

LESSON PLAN

Teen Writer: *The Power of Verbs*

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LESSON PLAN: *Teen Writer: The Power of Verbs*

OVERVIEW & RATIONALE

Exciting fiction is all about action. When writers build a strong “verb vocabulary,” they have the tools to choose precise and dynamic verbs to describe everything from exhilarating action sequences to lively character interactions in a fiction story’s plot.

This collection of 2 x 60-minute lesson plans employs lectures, discussions, large-group activities, assigned homework readings, and a quiz w/ answer key. The collection of lessons and activities will teach students how to utilize verbs creatively and effectively to help fiction “come alive” in the minds of the readers.

Lessons may be used as a stand-alone tutorial to build awareness of action verbs and to provide exercises for their application in creative writing; **OR**, instructors may choose to use this collection of lesson plans together with other creative writing lessons in which students already have in-progress or finished works of fiction. *Teen Writer: The Power of Verbs* could complement such curricula by providing additional components for the **revision of creative writing works**. Students could be asked to identify action verbs and analyze action sequences in the existing draft *and revise* the work to include more dynamic and precise action verbs.

This collection of lesson plans is designed to be used in tandem with the Luminari video, *Teen Writer! The Power of Verbs* <https://www.luminari.org/teen-writer-online/> copyright 2020 Luminari All Rights Reserved

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 a quiz with answer key.

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

Text Types and Purposes:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1](#)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2](#)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B](#)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.D](#)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.E](#)

[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](#)

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

Production and Distribution of Writing:[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4](#)[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5](#)[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.6](#)**Range of Writing:**[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.10](#)**GOALS FOR UNDERSTANDING // ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS**

- What is a **verb**?
- What is the storytelling value of using lively and precise **action verbs** in fiction?
- How can a **thesaurus** aid creative writers in choosing action verbs to describe precise and dynamic action sequences?
 - What is an **adverb**; and, what are the benefits and challenges of using one precise verb versus using a combination of verbs and adverbs to describe action?
- How do lively descriptions of characters' *physical interactions* enhance scenes in fiction?
- What is **characterization**; and, how do descriptions of characters' actions (VERBS) contribute to it?
 - How can writers avoid stereotypes when developing characterization through actions?
 - What is the potentially harmful nature of using stereotypes in fiction writing?
- How can creative writers review and revise works to include livelier verbs and action scenes?

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. They will draw on their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
- 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 to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

- Apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
- 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.
- Develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
- Participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
- Use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

LESSON I – (60 minutes total)

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

TIP: Instructors may wish to assign a refresher reading about verbs prior to the start of this lesson, e.g.

- **Your Dictionary-What is a Verb?** <https://grammar.yourdictionary.com/parts-of-speech/verbs/what-is-a-verb.html>
- **Cliff Notes-Action Verbs and Linking Verbs** <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/study-guides/english/verb/action-verbs-and-linking-verbs>

Exciting fiction is all about *action*. When writers build a strong “verb vocabulary,” they have the tools to choose precise and dynamic verbs to describe everything from exhilarating action sequences to lively character interactions in a fiction story’s plot.

In this lesson, we will examine verbs and discuss ways in which they help readers to visualize a fictional action scene; and, we will practice writing fictional sequences with a focus on using precise and dynamic verbs.

We will begin by screening a 5-minute 30-second video designed especially for young writers. It is called *Teen Writer! The Most Powerful Writing Prompt: What if...?*

- The instructor will play the LUMINARI VIDEO *Teen Writer! The Most Powerful Writing Prompt: What if...?* available at the following link:
<https://www.luminari.org/teen-writer-online/>
(SCROLL DOWN TO “Teen Writer: The Power of Verbs”)

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION - after screening the Luminari video

As we saw in the **Luminari video**, a **verb** is a part of speech that describes **action** or a **state of being**. In this lesson, we are focusing on **action verbs**, i.e. verbs that describe physical motion.

Question: What is the storytelling value of using lively and precise verbs in fiction writing?

A.) Dynamic verbs help the reader imagine the story more precisely. It's important for writers to build strong "verb vocabularies" so they can write lively and precise action into their stories.

Question: What are some memorable action scenes in fiction you've read... and what was it about how they were described that made them memorable to you?

A.) Familiar examples could include Harry Potter's battles against Voldemort in the *Harry Potter* book series, Katniss in the Cornucopia scene in *The Hunger Games*, etc.

Some **action verbs** may *seem* similar, but there are subtle differences in those similar actions. Each variation could suggest something significant about the characters' behavior or mood, about the plot, *and* about how the reader is *interpreting* the story the writer is trying to tell.

