide 11**. Have students take out a piece of notebook paper and begin writing their letters, using the Letter Planning handout to guide their writing. Consider allowing students to draft and complete their letters for the remainder of the class period.

10 minutes

Evaluate

Once students have completed their letters, move to **slide 12**. Ask students to silently read their completed letter and underline one sentence that best reflects their intentional word choices. Share that this line should be one they deliberately wrote to create a specific effect.

Then, organize students into pairs. Share that each person should share their chosen sentence with their partner, explain the effect they intended to create (sympathy, humor, inspiration), and ask for feedback on whether or not they achieved that effect in their sentence. Encourage partners to respond with constructive feedback and justify the reasoning behind their feedback. Ensure that each student has the opportunity to share.

Have students submit their completed letters and the Letter Planning handout once they finish sharing.

Resources

- K20 Center. (n.d.). Quick write. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/1127
- K20 Center. (n.d.). 3-2-1. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/117
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Why-lighting. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/128
- K20 Center. (2021, March 21). *K20 ICAP - Licensed Professional Counselor - Are we okay?* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BN10mvJYoTA
- K20 Center. (2021, September 21). *K20 Center 5 minute timer* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVS_yYQoLJg
- K20 Center. (2021, September 21). *K20 Center 8 minute timer* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-21YM7Ey7k