

Beyond Rose Cheeks and Bright Blue Skies: The Power of Descriptive Writing with Amanda Skenandore

Grades 9 - 12

This lesson will highlight examples of descriptive language that are both effective and inventive across a variety of genres and disciplines. Then students will participate in three exercises designed to stretch and strengthen their descriptive writing skills. Students will learn that descriptive writing reaches beyond the familiar and cliché and has the power to transport your reader and enliven your prose.

Materials: Pen, paper and two nearby objects in your home

The Lesson:

1. A brief discussion of descriptive writing and how it enhances all literary forms. I will then share three short examples from different sources (e.g., a few lines from a travel expose, sports essay, fantasy novel, etc.) and discuss how the author uses description to create a specific and vivid picture in the reader’s mind. Next, I will facilitate
2. Three exercises that allow students to experiment with descriptive writing.
 - a) The first exercise, students will select a nearby object and spend 45 seconds writing a few descriptive sentences about it. They will do the same thing again, but without using any words from their original sentences. Then they will repeat the exercise a final time, describing the object with entirely new words.
 - b) The second exercise will focus on the use of analogies. Students will select another object and describe it by likening it to a different object, feeling, or sensation. I will build upon the previous exercise by encouraging students not to use the first analogy that comes to mind but to dig for something more unique. (For example, clouds are often likened to wisps of cotton. What about likening them to crumpled socks or synthetic pillow stuffing?)
 - c) The third exercise, I will have students choose a person—themselves, a parent, a celebrity—and write a few sentences describing that person without discussing their hair, eyes, or height. Each of these exercises will last only 2-3 minutes. During the exercises, I will invite students to write about things and people that interest them and share what they wrote with a parent, friend, or teacher.
3. Review of lesson’s key points.

Connection to the Nevada Academic Content Standards for the Fine Arts

- Creating: Conceiving and developing new artistic work and ideas.
- Responding: Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.

Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events.

Connection to Literacy: This project would support literacy by enhancing students' writing and reading skills, as well as their ability to express ideas. The lesson will encourage students to notice and evaluate passages of descriptive writing in the material they read. It will also provide them with tools to employ the power of description in their own writing. Finally, by teaching students to push beyond the familiar and cliché, this lesson will help them find their own unique voice and perspective.

About the Artist

Amanda Skenandore

Amanda Skenandore is the author of two historical novels, *The Undertaker's Assistant* and *Between Earth & Sky*, winner of the 2019 American Library Association's Reading List Award for Best Historical Fiction. She's a Nevada Arts Council grant recipient and Roster Artist. Her third novel, *The Second Life of Mirielle West*, comes out in July 2021. She lives in Las Vegas along with her husband and their pet turtle Lenore.

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Nevada Arts Council Teaching Artist Roster

The Nevada Arts Council Teaching Artist Roster is an online resource for schools, organizations and communities seeking to engage teaching artists. Roster artists are experienced in collaborating with schools and communities to conduct arts learning and cultural experiences in, through and about the arts.

Explore the roster at <https://www.nvartscouncil.org/rosters/teaching-artists/>