Question: Describe the subtle differences you imagine between the following:

- Crying and Bawling
- Shouting and Bellowing
- Whispering and Muttering
- Teasing and Tormenting

Tip: In the following section, depending on the classroom dynamic, the instructor may choose to ask students to *physically act out* examples and have fellow students come up with **precise verbs to describe the actions**.

In the **Luminari** video, one example of variations was the subtle differences in how people **walk**. Let's think about verbs that are *similar* to walking, but that reflect more specific moods and purposes.

Question: What verbs could you use to describe how someone walks:

- If they are *tired*?
 - **A.) e.g.** Scuffle, stagger, stumble, totter, etc.
- If they feel *proud*?
 - **A.) e.g.** Stride, strut, tread, saunter, etc.
- If they are *late* for something important?
 - **A.) e.g.** Jog, trot, sprint, dash, etc.
- If they are *afraid someone is following them*?
 - **A.) e.g.** Flee, bolt, scurry, scramble, etc.
- If they are *embarrassed*?
 - **A.) e.g.** Skulk, slink, creep, sidle, etc.

LARGE GROUP ACTIVITY

As noted in the **Luminari** video, one of the tools writers can use to help build those verb vocabularies is a **thesaurus**.

This exercise will help us think about our current “verb vocabularies” and demonstrate how to use a thesaurus to help build our vocabularies.

- The instructor will display action verbs using an overhead projector or SmartBoard.
 - SPIN
 - THINK
 - STUDY
- For *each* action verb displayed, students will suggest **synonyms**.
 - The instructor, or a designated student, will compile a list of students’ suggestions on the board.
- The instructor will then use a **thesaurus** to search the action verb **and compare the thesaurus list to the list of students’ suggestions**.

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION, cont.’d

In grammar, an **adverb** is a word or phrase that modifies (*describes*) or qualifies another word, giving more specific information about the degree or circumstances. **Adverbs** often end in **-ly**.

For example:

She walked (VERB) quickly (ADVERB).

He hollered (VERB) loudly (ADVERB).

A common tendency in young writers is to **combine adverbs with action verbs** to create a phrase which describes the mood or variation of the action; **however**, that combination of words most likely could be replaced with **one *specific* action verb**.

For example:

She walked (VERB) quickly (ADVERB). vs. She sprinted (VERB).

He hollered (VERB) loudly (ADVERB). vs. He screamed (VERB).

QUESTION: What are the *benefits* of using **one precise action verb** versus using a combination of verbs and adverbs?

QUESTION: What are the *challenges* of using **one precise action verb** versus using a combination of verbs and adverbs?

CLOSING REMARKS: As you build a strong “verb vocabulary,” you’ll have more “tools in your writer’s toolbox,” to choose precise and dynamic verbs to enrich your fiction. Complete the assigned homework readings and be prepared to discuss them and apply those concepts in the next class period.

LESSON I – HOMEWORK

- **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: Writer’s Digest – *Don’t use Adverbs and Adjectives to Prettify Your Prose*
Edit out those redundant adverbs and adjectives and make your writing stand out with the *perfect* verb! <https://www.writersdigest.com/improve-my-writing/nobles-writing-blunders-excerpt>

READ: Strong Verbs – Replace long word strings with vivid verbs ¹

https://www.apu.edu/live_data/files/288/strong_verbs.pdf

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Dragon Writing Prompts- 1000 Verbs to Write By²

<http://dragonwritingprompts.blogspot.com/2009/02/1000-verbs-to-write-by.html>

Ungraded exercise for additional practice:

Consider this list of **strong verbs**. Try this exercise to build your verb vocabulary:

- Select several of the verbs on this list.
- Come up with a list of **synonyms** for those verbs. THEN...
- Use a **thesaurus** to search the verb and compare your list to the list of verbs provided by the thesaurus search.

LESSON II - (60 minutes total)

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

¹ *Strong Verbs*. (2014, September 11). PDF Resource. APU Writing Center.
https://www.apu.edu/live_data/files/288/strong_verbs.pdf

² *1000 Verbs to Write By* (2009, February 7). Dragon Writing Prompts.
<http://dragonwritingprompts.blogspot.com/2009/02/1000-verbs-to-write-by.html>

REVIEW QUESTION: Why should creative writers avoid long strings of words and verb/adverb combinations in their fiction?

A.) Using one specific action verb rather than long phrases and/or verb/adverb combinations makes creative writing less redundant; less wordy; and more specific. This enables readers to more easily follow the story *and* to imagine action as the writer intended.

