Sparks Igniting curiosity and career exploration

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CISA Sparks: Creative Writing Teaching Guide

Grade levels: Upper elementary, middle school, high school

Faculty members: Stacey Said

Arizona Education Standards alignment

This lesson can align with additional teaching lessons modeled after the following Arizona English Language Arts Education standards:

- **Writing Standard 4.W.3 (4th grade):** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, descriptive details and clear event sequences.
- **Writing Standard 5.W.3 (5th grade):** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details and clear event sequences.
- **Language Standard 4.L.5/5.L.5:** Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings.
- **Social-Emotional Learning Standard SEL 1.1:** Develop self-awareness by identifying and expressing personal traits and emotions.

Background information

What English and creative writing mean: English entails the study of literature, writing, film, and culture; we utilize our thoughts and ideas to entertain and educate people. This degree hones your creativity in a specific type of English work. Students learn how to practically deliver their thoughts, ideas and stories through detailed wording. Students use sentences and details to make their readers see, hear, taste, touch or feel their story.

How it looks in everyday life: Writing stories for comics, screenwriting, writing songs, publishing books, book and story preservation, writing children's books, marketing, journalism, working as a librarian, social media manager, editor, web content manager, professor, or creative director, among other career options.

Some English careers:
- News reporter
- Communications specialist
- Editor

Aspects of these careers:
Communication - How we share ideas, feelings and information with others, whether by talking, writing or using body language.
Reporting - Sharing important information about what happened or what was found out.

Editing - Editing in creative writing is the process of reviewing and revising a written work to improve its clarity, flow and overall quality, ensuring it effectively communicates its message.

English (creative writing), BA degree information:

English includes the study of literature, writing, film and culture. When you utilize creative writing, you have a way to share your thoughts, ideas and stories through words. You use sentences and details to make your reader see, hear, taste, touch or feel what you imagine.

Key terms:

Word choice - The specific words you use to make your writing clear, interesting and vivid.
Sensory details - words or descriptions that help you imagine what something looks, sounds, smells, tastes or feels like. They make writing more vivid by describing the five senses:

Sight: What do you see? Is it bright, colorful, dark or shiny?

Sound: What do you hear? Is it loud, soft, musical or noisy?

Smell: What do you smell? Is it sweet, smoky, fresh or stinky?

Taste: What do you taste? Is it salty, sweet, sour or spicy?

Touch: What do you feel when you touch something? Is it rough, smooth, cold or warm?

Student activity 1: Creative writing poem (using “show, not tell” and descriptive details)

Show, not tell/descriptive details: It’s important to use descriptive and sensory details (think: appealing to the 5 senses) when writing to paint a picture for the reader. With writing, we call that “show, not tell” — as in, show me the scene, rather than telling me about it.

> Ex: (Tell) I was so scared.
> Ex: (Show) I could feel my stomach turning and my heart started to race.

Short, introductory activity: Take the “tell” sentences below and turn them into “show” sentences. Bonus points if you add sensory details!

- I am so happy.
- I was nervous.
- I am cold.
- The food is good.

Now, let’s try this by describing yourself.

> Ex: (Tell) My hoodie is so comfy.

Ex: (Show) The light, buttery fabric kissed my skin. I could smell the bonfire from last night, and noticed the sticky marshmallow left on my left arm from the s'mores.

Now, try it with a few descriptions about you or your favorite things (try for 3!).

Longer activity: Tim O'Brien's story "The Things They Carried" offers descriptive details about what each soldier carried. What effect do you think this writing had on its readers? Why would the author include so many descriptive details? Does it help us get to know the characters in a better way — by showing, not telling?

Create your own poem (free verse, no rhymes, no rules!) about yourself and the things you carry in your life, by using and incorporating descriptive details and sensory details. Try to apply the lessons from above to each line of your poem. Remember, you are *showing* who you are with *sensory details* and descriptive details.

Real-world relevance: You'll be asked to describe yourself to others throughout your life — during job interviews, for instance, or with college essays and applications. You can apply these lessons to those writings.

Student activity 2: Creative writing - powerful first lines

Overview: This lesson teaches students the effect of powerful first lines in creative writing — whether it be fiction (novels and short stories) or non-fiction (first lines of true narratives or college essays). The goal is to use creativity and imagination to capture readers with the first line of a piece of writing, leading them to want to read more.

Short activity: Read the following lines and decide which ones make you want to read more. Think about it, or talk about it with a friend.

- The day my grandma died was the worst day of my life.
- I had a fun summer.
- I hate going to the dentist.
- In a hole in the ground, there lived a hobbit. (Tolkien)
- It was a cold day in April, and the clocks were striking 13. (Orwell)
- Someone must've slandered Joseph K., for one morning, without having done anything wrong, he was arrested. (Kafka)
- I change my name each time I place an order at Starbucks. (Stanford admissions essay)
- I almost didn't live through September 11th. (Stanford admissions essay)

Follow-up practice: Write a few captivating first lines that you think would hook readers and get them to want to read more. The topic can be about anything, and the genre can be fiction or nonfiction.

Real-world relevance: You will have to write admissions essays when you apply to college, or sometimes short essays when you apply for scholarships. Admissions committees read a lot of these! So, if you can capture their attention with a powerful first line, you have a greater chance of gaining their attention.

Summary

Key takeaways -

In English, creative writing includes many elements like word choice, sensory details and description. Putting all these elements together can help a writer create a vivid story that clearly defines what the writer wants the reader to understand.

Real-life connections -

Every day, you see things that include some element of English. Mastering your descriptive skills can help you in the future with things like job interviews or college applications.

Student learning goals

Students will learn about English and creative writing, including understanding what careers they can have in the future with this degree. The student will understand the role of sensory details when it comes to writing. The student will also master appropriate grammar and English skills to organize, present and communicate information.

Skill focus

Writing, descriptive writing, critical thinking, applying, creating

Essential questions

How can you use sensory details to make writing more impactful, interesting or engaging?
What is the impact of using sensory details to “show” readers, rather than “tell” them?
How can you apply this lesson to other subjects or areas of your life?
Where do you observe powerful writing, or “show not tell,” in common media today?

Learning outcomes

1. Understand the difference between “show” and “tell” using sensory details and descriptive writing.
2. Apply the lesson of “show, not tell” to students’ own writing.
3. Create impactful writing excerpts that employ descriptive language and sensory details.
4. Distinguish between “show” and “tell” language.