

On the Nose

Our senses are ways that our brain receives information about the world around us. We as writers want to bring the reader into the worlds that we create on paper. In the lesson series On the Nose, young writers explore how to use sensory details as a way to enhance a memory and make it come alive within the reader's mind. These lessons build on each other, allowing students to explore how to write clear, precise descriptions, based on experiential activities that will tap into a memory that begins with the sense of smell.

Lesson 1: Senses Surveyed - Planning and Goal Setting/Making Predictions/Tapping Prior Knowledge/Making Inferences

Before this lesson:

- Prepare a set of spice containers with different spices or household items that should be familiar to your students. (One spice container for every two students works well.) Clearly label what is inside the jar, and then wrap each one in heavy paper, creating a "secret" scent container. Then, number each package and record the name of the spice or item on a sheet of paper that will be used as an answer sheet later. For example: 1 - cloves, 2 - orange peel, 3 - garlic powder, etc.

In Mary Widtmann's 5th grade classroom, she introduced the unit by starting a discussion about a BBQ party that she hosted the previous weekend for her family. She explained that they had BBQ'd ribs, salad, garlic bread and a homemade apple pie for dessert. To get her students thinking about sensory detail and description, she asked her students to describe these items for her:

- Ribs - "Spicy," called out Jacob.
- Salad - "My mom says they're healthy," says Skyler.
- Garlic bread - "Warm," adds Zoe
- Apple pie - "Sweet!" say Peyton and Maddox at the same time.

Mary explained that these are accurate descriptions, but they are lacking sensory details. She modeled how to change the description for garlic bread using sensory details and then they revised their original descriptions for the ribs, apple pie, and salad together as follows:

Without Sensory Details	With Sensory Details
warm garlic bread	warm, soft bread smothered in garlic butter surrounded by a hard crunchy crust.
spicy ribs	spicy ribs coated in a tangy sauce that has a bite in the end and covers your hands and face with happiness
sweet apple pie	mouth-watering, cinnamon sweet apple pie fresh from the oven covered with a mound of melting vanilla ice cream
healthy salad	crisp organic green salad with juicy tomatoes and crunchy carrots smothered with a fresh lemon garlic dressing

Once they were done, they compared the two descriptions and discussed which was better and why. Invariably, they preferred the second set of descriptions because they found them more interesting and they were able to visualize each item that was served at the BBQ party.

After that, Mary brought out a tray filled with spice containers and explained that they were going carefully smell each jar and write precise vivid descriptions to show how each item smells. She explained that they will also be playing a “guessing game” to try to figure out what is inside each jar!

To begin, Mary passed out Sniff Sheets to all students and a spice container to every other student. On one side of the Sniff Sheet she listed all of the scents that were being identified with spaces for the students to try to match the scent with what is in each jar. On the other side of the Sniff Sheet her students wrote their precise descriptions of each jar’s smell.

Then she began her rotation of the jars in one-minute intervals (you could increase this time to 2-3 minutes if your students need more time). Each student had one minute to either smell the contents of a jar and identify its contents or describe the smell using precise language and rich sensory details. Although there were many giggles, moans, and mmm's interspersed with some sneezes, the students were not allowed to discuss what they were sniffing so that each student could record their own ideas! Her students

continued passing, smelling, identifying and describing until everyone had a chance to smell every container.

To wrap up the activity, Mary let them compare their descriptions for different containers and predict what they thought was in each container. After that, they revealed what was inside each container by allowing the person who has a numbered container unwrap that package and reveal the answer! Mary's students loved this part of the activity because they said it was like Christmas morning!

Lesson Two: Getting the Scent - Revising Meaning/Clarifying/Making Connections/Tapping Prior Knowledge

Mary began the lesson by lining up all of spice containers along the whiteboard tray, which became a "reference rack" as the students worked on the day's lesson. She discussed the previous day's activity and emphasized that using precise language and rich sensory details creates stronger writing.

Once that was finished, Mary broke her students into writing groups of four, and had them review and discuss the words on their Sniff Sheets in terms of each word's ability to describe the smells precisely and vividly. If her students needed to verify a specific scent, they were able to use the "reference rack" to double-check the validity of their descriptions. Then, she had them combine all of their words into one alphabetized group list of descriptions.

