

LESSON PLAN

Teen Writer: *Descriptive Writing & The Five Senses*

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LESSON PLAN: Teen Writer: Descriptive Writing & The Five Senses

OVERVIEW & RATIONALE

Human beings learn about the world through using the five senses: Sight, Sound, Taste, Touch, and Smell. An important goal of fiction is to *transport* readers to a fictitious world, so including vivid descriptions that refer to all five senses is one way to help readers *learn* about that story's world.

“Good writing is supposed to evoke sensation in the reader—not the fact that it is raining, but the feeling of being rained upon” – E.L. Doctorow

This collection of lesson plans is designed to help students employ innovative methods to note *and describe* not only what characters are *seeing*, but also what they're hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting within a story's setting. Through detailed lecture notes, large-group discussions, exercises, and a final assessment/assignment, creative writing students will be challenged to create vivid fiction by using rich, specific, and purposeful sensory details.

This collection of lesson plans is designed to be used in tandem with the Luminari video, *Teen Writer! Descriptive Writing & The Five Senses* <https://www.luminari.org/teen-writer-online/>
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Content in this collection of lesson plans aligns with the Common Core State Standards Initiative-
<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/SL/9-10/>

GRADE LEVEL OF TARGET GROUP: 9th & 10th graders. ADAPTABLE for rising 8th – 12th graders.

TOTAL TIME: 2 x 60-minute class periods, plus out-of-class writing activity/assessment with a suggested turnaround time of 4 – 5 days.

*Full description of Benchmark & Performance Standards at end of this document

TEXT TYPES AND PURPOSES:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3](#)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.A](#)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.B](#)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.C](#)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D](#)

PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF WRITING:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4](#)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5](#)

RANGE OF WRITING:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.10](#)

GOALS FOR UNDERSTANDING // ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How do humans learn about their world through the five senses: Sight, Sound, Taste, Touch, and Smell?
- What is meant by a story's **setting** in fiction?
- How can readers learn about the story's **setting** through sensory descriptions?
- How can readers learn about the story's **characters** through sensory descriptions?
- What is meant by "sensory observations" in the research and writing process for fiction?
- How can sensory descriptions contribute to the **mood** and **tone** of a story?
- What is the difference between *purposeful* sensory description and *superfluous details* in a story?
- How can sensory observations and personal experiences inform a writer's use of sensory descriptions in fiction?

As per National Standards, by the end of these lessons students will be able to:

- Apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.
- Adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- Employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately.
- Apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), and genre to create, critique, and discuss print texts.
- Conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
- Participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
- Develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

LESSON I – Introduction and lecture (60 minutes total)

Supplies: Internet connection; SmartBoard or ability to project instructor's screen on overhead.

The author E.L. Doctorow once said, “*Good writing is supposed to evoke sensation in the reader—not the fact that it is raining, but the feeling of being rained upon.*”

QUESTION: What do you think he meant by that?

A.) Evoking those sensations can deliver a more engaging and satisfying experience for the reader because sensory descriptions make fiction more vivid and believable.

Human beings learn about the world through using the five senses: Sight, Sound, Taste, Touch, and Smell. An important goal of fiction is to *transport* readers to a fictitious world, so including vivid descriptions that refer to all five senses is one way to help readers *learn* about that story's world – a world that you, and you alone, imagined!

In this lesson, we are going to learn strategies to write vivid fiction by using rich, specific, and purposeful details that engage all five senses.

We will begin by screening an 8-minute 15-second video designed especially for young writers. It is called *Teen Writer! Descriptive Writing & The Five Senses*

- The instructor will play the LUMINARI VIDEO *Teen Writer! Descriptive Writing & The Five Senses* available at the following link:
<https://www.luminari.org/teen-writer-online/>
(scroll down to video)

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION - After screening the Luminari video

ALL fiction includes these 4 elements

- **Setting**
- Character or characters
- Conflict
- Resolution

As we saw in the **Luminari** video, a **setting** is the location and time period in which your story takes place.

QUESTION: Think about a favorite fiction book or short story you've read, and the **setting** of that story. Can you recall particularly strong descriptions of the setting that made you feel as if you were *transported* into that fictional world?

QUESTION: Do you recall particularly vivid descriptions in those stories that related to *all five* senses, i.e. Sight, Sound, Taste, Touch, and Smell?

