

VOICE LESSONS: SAMPLES

DICTION

Her face was white and sharp and slightly gleaming in the candlelight, like **bone**. No hint of pink. And the hair. So fine, so pale, so much, crimped by its plaiting into springy zigzag tresses, **clouding** neck and shoulders, shining metallic in the candlelight, catching a hint, there it was, of green again, from the reflection of a large glazed cache-pot containing a vigorous sword-leafed fern.

— A. S. Byatt, *Possession: A Romance*

DISCUSS:

1. When Byatt describes a face “like *bone*,” what feelings does she suggest?
2. How can hair be “*clouding* neck and shoulders”? What picture does this word create for the reader?

APPLY:

Substitute another noun for bone in sentence one. Your substitution should change the meaning and feeling of the sentence. Show your sentence to your team and explain how your noun changes the sentence’s connotation and impact.

DETAIL

How fine it is to enter some old town, walled and turreted, just at approach of nightfall, or to come to some straggling village, with the lights streaming through the surrounding gloom; and then, after inquiring for the best entertainment that the place affords, to “take one’s ease at one’s inn”!

— William Hazlitt, “On Going a Journey”

DISCUSS:

1. What details support the generalization, how fine it is?
2. What feelings are evoked by the details of the town (old, walled, turreted)? How does this selection of detail communicate Hazlitt’s attitude toward the town?

APPLY:

Imagine going to a motel after a long day on the road. The motel is the only place to sleep in town, and the next town is 200 miles away. The motel is old and dirty; your room is shabby and dark. Plan a brief monologue which expresses your attitude toward this room. Include specific references to the details that both produce and reveal your attitude. Perform your monologue for your team.

IMAGERY

She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again. Edna heard her father’s voice and her sister Margaret’s. She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air.

— Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*

DISCUSS:

1. Although the narrator “looks into the distance,” the images are primarily auditory. What are the auditory images in the passage? What mood do these images create?
2. The last sentence of this passage contains an olfactory image (the musky odor pinks fill the air). What effect does the use of an olfactory image, after a series of auditory images, have on the reader?

APPLY:

Write a paragraph in which you create a scene through auditory imagery. The purpose of your paragraph is to create a calm, peaceful mood. Use one olfactory image to enhance the mood created by auditory imagery.

SYNTAX

She is a woman who misses moisture, who has always loved low green hedges and ferns.

— Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient*

DISCUSS:

1. Both of the subordinate clauses in this sentence modify *woman*. What effect does this parallel structure have on the sentence?
2. How would it change the feeling evoked by the sentence if it read:
She misses moisture and has always loved low green hedges and ferns.

APPLY:

Write a paragraph in which you create a scene through auditory imagery. The purpose of your paragraph is to create a calm, peaceful mood. Use one olfactory image to enhance the mood created by auditory imagery.

TONE

JACK (*slowly and hesitantly*): Gwendolen—Cecily—it is very painful for me to be forced to speak the truth. It is the first time in my life that I have even been reduced to such a painful position, and I am really quite inexperienced in doing anything of the kind. However I will tell you quite frankly that I have no brother Ernest. I have no brother at all. I never had a brother in my life, and I certainly have not the smallest intention of ever having one in the future.

— Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Ernest*

DISCUSS:

1. What is Wilde’s attitude toward Jack? What specific diction and detail reveal this attitude?
2. What is Wilde’s attitude toward the audience or the reader? How do you know?

APPLY:

Rewrite Jack’s lines to reflect the attitude that lying is terribly wrong. Adopt a disdainful attitude toward your audience and a scornful attitude toward Jack. Have your teammates read your lines.

Nancy Dean. *Voice Lessons: Classroom Activities to Teach Diction, Detail, Imagery, Syntax, and Tone*.
Gainesville: Maupin House, 2000, Print.