After everyone was done, Mary collected each group's word list and began to help her students generate words and phrases, and give them some practice with sentence combining by having them combine their descriptive words into phrases and the phrases into sentences. She introduced and stressed the use of comparisons using "like" and "as" by informally playing with language while using the sentence frames.

- The _____, _____ perfume smelled like _____ and reminded me of _____ and _____.
- The _____, _____ smell of the apple pie made my mouth water and made me feel as if _____.
- When I opened my lunchbox, the the _____, _____ week-old milk smelled like _____ and I wanted to throw up.

Her students enjoyed playing with the different ways to describe each item, and they also experimented with changing the connotation of the message from positive to negative while using the same frame.

Lesson Three: The Thesaurus Page - Visualizing/Tapping Prior Knowledge/Making Connections/Adopting an Alignment

Before this session:

- Combine each group's list of words into a class thesaurus. This will become a shared resource that they can use while they begin writing their descriptive paragraphs.
- Have one sheet of art paper and crayons or colored pencils ready for each student.

Mary began the next session by passing out the student generated Thesaurus. They reviewed the list, and the students were amazed that they were able to find so many different words that precisely described what they smelled!

She explained that today, they were going to practice visualizing different places and times and explore the sensory details that they can recall about each time or place. Mary began the discussion at her students' own experiential level. She asked and discussed the following questions while encouraging the students to start their descriptions with images that appeal to their sense of smell, to expand those images to include as much sensory description as possible, and to finally tell why the place is important to them:

- Look closely at the top of your school desk. Can you remember the smell and feel of the cleaning towels the last time you cleaned your desk? Who can describe it?
- Picture yourself watching a movie at your favorite theater. What is the first smell you think of? Describe the situation for us.
- Do you remember your last Thanksgiving dinner? What was it like?
- Close your eyes and remember the smell of cookies baking. What does it smell like? Where, in your memory, does it take you? Describe it for us.

As Mary's students began thinking about specific smells and senses related to familiar places and situations, she began to direct their focus inward to their personal experiences. She dimmed the lights and invited them to totally relax their body by putting their heads down on their desk, lying down on the carpet, or simply sitting

comfortably. Then, using the following questions, she to guided her students' imagery to a special place related to a specific smell by saying:

- Close your eyes and relax. Find a position that is comfortable and be as relaxed as you can be.
- Imagine that all the tension in your body is running down from your head and right out through your toes. Picture it evaporating into the air and floating away as lightly as a fluffy white cloud. Your whole body is relaxed and you feel calm and peaceful.
- Breathe slowly and deeply, enjoying this calm and peaceful feeling.
- Turn your attention to the smells that make you think of school. Smell and imagine:
 - The smell of a hot meal as you stand in the lunch line;
 - The smell of a pencil being sharpened;
 - The smell of a dry-erase marker while you are writing on your whiteboard
 - The smell of the playground blacktop on a hot day;
 - The smell of the air just after a rainstorm;
 - The smell of grass being cut on a warm spring day.
- All those special smells bring back vivid memories for us. Now think of a smell that is special to you.
 - What is that smell like?
 - Where are you when you smell it? Are you at home? Away? Are you inside? Outside?
 - Is this place familiar to you? Unfamiliar?
 - What do you see as you look around this place?
 - Are you moving or are you still?
 - What are you touching? What is touching you? What do you feel?
 - What kinds of sounds surround you?
 - What do you taste?
 - How does this place make you feel?
- Slowly, Mary turned up the lights, put on some quiet music, and had her students draw a picture of the place that they visualized, incorporating as many details as they can into their drawing.

Lesson Four: Following the Scent - Planning and Goal Setting/Forming Interpretations/Tapping Prior Knowledge/Visualizing/Revising Meaning

Mary began her next session by reading and discussing the writing prompt with her students.

Writing Prompt:

Our sense of smell can vividly bring back a memory or create an impression. Think of a place that you associate with certain smells. Using your memories and sensory impressions of those smells, along with details that appeal to your other senses, write a paragraph identifying and describing that place. Make your writing so precise and vivid that your readers will smell that place and feel that they are there just as clearly as you are there when you remember that special place.