Different settings offer unique things for characters to see, hear, smell, touch, and taste. Vividly and accurately describing those elements in the **setting** is important because any one of them could have a significant impact on the plot.

For example:

1. **Some settings may have a *physical* impact on the story.** Imagine an action scene with a car chase. Suppose one car is chasing another car on an flat country road with no twists or turns. Now, suppose one car is chasing another car through busy city streets. Now, imagine one car is chasing another car on an icy, snowy road in the mountains, alongside steep cliffs.
 - **QUESTION:** How might each setting affect the outcome of the chase?
2. **Some settings may have an *emotional* impact on the story.** Imagine a romantic scene where one character plans to surprise the other with a marriage proposal. Suppose the character chooses to propose at a secluded, romantic site where the couple had their first date. Now, suppose the character chooses to propose at a party in front of a crowd of people. Now, suppose the character proposes marriage *without realizing* the chosen location is actually a site which holds very painful memories for their partner.
 - **QUESTION:** How might each of these settings affect whether or not the partner accepts the marriage proposal?

Sensory descriptions also contribute to the **mood** and **tone** of a story. The **mood** of a story refers to its *atmosphere*; and the **tone** of the story is the author's attitude toward the topic.

QUESTION: Suppose you are writing a **horror story** and the **setting** is the inside of a haunted mansion. What kind of **mood, i.e. *atmosphere***, would you expect it to have?

QUESTION: Let's imagine some of the **sensory details** that could contribute to a spooky/eerie/creepy/frightening atmosphere.

- What kind of things might you be able to **SEE** inside the haunted mansion?
e.g. Cobwebs; outdated and broken furniture; creepy paintings; unexplained orbs of light; rodents and insects, etc.
- What kind of things might you be able to **SMELL** inside the haunted mansion?
e.g. Mildew; decaying wood; rodent droppings; spoiled food, old perfume, etc.
- What kind of things might you be able to **HEAR** inside the haunted mansion?
e.g. Howling wind, distant footsteps, creaking attic, paranormal screams, etc.
- What kind of things might you be able to **TOUCH/FEEL** inside the haunted mansion?
e.g. Warped floors under your feet; damp air blowing in from broken windows; dust build-up on a bannister; goosebumps on the back of your neck; sensation of someone touching your arm even though you know you are alone, etc.

- What kind of things might you be able to **TASTE** inside the haunted mansion?
e.g. Inhaled dust from the stale air; dry “taste of fear;” magic potions, etc.

QUESTION: What is the difference between **purposeful** sensory description and **superfluous details** in a story?

A.) Purposeful sensory details pertain to elements of the setting that have an impact on the story’s mood, plot, and action.

Purposeful sensory details also contribute to **characterization**, which is the literary process of providing information about a character, such as physical descriptions.

On the other hand, **superfluous details** are unnecessary and excessive “word fat.” They have no significant impact on mood and tone; they have no bearing on action in the scene; they do not move the plot forward in any way; and they do not provide meaningful details that give the reader greater insights into a character.

LESSON I - Large group activity

The **Luminari** video we watched earlier presented a writing exercise challenging writers to observe details in their environment, and we’re going to try that exercise now in our classroom.

Instructions:

- **The instructor will ask students make sensory observations. Student volunteers will name and describe the following:**
 - **5 things you can SEE**
 - **TIP: Refine your observation skills by *being specific with the things you see*.** If you say you saw a “book,” that’s okay, but there are *many* different kinds of books. Is it a *text book*? A *novel*? A *poetry anthology*? An *instruction manual*?
 - **4 things you can TOUCH**
 - **TIP: Don’t make assumptions about how an item will feel, even if it’s something you’ve touched frequently in the past.** Touch the item and really concentrate on textures and unique elements of that item that you may not have noticed before.
 - **3 things you can HEAR**
 - **TIP: As noted in the **Luminari** video, close your eyes so you can focus solely on sounds.** Listen for subtle sounds that might get overlooked, such as the hum of a fluorescent light; the ticking of the second hand on a wall-clock; distant sounds of voices from nearby classrooms; even the irritating sound of a nearby classmate chewing gum!

- **2 things you can SMELL**
 - **TIP:** As noted in the **Luminari** video, our memories are closely linked to **smells**. Focus on scents in this environment that you closely associate with school, such as the smell of dry-erase markers; a musty rack of old books; etc.
- **1 thing you can TASTE**
 - **TIP:** Try to think of a **literal** example *and* a **figurative** example. A **literal example** could be a drink or snack you're eating, or a watering mouth because you're hungry. A **figurative example** could be based on a **metaphorical or symbolic** reference, such as "the sweet taste of relief" knowing that class is almost over!

