

TITLE OF LESSON

English 1 Unit 1 Lesson 15 – Writing through the Senses: Descriptive Essay (Touch)

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TIME ESTIMATE FOR THIS LESSON

One class period

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ALIGNMENT WITH STANDARDS

California – Eng 9-10: W1.0-2, 2.0-1; W/O1.0-3

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MATERIALS

See *Explanation of Lesson* section for a detailed description.

3-4 boxes

butcher or wrapping paper

markers

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LESSON OBJECTIVES

- To begin to consider the importance of brainstorming and develop brainstorming abilities
  - To practice the structure of a written paragraph and essay and develop the basic writing skills
  - To transfer comprehension of graphic organizing of ideas from reading to writing
  - To develop new organization skills
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EXPLANATION OF LESSON

To prepare for this lesson you're going to have to find some old boxes and get some butcher paper or a solid color wrapping paper. You can decide about how many boxes you want, but try to have at least four and a table or large desk area for each. The easiest way to do this is to remove the flaps from the boxes so each is only five sided, then cut a hole like a mouse hole in one side. The idea is that the box will be set over items that students will reach in through the hole to feel. Cover each box in a solid color paper (not necessarily the same color) and have a marker or two for each box. Make sure that if you use, for example, red paper, the marker is black or a color dark enough to be seen on the paper. The students will use the markers to write their descriptive terms (of the items in the box) on the box. Once you finish, you can hang the wrapping paper on the walls if you choose.

For the inside, choose items that have an assortment of textures and temperatures: pine cones, wet sponge, sand paper, peeled grapes, rocks, ceramic tiles, burlap, velvet, silk/satin, etc. To save time you can put two or three things under each box, but if you do, think about the combination – e.g. applesauce and lentils under one box tend to become more of a cereal! Also, if you are going to use applesauce or pudding, which is fun, be sure to have a bowl of water and a dishtowel for students to rinse their hands. Be as creative as you can here and try to bring things students will not be able to identify or classify easily. It's easier for them to come up with purely descriptive terms if the item they are feeling isn't something absolutely familiar. You will probably still hear, "It feels like a pinecone." Okay, but what does a pinecone feel like? The activity is spelled out below.

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FOCUS AND MOTIVATE STUDENTS

- 1) Homework Check – Students did not have any homework last night. Pass back graded work from yesterday and have students place it in their folders.
- 2) **Brainstorm** – On the board, brainstorm descriptive words for touch. What are words you can use to describe how something feels? Consider all the ways something can feel, from icky to coarse, slimy to patterned. Include descriptive terms of all aspects of things – shapes, textures, aridity or moisture, temperature, depth, length, size, and so on. You may have to pose these probe questions carefully, depending on your students. If this is the case, try giving harmless examples: "What are some words you could use to describe an oven? a squeegee? an ice cube? goo? You can also ask them to describe feeling in

terms of how they feel – happy, sad, sick, chilly, afraid, and so on. Try to fill the board with terms and leave them up.

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#### ACTIVITIES – INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP

1. Have the boxes on the tables/desks as the students come in but don't let them touch yet! Build the mystery. Do the brainstorm as above. Have them copy the brainstorm list as you develop it.
2. Introduction – Once you've finished the list, explain that today you'll be continuing to work on descriptive writing, but instead of a paragraph, they'll write an essay. As they may have guessed, in their essays they'll be describing how something feels. To get some ideas, they'll be using what's inside the boxes.
3. Box Activity – First, all they have to do is go from table to table, reaching into each box, feeling the items, and writing their descriptive terms on the outside of the box. They can use terms from the brainstorming on the board, but they can't use exactly the same terms that others have used. Again, if the item they're feeling is a pine cone, their descriptive term shouldn't be pine cone. Ask students to search for unique words, words that would make someone picture the item.
4. Choose a Table – Once everyone has gone to each of the boxes, have them decide which item they want to write about and sit at that table. If they take too long to decide and the table is already full, they have to choose a different table.
5. Essay Organizer – At this point, you can take the wrapping paper off the boxes and lay it out on the table if that would make it easier for everyone to see all the words. Have students take out their sample five paragraph essay graphic organizers and blank sheets of paper. Onto the blank pages, students should copy the graphic organizer without the words *Introduction*, *Body*, and *Conclusion*.
6. Three Aspects – In the intro box they should write the item they have chosen to write about. Now, they should choose three aspects of the item they're going to describe. If they're going to describe a piece of sandpaper, for example, they might choose to describe its depth, texture, and its shape. They should, then, write one of these words in each of the three body boxes and add these three aspects to the intro box. At this point they can leave the conclusion box open. You should explain to them that it is in fact true that the chances that they will ever have to write a 5-paragraph essay describing sand paper in real life are very slim. Although the exercise may seem abstract or pointless, what they are learning is how to force themselves to be as clear and explicit as possible in an essay. To create a realistic image for someone else is always difficult. In this case, ideally, they've never even seen the object themselves. This makes it more important to describe exactly how it feels, what they believe it looks like. For this reason, it is much more difficult to describe an emotion or an opinion. We're starting with the basics of writing clearly – you don't try a black diamond slope your first time on skis and no one is going to start teaching you a jump shot before you can even dribble.
7. Supporting Evidence – Just as the thesis normally has three supporting topics (the descriptions, definitions, proofs, etc.) so each of those supporting topics should have three supporting statements. The reason for this, with a descriptive essay, is to provide sufficient detail for the reader to develop an image of the thing or situation being described. There are certainly times they'll need more than just five paragraphs to describe things, but in learning the basic essay format, three supporting paragraphs with three supporting ideas each should, if done correctly, be sufficient description. So, in each middle body box, under the quality they've chosen to describe, students should write three things to describe that particular quality. In most cases it may be easiest for them to think of something to compare to the item. (They will study simile and metaphor in Unit 2, but you can introduce the terms here if you have time, or just let them do it, then refer back in Unit 2.) Again, if the item is sandpaper, the three things they write under depth might be flat, thin, and loose leaf (or notebook) paper – because it's flat, rather than different depths in different parts, thin, rather than just flat like a mesa, and might remind one of a piece of paper, if it weren't for the texture. (This could be a transition into the next paragraph. You can mention transition here to get them to start thinking about a technique they'll become much more familiar with in Unit 2.)

