

Grab-and-Go Writing Activity: The Importance of Description in Writing

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Timeframe: 20 minutes

Materials needed (including preparation):

- A handout of written examples for students to read and follow
- A handout with two different images
- White board markers or chalk

Objectives: After the activity, students will be able to

- illustrate the purpose of describing their subject and whether the information will be expressed in an objective or subjective fashion.
- use figurative language and sensory details to compose descriptive language.

Introduction: [3 minutes]

- Explain the importance of description in the development of an essay.
- Talk about how it brings depth to a subject by emphasizing certain characteristics.
- Explain how sensory details employ the five senses (sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste) to garner a reader's interest.
- Ask students to point out a particular detail or image from any of the readings so far. What made these descriptions effective and memorable?
- Pass out the first handout which includes examples of descriptive paragraphs.

Procedures: [15 minutes]

Step 1 [6 minutes]: Define the terms “objective” and “subjective” for students after the first handout is distributed. Then go over the sample descriptive paragraphs; ask for volunteers to read them out loud. Students should take notes and highlight descriptive language that appeals to the five senses or uses figurative language like similes, metaphors, or personification. After each example is read, ask students what descriptive qualities they noted, and then write them on the board.

Step 2 [7 minutes]: Pass out the second handout with the pictures, and ask students to write a descriptive paragraph about one of them. Students should focus on figurative language and sensory details while also identifying the purpose and audience for their piece.

Step 3 [2 minutes]: Ask students to volunteer to read their paragraphs, and provide them with feedback about one description that worked well and one that still needs improvement.

Closure/Evaluation: [2 minutes]

Answer any questions that might arise during the activity and refer to supplementary readings if students want to look at more examples. As part of their homework, ask students to write one sentence for each of the five senses. Provide them with a particular topic to write about like food, concerts, or seasons.

Activity Analysis:

This activity will teach students how to read closely and to write detailed and focused paragraphs. Once students have identified the subject or topic of their paragraph, they can consider their audience and purpose. Moreover, students will have a better understanding of what type of information to include in their paragraphs after they have decided to write from either an objective or subjective perspective. This activity is also adaptable, especially in terms of including different types of textual and visual examples for the handouts. Furthermore, you can select examples that highlight a particular sense like touch or taste. A weakness in this activity might be the time constraint because it is difficult to predict how many questions will arise. Also, some students might need more time for the writing portion.

Examples of Descriptive Writing

Key Terms:

Objective: relating to facts rather than personal feelings or opinions; unbiased.

Subjective: relating to the experiences, feelings, perceptions, or opinions of an individual rather than factual information.

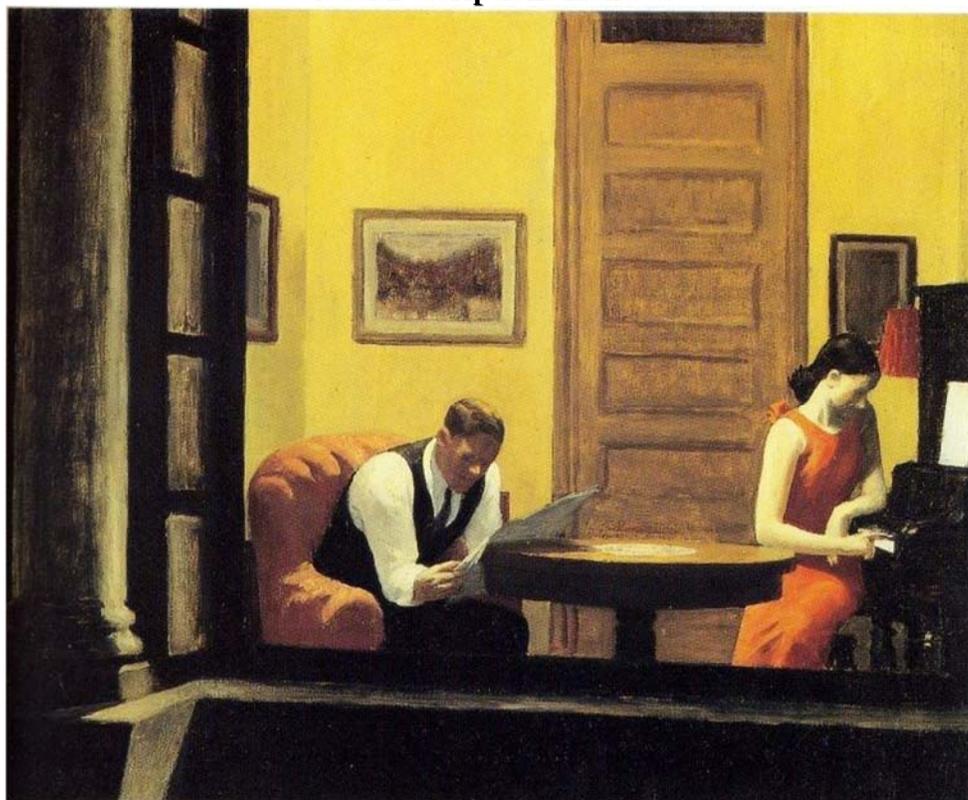
“It would be a long while because, quite simply, I was in love with New York. I do not mean “love” in any colloquial way, I mean that I was in love with the city, the way you love the first person who ever touches you and never love anyone quite that way again. I remember walking across Sixty-second Street one twilight that first spring, or the second spring, they were all alike for a while. I was late to meet someone but I stopped at Lexington Avenue and bought a peach and stood on the corner eating it and knew that I had come out of the West and reached the mirage. I could taste the peach and feel the soft air blowing from a subway grating on my legs and I could smell lilac and garbage and expensive perfume and I knew that it would cost something sooner or later—because I did not belong there, did not come from there. . .”
—Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (“Goodbye to All That”)

“On Jan. 20, 2009, Barack Obama was sworn in as president of the United States. Obama took his place as the 44th president under a bright winter sky, painting this perilous national moment in unsparing terms and exhorting Americans to respond by taking greater responsibility for themselves, the country and the world. More than 1 million people flocked to the National Mall to take part in the event, spilling outward from the gleaming white Capitol steps toward the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial more than a mile away. Throngs of people wept with joy, waving flags, and hugging strangers. After a swearing-in ceremony punctuated with performances by stars including Aretha Franklin and Yo-Yo Ma, a 15,000-person parade accompanied the first family to the White House; the assembled crowd roared a raucous farewell to Bush as he flew away in a Marine chopper. Later that evening, Barack and Michelle Obama bounced between 10 separate official inaugural balls.”
—*Chicago Tribune* (on President Barack Obama’s first inauguration)

For discussion:

- Can you decipher the author’s purpose? Is it executed successfully or not?
- Differentiate the paragraph descriptions as either objective or subjective. What is your reasoning?
- What details can you see, smell, hear, touch, or taste from the paragraphs above? What impact do these sensory details have on the reader?
- Note some of the concrete images and figurative language in the examples. Do they elevate the text? What impression do they leave on the reader?

Visual Descriptions Handout



Room in New York by Edward Hopper, 1932



Photographed by Nina Leen for *LIFE* Magazine, 1941