Make sure your paragraph:

- Includes four or more details that appeal to the sense of smell
- Includes four or more details that appeal to the other senses (taste, touch, sight, sound, and movement)
- Has a strong topic sentence that draws the reader into the paragraph by appealing to the sense of smell
- Flows smoothly and tells how that place makes you feel
- Demonstrates a mastery of spelling and punctuation.

She shared student models, highlighting the ways that the writers used their sense of smell as well as words that appeal to the other senses to bring back a memory or create an impression. (See On the Nose Resources)

As a way to get the students apply the details of the prompt to their writing, Mary took her own drawing of a special memory and, with the class reading off each part of the prompt, identified: things she could smell, things she could taste, touch, see, or hear, made a comparison using a simile or metaphor about her picture, and explained how this place made her feel. Then, each student practiced reviewing their picture with a partner guiding them through each component of the prompt.

Once her students finished sharing, Mary passed out a Cluster Map and the Memory Chart, and modeled how to complete them using her picture to guide her thinking. As her students began to work independently, Mary circulated the room guiding, encouraging, and answering questions.

After the graphic organizers were completed, Mary passed out a writing frame to use as a guide as they wrote their first draft of their descriptive paragraph.

Lesson Five: Sharing and Revising for Content - Monitoring/Clarifying/Revising Meaning/Analyzing the Author's Craft/Evaluating

Before this lesson:

- Make sure each student has a red, blue, green, purple, and pink colored pencil.

Mary began the day by having her students reflect on the writing process by answering and discussion the following three questions:

- How did you put yourself into your special place? For instance, did you walk into and through it or, were you sitting still in your place?
- How did you focus on the details of your place? For instance, did you move around it or did you move outside and then back inside? What, if any, problems did you have describing your place and how did you solve them?
- How did you manage to include your feelings about the place in your paragraph? Did you have any trouble or triumphs when weaving your feelings into your description?

Once they finished, the students met with their writing groups. Each group read each other's first drafts and determined which paragraph they liked best. Then, Mary invited each group to share that piece with the class and all students gave specific feedback about what they liked.

After that, Mary passed out colored pencils to each writing group. They exchanged papers and the students:

- Circled and numbered all sensory details that appeal to the sense of smell in **red**
- Circled all sensory details that appeal to the sense of sight in **blue**
- Put a **green** “?” in the margin next to the places that they can't visualize
- Underline the hear, touch, taste, and movement words in **purple**
- Identify the sentences that show how the writer feels about the place in **pink**.

Once they completed this task, they gave feedback to the author by identifying one thing they liked best about the paragraph and made one suggestion for improving the piece. Using this feedback, her students worked independently to embellish and refine their paragraphs according to the new images and ideas they may have gained through the sharing process.

Lesson 6: Sharing and Revising for Form - Monitoring/Clarifying/Revising Meaning/Analyzing Author's Craft

Mary's students gathered again to review, evaluate, and discuss the scoring rubric for their descriptive paragraphs. Once they clearly understood the expectations, they met

with their writing groups to share and discuss their second drafts in terms of the criteria presented in the scoring guide while Mary moved from group to group, celebrating successes and answering questions. After each group had time to analyze each paragraph, her students worked independently to finish their final drafts based on writing group's suggestions.

Lesson 7: Editing and Evaluation

As a final chance for the students to finalize their drafts, Mary had each writing group meet one more time to look over each others' papers for paragraph form and correct spelling and punctuation. After making any final changes, they read their final drafts to their writing group and each group chose their favorite piece to be shared with the class and celebrate their work.

Here is a sample of Rocco's final paragraph:

The Baseball Field

CRACK! I heard the bat drop and the batter dash to first as I walked into the dugout to put down my bag. I was immediately greeted by the refreshing, dewy smell of the newly cut morning grass. It reminded me of where I belong, on the field, and suddenly I was back into my championship game. I can taste the salty sunflower seeds shooting out of my mouth. I can see the pitcher throwing as accurately as he can, the batter swinging the bat as hard as a sledgehammer, then the ball soaring over the right field fence. I smell savory hot dogs and hamburgers coming off the grill, the fruity scent of bubble gum bursting in the air, and right then, it felt like this was the only place I wanted to be.