CLOSING REMARKS: When we make more deliberate efforts to observe the sensory details in our surroundings, we also can become more deliberate about including vivid sensory descriptions in our creative writing.

In our next lesson, we will make sensory observations and write sensory descriptions that will be used to describe the setting for a fictional work. Please complete the assigned homework reading and be prepared to discuss it and apply its concepts in our next class.

HOMEWORK

Supplies: Internet connection

- **REVIEW** the **LUMINARI VIDEO** – *Speak & Tell! Focus Your Message for Effective Public Speaking*, available at the following link:

<https://www.luminari.org/speak-tell-online/>

Note: Scroll down to locate and play this video.

READ: Writing Guide- DESCRIPTIVE & SENSORY DETAIL-PDF¹

<http://www.wright.edu/~david.wilson/eng1100/sensorydetails.pdf>

Read the examples of the fictional passage and consider how each new sensory description contributes to a more vivid, realistic, and engaging scene.

Analyze each sensory description and determine whether it contributes to the **mood, action, or characterization** in the passage.

¹ *Writing Guide- DESCRIPTIVE & SENSORY DETAIL-PDF*. (n.d.) Wright State University. Retrieved from URL <http://www.wright.edu/~david.wilson/eng1100/sensorydetails.pdf>

LESSON II - (60 minutes total)

Supplies: Internet connection; SmartBoard or ability to project instructor's screen on overhead.

For homework, you were assigned: **Writing Guide- DESCRIPTIVE & SENSORY DETAIL-PDF**

TIP: The instructor may choose to display the link on an overhead projector or SmartBoard so students can follow along.

<http://www.wright.edu/~david.wilson/eng1100/sensorydetails.pdf>

The passage describes a grandmother who leans on her grandson for support as they climb a staircase. We are going to review and discuss how the passage becomes more vivid with the addition of sensory details.

QUESTION: What mood, *i.e. atmosphere*, did you think was created by the sensory details that were described? *i.e. Was the mood carefree, stressful, depressing, joyful, etc.?*

QUESTION: Based on the sensory descriptions of the grandmother's *look and smell*, what impression did you get of her and her personality? *e.g. Leathery hands; skin that was creased and bloated; smelled of wet cigarettes and bacon.*

QUESTION: What did the young boy Randal taste when he bit his lip? *i.e. The sweet, coppery taste of blood.*

QUESTION: Why not just say, "*Randall bit his lip and tasted blood*"?

QUESTION: Which sensory detail stood out to you as *most* vivid, helping to "transport" you into the story and its mood?

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LESSON II - WRITING ACTIVITY/ASSESSMENT – SUGGESTED TURNAROUND TIME – 4 – 5 days

Supplies: Writing pads *or* computers with word processing program (e.g. Microsoft Word, Apple Pages, Google Docs, etc.); **PRINTABLE WORKSHEET & SHORT FICTION ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION**

The instructor will distribute the **WORKSHEET & SHORT FICTION ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION**, and **RUBRIC (separate attachments)**, and **REVIEW**.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Our final activity in this lesson is to *apply* what we've learned about sensory descriptions to an original work of short realistic fiction. This assignment will be completed in several steps:
 - **STEP 1:** Each student will consider the **assigned writing prompt for short realistic fiction** **AND THEN** determine a **SETTING** where this scenario will take place.
 - The chosen setting **MUST** be *a realistic location in this school community*, i.e. a specific classroom, the school library, the school gymnasium, the school's outdoor sports arena, the cafeteria, etc.
 - **STEP 2:** Each student will complete the **5 SENSES WORKSHEET** based on their chosen setting.
 - Students should use sensory descriptions based on their own memories **AND** they should *visit* that location to make and record sensory observations, and write drafts of sensory descriptions.
 - **STEP 3:** Students will use their completed 5 Senses worksheet to inform an **original work of short realistic fiction**.
 - **SHORT FICTION WORD COUNT:** The original work of short fiction should be 1,200 – 1,500 in word length.
 - **REALISTIC FICTION:** A genre consisting of stories that could have actually occurred to people or animals in a believable setting. These stories resemble real life, and fictional characters within these stories react similarly to real people.