8. Conclusion – Once they've written three things for each, they have almost finished their outline. Ask them if they remember what goes into a conclusion. Yep, a restatement of their main idea and the supporting ideas. These should be written in a new and different way. For now, ask them to just write in the conclusion box any ideas they may have about writing their main idea differently. Now, they have finished their essay outline.
  9. Introduction in Essay Form – Have them take out a sheet of notebook paper. Tell them this is a rough draft and they should not worry about crossing things out and writing in margins. That's how first drafts are supposed to look! Go over with them how to write an introduction. The most important part of the introduction is the thesis statement that tells the reader the point of the essay. For this essay, the thesis statement may not be altogether exciting because the purpose of this essay is to describe the feeling of something they felt in a box! But have them play around with it a little. Some may be a bit more comfortable with writing and feel free enough to be creative. Encourage this as much as possible so others see this is okay. Because this is an introduction, it is customary to include an introduction to what each of the next three paragraphs will cover. In this sense, the introduction is like an outline, guiding readers through the text: you can expect to read about this in the first body paragraph, this in the second, and this in the third. Again, it's the pattern they look for when they're reading. When they're writing, they should create the same pattern to orient those who will read their work.
  10. Write – As they work on their introductions, make sure they know that a standard paragraph contains from three to five sentences. One sentence is not a paragraph, not just because the rules say so, but because a paragraph should contain a full thought or idea. They may understand everything they want to say in one sentence, but the objective here is to convey their thoughts to others. For that, they will need to explain in more detail. If they're not sure what to say next, have them read their last sentence and ask themselves, "Why?"
  11. Body Paragraphs – As they finish up their introductions, with you walking around offering as much one-on-one help as possible, tell them that the next step is to take each of the three boxes and, using the words they've already filled in, turn each box into a paragraph. They already have three words – three ideas. If they turn each into a sentence, they've got at least the foundation of a paragraph. This is where you'll have to provide the most support. Again, many students in freshman year, and later, don't easily make the connections necessary to provide support for their arguments. We're starting with something very simple for which no real arguments are necessary. All they have to do is describe something, which can be done fairly simply by comparing it to other things. These may end up sounding a bit poetic. Again pair up students who can help each other out.
  12. Conclusion – Once all students have finished this, ask them to write a conclusion. On the board you can list common terms used in conclusions: In conclusion, again, thus, as you can see, etc. Work on them with their conclusions, helping them to restate their thoughts or comparisons. Explain that the conclusion is often the most difficult part of the essay, especially an essay in which they're not really proving a point or offering additional ideas for people to consider.
  13. Wrap Up – Once everyone has finished, point out to them that they have completed the first three steps to writing an essay: 1) brainstorming – on the board; 2) organizing their thoughts – on the graphic organizer; and 3) writing a first draft – on the notebook paper. This is as far as they go with this essay. In the next three classes, they'll be going through these same three steps to learn the foundation of essay writing. Once they feel comfortable with these steps, they'll begin the process of revising and editing. Have everyone put their brainstorm lists, sample and completed graphic organizers, and essays into their classroom folders or collect them to be graded tonight.
  14. Homework Assignment – None
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#### GROUP ROLES

Students will be working individually during this lesson, except those students who need assistance.

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#### DOCUMENTATION FOR PORTFOLIO

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