

Lesson Skill: Using specific vocabulary and elaboration

Strand Writing

SOL 6.7, 6.8

7.7, 7.8

8.7, 8.8

Materials

- Chart paper
- Selection of “blah” sentences
- Markers
- Paperclips

Lesson

1. Prior to lesson, post “blah” sentences on chart paper around the classroom so that students will see them when they enter.
2. Begin by giving the class some vague directions. Do not say anything specific, but use pronouns like *it* instead of *pencil* or *paper* to make your point about nonspecific vocabulary. When they are thoroughly confused, explain that using *specific* vocabulary would have been helpful in communicating your message and sustaining their interest in what you were saying. Discuss how elaboration using specificity helps readers understand, connect with, and stay interested in a piece of writing.
3. Put students into pairs, and direct students’ attention to the “blah” sentences posted throughout the room. Tell students that each poster contains a “blah” sentence at the top, and it will be their job to add the necessary elaboration and to control word choice to make the sentences more interesting.
4. Complete a sample on the board so students know what is expected. For example, for the blah sentence, “The car stopped suddenly.” the revised sentence might be, “The gleaming Mercedes convertible came to a screeching halt when the dump truck unexpectedly turned in front of it.”
5. Have students complete a similar sample with their partners. The sample can be of your own choosing, or you might use the following blah sentences: “Did you hear what Mrs. James said? She’s mean!” (New sentence: “Fran, did you hear what that mean old snake, Mrs. James, said to Mrs. Johnson? She told Mrs. Johnson that her tomatoes tasted like gasoline! Fran, everybody knows Mrs. James wouldn’t know a tomato from a pickle! What does she know!”) Once partners have revised the blah sentence, ask a few of them to share their sentences with the class.

6. Distribute markers, and instruct each pair to stand before one of the posters to participate in a carousel activity. Have each pair take 2 to 3 minutes to revise and rewrite the sentence on their poster, writing the revised sentence *at the bottom of the chart paper*. When they have finished writing, have them fold their revised sentence up and over so the next group cannot see what they wrote. Provide students with paperclips to hold the folded paper in place.
7. When all pairs have finished writing, folding, and clipping, instruct them to rotate to the poster on their right and repeat the process with the new sentence, again folding the paper at the end.
8. The activity will continue in this way until the pairs rotate all the way back to the poster where they started.
9. Once students are back to their original sentence, tell them that now they are going to vote on the sentences that show the best elaboration and word choice. Instruct students to unfold the poster at which they are standing and read all the revised sentences on the poster. Now instruct them to draw a star beside the sentence that they feel shows the best elaboration and word choice.
10. Again, have students rotate from poster to poster to vote on the sentences that show the best elaboration and word choice.
11. Walk around from poster to poster looking for good examples to be read aloud. Ask selected pairs to tell the class the reasons they voted for certain sentences.
12. Make a class list of some common elements that are found in the favorite sentences. Ask students, “What makes those sentences stand out? What can you, as writers, learn from those sentences? Can you include those kinds of sentences in your writing? How?” Discuss these questions, or have students answer them individually in writing and turn in their responses on their way out.

Strategies for differentiation

- In groups of 3, have students draw one notecard with a “blah” sentence written on it.
- In their groups, the students will revise the “blah” sentence separately and then present it to the other members in their group.
- Students will decide which revised sentence is the best one to share with the rest of the class.