

***Grab-and-Go Writing Activity:
The Power of the Pastiche***

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Timeframe: 15-17 minutes

Materials needed (including preparation):

- Text for students to imitate
 - Consider in your selection what you want students to learn from the text. Do you want them to look at style? Ideas? Organization?
 - These could be speeches, poems, essays, or great documents like the Gettysburg Address.
- Examples of successful pastiches done by students
- Handout with a text selection and blanks for students to fill in

Objectives: After the activity, students will be able to

- identify the chosen elements selected for imitation.
- be able to imitate and discuss the focus elements.

Introduction: [2 minutes]

“New writers often struggle with finding their own voice in writing. We are going to do a pastiche. A pastiche is a work that imitates the style of a piece of art. It is a doorway to finding your own voice. For this exercise, we will be copying the style of a short piece of literature. We will do this by looking at ‘great beginnings.’ Great beginnings hook the reader or listener. You all have read books that engage you from the first paragraph. Let’s name some of those. [Let the students respond.] We will think about how authors hook readers with great beginnings as we do our pastiche. Let’s look at a few famous great beginnings.” Project a list of these while you distribute the handout with a text selection and blanks for students to fill in.

Procedures: [12-13 minutes]

Step 1 [5 minutes]: Project several great beginnings on the screen. Here is a link to a website with some great beginnings: <http://nale.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/Literature/firstparas.html>. Feel free to choose any work that serves your purpose. You could even have students bring in some great openings to texts they have enjoyed. Have students read the selections aloud.

Ask students what they see. Have them highlight the “sparks,” or places of energy. Note on the board any patterns, repetitions, key words, evocative language and other stylistic elements. Discuss those elements. Show your own example.

Step 2 [5 minutes]: Have students fill in the blanks on the handout with material from their own lives.

Step 3 [2-3 minutes]: Show examples of effective pastiches from former students. (I would save the examples for the last step of the procedure because I do not want students imitating the examples.)

Closure/Evaluation: [2-3 minutes]

Read a few pastiches aloud. Discuss why they seem to engage us. You may choose to focus your discussion on any aspect of the text. You could discuss ideas, vocabulary, parts of speech, or grammatical constructions. You could discuss how Steinbeck chooses to list his items and do a follow-up exercise on lists that could be useful in any type of writing class.

Activity Analysis:

The instructor needs to be clear about the focus of the exercise. You might have students who cannot think of anything, but I did not find that a problem. If the activity is not modeled, students might flounder. If you do one yourself, that would help. For a longer lesson, the instructor can spend more time on discussion and identification of parts or even do the pastiche sentence by sentence. You can use it as a grammar lesson to identify constructions and parts of speech.

Handout

“Cannery Row in Monterey in California is a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream. Cannery Row is the gathered and scattered, tin and iron and rust and splintered wood, chipped pavement and weedy lots and junk heaps, sardine canneries of corrugated iron, honky tonks, restaurants and whore houses, and little crowded groceries, and laboratories and and flophouses. Its inhabitants are, as the man once said, ‘whores, pimps, gamblers, and sons of bitches,’ by which he meant Everybody. Had the man looked through another peephole he might have said, “Saints and angels and martyrs and holy men,’ and he would have meant the same thing.”

Cannery Row, John Steinbeck

You need not fill in every gap, but seek to envision a scene with which you are familiar that will allow you to easily complete the paragraph.

“ _____ is a _____, a _____ a _____, a _____, a _____, a _____, a _____, a _____. _____ is the _____ and _____, _____ and _____ and _____ and _____, _____ and _____ and _____, _____, _____, _____ and _____, and _____, and _____ and _____. Its inhabitants are, as the _____ once said, ‘ _____, _____, _____, and _____,’ by which _____ meant Everybody. Had the _____ looked through another peephole he might have said, “ _____ and _____ and _____ and _____,’ and _____ would have meant the same thing.”

Student Examples

This is an excellent example of a successful pastiche.

Santana Row by Maria Griswold

Santana Row in Santa Clara in California is a poem, a luxury, a craving, a quality of living, a getaway, a habit, a privilege, a dream. Santana Row is the wealthy and the wannabes, lavish and expensive and shops and gourmet food, fresh pavement and live music and family gatherings, apartments guarded by an iron gate, farmers markets, restaurants and sights, and little crowded groceries, and spas and and a single theatre. Its inhabitants are, as the man once said, 'hipsters, snobs, wannabes, and spoiled tweens,' by which he meant Everybody. Had the man looked through another peephole he might have said, "Artists and opinionated and aspiring people and the young souls,' and he would have meant the same thing.

This next is also an excellent example of a pastiche. Notice how the setting is completely different from the first pastiche. The reader is able to get a sense of this place.

Arbor Lakes by Shayla Lopes

Arbor Lakes in Maple Grove in Minnesota is an emotional teenager, a yawn, a helping hand, a sinister breeze, a manic Monday, a promised land. Arbor Lakes is the homesteaders and the entrepreneurs, the cornfields and deer and tractors and silos, the fresh greenery, charismatic buildings, entanglement of bike paths, snowmobiles, pets, outdoor malls and prayer houses, available parking places, cheap rent, and a park free of guns and gangs. Settled with, as man once said, "the literate, fantasizers, housewives, and the selfless," by which he meant Everybody. Had the man looked through another peephole he would have said, "thieves, jerks, cheaters, and the conceited," and he would have meant the same thing.

This example is freer, but still follows the basic format. He has still honored the “spirit” of the text.

The Shining Star of Northern California by John Fox

Chico is an imploded star, with embers still burning, remembering the care free college living of its once *Animal House* style living. The upper class inhabitants are conservative almond farmers and selectively liberal professors, each consistently poking fun at each other for their beliefs. The actual people who live in Chico are listed as: kids, students, Hmong farmers, over zealous frat-boy rapists, pot farmers, skinheads, bimbos, homeless, and small town thugs who attempt to take advantage of the prosperous city they grew up in. Bars, Bars, Bars are the downtown. A liberal old person bar for the professors to pretend that the “2-buck-chuck” they are drinking gives them class and intelligence, a country bar for the farmers, with mechanical bull included, and of course loud college sports bars. The monotony of the bars is broken up with [the]occasion[al] corner store, and failing local skate shops. One may say the jaded local never likes his hometown. I love it, my family and friends are there. It is just incredibly sad, slowly but surely draining the ambition and decency from anyone that lives there.