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

We are going to continue our study of strong action verbs, and in this lesson we will consider *actions* as they relate to what actions say about a character's personality.

QUESTION: How do *actions* (VERBS) reflect a character's personality?

A.) ACTIONS imply traits of a character's personality and moods.

- **e.g.** A person with a shy and withdrawn personality may react to an injustice by retreating to an empty space and weeping.
- **e.g.** A person with an aggressive and angry personality may react to an injustice by confronting the perpetrator with shouting, or even start a physical altercation.

In literature, the term characterization refers to the act of creating and describing characters. Characterization includes descriptions of a character's physical attributes as well as the character's personality. The way that characters think, speak, and act adds to their characterization.

Characterization is important for *all* of the characters in a story, not just the main character, so don't forget to fully describe character *interactions*. When one character *acts*, another one *reacts*, so describing both actions and reactions is crucial to how your plotline unfolds. Those interactions make for compelling story conflicts!

5 ELEMENTS OF CHARACTERIZATION:

- Physical description
- Dialogue
- Possessions
- Narrative that reveals inner thoughts
- **Action**

QUESTION:

Suppose you create a character named **JOHN** who has a rude and dismissive personality. You *could* convey that to your readers by **telling** it to them:

e.g. John was a naturally egotistical, rude, and dismissive person. He never paid attention when anyone else was speaking, because how could any other opinion be as interesting as his own?

But. . . what if, instead of stating those personality traits outright, you **showed** them through John's body language, i.e. *physical actions*? Imagine a scene in which someone is talking to John, and this is John's body language:

INSTRUCTOR DEMONSTRATES: *Slouch, don't make eye contact, roll your eyes, yawn, look at your watch, etc.*

How do those actions **characterize** John's personality?

This process of showing instead of telling is call indirect characterization. The reader can infer what type of person the character is based on that character's actions and reactions in different situations.

Example 1:

Telling: Suzy was a shy girl. She kept her head down and avoided eye contact with others.

Showing: Suzy slouched low over her desk, hoping to make herself as inconspicuous as possible. She spent the rest of homeroom pretending to look for something in her tattered backpack so she didn't have to make small talk with the other students, relieved that her shaggy bangs hung over her eyes and served as an additional curtain of protection from making eye contact with anyone else.

QUESTION: Which description gives us a more complete image of Suzy *and* her personality? **WHY?**

A.) The examples that **showed** (instead of **told**) included references to actions, possessions, and physical descriptions that helped the reader imagine a more complete and complex understanding of that character's shyness.

Example 2:

Telling: Kendra was full of confidence as she walked down the school hallway.

Showing: Kendra strutted down the school hallway exuding an aura of royalty, swinging her pink fringed Juicy Couture handbag and beaming her perfectly capped teeth at every person she passed.

QUESTION: Which descriptions of actions contributed to the readers' understanding that Kendra had a confident personality?

A.) Verbs: Strutted, beamed In addition, her "perfectly capped teeth" and designer handbag suggest affluence, which she confidently displays to others.

However. . . when we start developing a character by assigning them specific actions, it's possible to end up consciously or unconsciously resorting to *stereotypes*.

QUESTION: What is the definition of stereotype?

A.) A **stereotype** is a set of beliefs about the characteristics or attributes of a group. It's looking at a whole group of people and assuming that they all share certain qualities. Stereotyped beliefs are generally widely-held but mistaken, either because they are based on grossly oversimplified truths; or, because they are wholly untrue and rooted in prejudice.

QUESTION: As we think about showing characters' personality traits through actions, how might writers contribute to harmful and offensive stereotyping?

A.) The writer might create stereotyped or clichéd characters, reinforcing offensive or prejudice beliefs about qualities such as ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual identity and orientation, culture, etc.

QUESTION: How can writers avoid using stereotypes when developing characterization through actions?

A.) When writing about **diverse characters**, part of a writer's job is to conduct *research* to ensure story elements are accurate and believable, and will not be distracting, outdated, or even offensive to the reader.

QUESTION: How can the writer research diverse characters in a way that ensures accuracy, impartiality, and respectfulness?

A.) Research could include reading academic, historical, and biographical texts; researching diverse viewpoints in social media; and respectfully speaking to people who identify with the group targeted by particular stereotypes. This research can help writers ensure that they are creating authentic portrayals and unique characters, rather than reinforcing harmful stereotypes.

