

LESSON 4: DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE



DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE

Language intended to create a mood, person, place, thing, event, emotion, or experience. Descriptive language uses images that appeal to the reader's senses, helping the reader to imagine how a subject looks, sounds, smells, tastes, or feels.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Language that involves the use of words and/or phrases that describe one thing in terms of another and that is not meant to be understood on a literal level. Figurative language always involves some sort of imaginative comparison between seemingly unlike things.

Types of Descriptive and Figurative Language

A. Metaphor: A comparison of two things that have some quality in common without using 'like' or 'as'. Instead, it states that one thing actually is something else.

Example: The spring flower is a breath of fresh air.

B. Simile: A comparison of two things that have some quality in common using 'like' or 'as'. In a simile, the comparison is conveyed by means of the word 'like' or 'as'.

Example: The spring flower is like a breath of fresh air.

C. Alliteration: The repetition of the same sound, usually of a consonant, at the beginning of two or more words immediately succeeding each other or at short intervals.

Example: The repetition of 'f' and 'g' in fields ever fresh, groves ever green.

D. Onomatopoeia: The use of words whose sounds suggest their meanings

Example: meow, buzz, splash

E. Hyperbole: A figure of speech in which a statement is exaggerated for emphasis or for humorous effect. Writers often use hyperbole to intensify a description or to emphasize the essential nature of something.

Example: A limousine is a mile long.

F. Personification: A figure of speech in which a nonhuman thing or quality is written about as if it were human. In the phrase “the blue stars shiver”, human attributes are given to stars.

Example: “Rocks lie on their backs” and “the rock has an open wound”.

Avoid Clichés

- A very comprehensive list of common clichés:
www.be-a-better-writer.com/cliches
- Try the “anti-cliché”—take a common cliché and change it a bit to make it feel fresh.

Don't Overdo It

Descriptive language is there to support the story, not the other way around. The story, or idea you are trying to express is subject. Use metaphors and other figurative language if it can help support the idea in a concise or more vivid way.

- The idea you are trying to expand on is naturally related to the image you are using. Don't try to force an image to fit an idea just because you want a metaphor there.
- The metaphor actually has a purpose—it clarifies or emphasizes something important, or explains it in a way that gets at the depths of the idea, or it enlightens the reader as to an aspect of the idea they may not have considered or have no experience with (or it's an opportunity to use a great image that enhances the prose concept—i.e., it really fits in multiple ways).
- You are not using an obscure image or idea just because it's dramatic or sounds unique. If it doesn't make the idea you are trying to enhance more clear to the reader (in less words is ideal), or at the very least doesn't inhibit the reader from quickly grasping the idea while you're being poetic, it probably isn't a good idea. A bad metaphor will confuse the reader or pull them out of your writing altogether.



CHALLENGE:

Write a 100-word story using this photo prompt. Using figurative and descriptive language is a great way to create a compelling scene with few words. This photo comes from the website: <http://www.100wordstory.org/photo-prompt/>. Every month, they post a picture as a writing prompt and anyone can post their story in the comments for a chance to be featured. In addition to sending in your challenge by email, take a moment to read through some of the other stories on the site. Take note of the stories that you are drawn to. How does the author use descriptive language? Try to find a great metaphor, and either a cliché or metaphor that falls flat. If you feel inspired, feel free to submit your own story on the site!

SOURCES

Engrade

wikis.engage.com/figurativeanddescriptive

Grammar Girl: Quick and Dirty Tips

quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/how-to-avoid-clich%C3%A9s#sthash.vwF3JQIC.dpuf

Eschler Editing

eschlerediting.com/her-words-flowed-like-a-tar-stream/

100Wordstories

100wordstories.org

Email your challenge to laurelnakai@gmail.com by March 21