ASSIGNED WRITING PROMPT:

A child at the SETTING you choose catches your eye – because the child is wearing an outfit that is *exactly* like a favorite outfit you wore when you were younger.

You quickly realize that the child has the same hairstyle you wore when you were younger. . . and is even carrying the exact same backpack *you* carried as a child. The child turns around and you see your name monogrammed on the backpack.

You realize – you *know in your bones* – that somehow, this child is actually *the younger version of you*, who has traveled through time to meet you. **WHY. . . and WHAT DOES THAT YOUNGER VERSION OF YOU WANT?**

WRITING ASSIGNMENT:

Write a work of short realistic fiction about this scenario, incorporating the appropriate story elements of fiction:

- Clear and related beginning, middle, and end.
- Character interactions
- Conflict and resolution.
- Setting: This story must incorporate vivid sensory descriptions in a purposeful way, i.e. enhancing mood, setting, and characterization.

The fictional work you create based on the writing prompt is entirely up to you. Here is some food for thought, if you need a little more inspiration:

- What does the younger version of you want? (NOTE that this is most likely related to the story's **conflict** and **resolution**.)
- Does the child realize you are the older version of him/her/them?
- WHY did the child version of you show up now?
- HOW did the child version of you travel through time?
- What do the two of you talk about?
- Would you reveal the future to your younger self?
 - What are the *consequences* of revealing the future to your younger self?

ASSIGNMENT TURNAROUND TIME/DEADLINE

This writing activity/assessment has a suggested turnaround time of **4 – 5 days**, although instructors may choose to modify that based on classroom size and needs.

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Teen Writer: Descriptive Writing & the 5 Senses

NAME: _____

LOCATION: _____

List **5** things you can **SEE**

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List **4** things you can **TOUCH**

--	--	--	--

List **3** things you can **HEAR**

--	--	--

List **2** things you can **SMELL**

--	--

List **1** thing you can **taste**

--

RUBRIC for 5 Senses Worksheet AND Short Fiction

Category	Points Possible	Points Earned & comments
5 SENSES WORKSHEET – Selected appropriate SETTING from the school community; and, completed worksheet with thorough and thoughtful sensory observations related to all five senses, reflecting both creative <i>and</i> critical thinking.	20	
STORY STRUCTURE FOR ORIGINAL FICTION WORK BASED ON WRITING PROMPT – The original short work of fiction was appropriately rooted in the assigned writing prompt; and, the story had a clear beginning, middle, and end, motivated by a satisfactory conflict and plausible resolution.	20	
STORY MECHANICS – Observed the mechanics of writing, using appropriate grammar, punctuation, spelling, and formats.	10	
SENSORY DESCRIPTIONS – The story used purposeful sensory descriptions that contributed to mood, setting, and characterization. Sensory descriptions in the story were informed by the 5 Senses Worksheet . Sensory descriptions included meaningful references to all five senses.	50	

For further study:

Instructors may choose to extend the final writing activity to include in-class workshopping with Peer Teams, and draft revisions, in conjunction with other fiction-writing curricula being used in the course.

Instructors also may choose to use this lesson in tandem with other *free* Lesson Plans in the Luminari *Teen Writer!* video series, available at:

<https://www.luminari.org/teen-writer-online/>

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SEE SEPARATE ATTACHMENTS for printables for:

- Pp 9, 10, 11, and 12

REFERENCES*

Bagnall, Kyla, et al. "How To Use All 5 Senses To Unlock Your Fictional World." *Writer's Edit*, 27 Apr. 2017, writersedit.com/fiction-writing/use-all-five-senses-unlock-fictional-world/.

Catanzarite, Gina. *Teen Writer: Fantastic Fiction*/Educational camp curriculum excerpts. Luminari. 20 June 2019.

Scheller, Rachel. "Create Powerful Imagery in Your Writing." *Writer's Digest*, 3 July 2012, www.writersdigest.com/there-are-no-rules/create-powerful-imagery-in-your-writing.

"Writing Guide- DESCRIPTIVE & SENSORY DETAIL-PDF." *Wright State University*, www.wright.edu/~david.wilson/engl100/sensorydetails.pdf.

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BENCHMARKS AND PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards Initiative-

<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/SL/9-10/>

TEXT TYPES AND PURPOSES:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.A

Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.B

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

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.C

Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D

Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.E

Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF WRITING

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

RANGE OF WRITING

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.