CLOSING REMARKS: **Action** is an essential part of dynamic scenes *and* in the **characterization** of the people populating the fiction world. Therefore, choosing specific and appropriate **verbs** is a vital part of storytelling so that readers can imagine the same story the writer is intending to convey.

In our next class, you will be given a **quiz on key concepts** from this lesson about the use of verbs in fiction.

ASSESSMENT – 20-point QUIZ

NAME: _____

GRADE: _____

1. (Worth 2 points) How do lively and precise action verbs enhance fiction?

2. (Worth 2 points) What is an adverb?

3. (Worth 2 points) **REVISE** the following sentence so that it uses one specific action verb instead of a combination of verb/adverb:

Example: The meal was so delicious that Shawn quickly ate it.

REVISION: The meal was so delicious that Shawn _____ it.

4. (Worth 2 points) Why should creative writers avoid long strings of words and verb/adverb combinations in their fiction?

5. (Worth 2 points) Define characterization and explain how characters' actions contribute to it.

6. (Worth 2 points) How can fiction contribute to and counter stereotypes?

7. (Worth 8 points) This process of showing instead of telling is call indirect characterization. The reader can infer what type of person the character is based on that character's actions.

REWRITE the example below, creating a paragraph of fiction that **SHOWS** Saundra's athleticism through physical strength, coordination, and confidence displayed in her everyday movements.

TELLING: Saundra was a great athlete and her everyday movements revealed her physical strength, coordination, and confidence.

SHOWING:

ASSESSMENT – 20-point QUIZ – ANSWER KEY**1. (Worth 2 points) How do lively and precise action verbs enhance fiction?**

A.) Some **action verbs** may *seem* similar, but there are subtle differences in those similar actions. Each variation could suggest something significant about the characters' behavior or mood, about the plot, *and* about how the reader is *interpreting* the story the writer is trying to tell.

2. (Worth 2 points) What is an adverb?

A.) An adverb is a word or phrase that modifies (*describes*) or qualifies another word, giving more specific information about the degree or circumstances. **Adverbs** often end in *-ly*.

3. (Worth 2 points) REVISE the following sentence so that it uses one specific action verb instead of a combination of verb/adverb:

Example: The meal was so delicious that Shawn quickly ate it.

REVISION: The meal was so delicious that Shawn _____ it.

A.) e.g. gobbled, devoured, wolfed, scarfed, gulped

4. (Worth 2 points) Why should creative writers avoid long strings of words and verb/adverb combinations in their fiction?

A.) Using one specific action verb rather than long phrases and/or verb/adverb combinations makes creative writing less redundant; less wordy; and more specific. This enables readers to more easily follow the story *and* to imagine action as the writer intended.

5. (Worth 2 points) Define characterization and explain how characters' actions contribute to it.

A.) It refers to the act of creating and describing characters. Characterization includes descriptions of a character's physical attributes as well as the character's personality. The way that characters think, speak, and act in certain situations adds to their characterization. A character's body language, movements, and physical demeanor all suggest specific things about that character's personality.

6. (Worth 2 points) How can fiction contribute to and counter stereotypes?

A.) Fiction can contribute to stereotypes if the writer creates clichéd characters that reinforce offensive or prejudice beliefs about qualities such as ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual identity and orientation, culture, etc. Fiction can counter stereotypes by presenting well-researched and authentic portrayals of characters, exposing readers to diverse and accurate representations of people, which could help to dispel stereotypes that exist.

7. (Worth 8 points) This process of showing instead of telling is call indirect characterization. The reader can infer what type of person the character is based on that character's actions.

REWRITE the example below, **SHOWING** Saundra's athleticism through the physical strength, coordination, and confidence displayed in her everyday movements.

Example 1:

Telling: Saundra was a great athlete and her everyday movements revealed her physical strength, coordination, and confidence.

Showing:

A.) *Students' answers will vary. Instructor should grade based on correct use of action verbs; and creative and critical thinking in showing how the character's athleticism is reflected in her everyday movements.*

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Instructors may choose to expand this lesson if students already have in-progress or finished works of fictions. Students would be asked to identify action verbs and analyze action sequences in the existing draft *and revise* the work to include more dynamic and precise verbs.

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

pp 5, 6, 8, 9, 11-12, 13-14

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**This list does not imply a promotion of the sites nor their sponsors; nor has any entity paid for or requested inclusion in this resource. Instructors are encouraged to review and vet the materials as per their individual school policies before inclusion in this curriculum.*

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.9-10.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B

Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.D

Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.E

Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

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.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.6

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.8

Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.A

Apply *grades 9-10 Reading standards* to literature (e.g., "Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work [e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare]").

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.