

Unit: CRACKING WORDS OPEN

CRACKING WORDS OPEN

Teacher Resource Materials

Purpose:

This unit, *Cracking Words Open*, explores the concept of “Show, Not Tell” as related to revision of words. The unit is designed to help students see how writers strengthen their writing through vivid images and description.

The objectives of this unit include:

- To help students write with specificity;
- To show students the difference between general, vague, and common words and words that convey a strong image or feel;
- To show students techniques for revising bland, ordinary writing into specific, interesting writing.

Description:

This unit has three parts:

PART I: Orientation Activity: Activity 0 (in *Teacher Resource Materials*)

Activity 0 introduces the concept of showing instead of telling to the whole class. To introduce students to the metaphor of “cracking open” words and descriptions, and since this unit was designed to take place in the spring around Easter, the orientation activity will use plastic eggs. Depending on time limits and weather, this activity can work one of two ways: inside or outside. Either way, each student will end up with a plastic hunting egg, each with a piece of paper inside that asks him or her to do things such as, “Describe your face” or, “Describe your favorite movie.” This activity introduces the concept of description and showing instead of telling within the metaphor of “cracking open” in a seasonal activity.

PART II: Activities 1-6

Activity I: The Wonderdogs Dating Game

This activity introduces the concept of showing, not telling about people. It explores both physical and personality characteristics. This concept will be important to students in fiction writing and creation of characters. Students are to create a dating game and “sell” different members of the group to the class in a presentation.

Activity 2: Building Description

This activity will require students to revise a generic, vague sentence. Students discuss how to revise the sentence to show, not tell about something and then create a model with Legos and other objects in their box to present to the class.

Activity 3: Show with Song

Students are given a general, vague sentence to revise as a group. Students are then to determine what mood or tone their writing conveys through the descriptions in the revised writing. Students then perform their revised poem in a presentation to the class through music, either singing or reading to music.

Activity 4: Drawing Words

Students are given a general, vague statement to revise. Students then prepare a graphic representation of their revised writing to present to the class.

Activity 5: Acting Out

Students are given a general, vague statement to revise. Students are to revise the statement describing each action involved using the most descriptive language. They will present their revised paragraph(s) in the form of a drama for the entire class.

Activity 6: A Word Map

Students are given a few sentences to revise. Once they have completed the revision, students are to reflect upon their revision and create a graphic/diagram/map to show the process of revision. Students will present their product to the class as well as their revision.

Each activity includes an *Individual Report* which provides students with a vague, generic sentence that they must revise using descriptive language.

PART III: Closing Activity: Activity 7

This activity, like the orientation activity, can be done a number of ways. It is a way to review the unit and figure out what parts worked for your classroom and which parts did not. If time and weather permit, this will also be done outside as an egg hunt. Otherwise, students are to be given eggs once again and break into groups according to the numbers inside the eggs. Students are instructed to discuss in a group and take notes about things they learned, liked and disliked about the unit.

Structure:

This unit is designed to take approximately five class days. A schedule follows below. Each activity is designed for a 60-minute class period. You may choose to emphasize a different part of speech (verb, adjective, noun) in each daily orientation session.

Assuming you have a class with six groups, each group will do three activities. A sample calendar follows below:

	<u>Day A</u>	<u>Day B</u>	<u>Day C</u>	<u>Day D</u>	<u>Day E</u>
Group I	Act. 0	Act. 1	Act. 2	Act. 3	Act. 7
Group II	Act. 0	Act. 2	Act. 3	Act. 4	Act. 7
Group III	Act. 0	Act. 3	Act. 4	Act. 5	Act. 7
Group IV	Act. 0	Act. 4	Act. 5	Act. 6	Act. 7
Group V	Act. 0	Act. 5	Act. 6	Act. 1	Act. 7
Group VI	Act. 0	Act. 6	Act. 1	Act. 2	Act. 7

Multiple Abilities:

Below follows a partial list of multiple abilities used in the activities. Please contribute your ideas and extend this list.

- Dramatic Abilities
- Using gestures, facial expressions and body language to convey a particular idea or action
- Critical analysis of words
- Developing synonyms and antonyms
- Elaboration upon and creation of strong images and atmosphere
- Illustrative abilities
- Articulation of thoughts and ideas
- Recognizing and creating tone
- Seeing creative uses for ordinary objects
- Designing and crafting three-dimensional objects
- Organizing ideas
- Analyzing and reflecting on the revision process

Materials:

- Construction paper
- Straws/pipe cleaners
- Tape
- Glue
- Scissors
- Toilet paper and paper towel rolls
- Legos
- Yarn
- Artwork/pictures
- Dictionaries
- Thesaurus

- Art paper
- Markers
- Crayons, markers, and colored pencils

Background Information:

In this section we provide definitions and concepts that are important to this unit. All concepts and definitions relate to the unit and may be brought up in the orientation activity or the orientation for each day of the rotation.

- **Metaphors** make connections between things that are not initially similar. For example, if you say, “the wind howled,” you connect the “wind” with a “wolf, dog, or coyote.” Each of those animals howls, and by comparing the wind to one of these animals, you suggest feelings, emotions, tone, etc. associated with howling.
- **Similes** also compare two things that are not similar except they use the words “like” or “as” to make the comparison. For example, “smooth as a baby’s bottom” connects whatever you are describing to a baby’s bottom and suggests that the thing you are describing has the same qualities associated with the baby’s bottom.
- **Imagery** uses words that play on all five senses—taste, smell, sound, touch, and sight. The writer’s job is to create, with words, a strong image that makes the reader feel the words come to life as if he or she is experiencing the same thing with the writer.
- **Synonyms** are words that mean the same dictionary meaning but maybe suggest slightly different tones, moods, atmospheres, etc. For example, “ugly,” “horrendous,” “hideous,” “unattractive” and “grotesque” are all synonyms but all carry different feelings with them for the reader.

Orientation Activity: Activity 0

The aim of this activity is to orient the students to the concept of descriptive language, or “show, not tell” as relates to the revision of words. Descriptive language helps writers stimulate a stronger reader response through extreme emotions and strong images.

Before Class:

You need to gather enough plastic eggs for each student to have one of his or her own. Inside the eggs, put a slip of paper with a command on it. Some examples are “Describe your face” or “Describe your favorite movie.”

During Class:

This activity may be done in varying ways. Should weather and time permit, it may be done as an egg hunt outside or even in the classroom. If not, eggs can simply be distributed to each student. Students will “crack open” their egg and work in pairs or groups on each of their pieces of paper inside the eggs. A few students can then volunteer to share with the entire class.

Closing Activity: Activity 7

Before Class:

Take the eggs used during the Orientation Activity and place group numbers inside the eggs. Be sure to divide students into groups of about 3-5. This activity may also be done as an egg hunt. It is not advised to do an egg hunt for both.

During Class:

Distribute eggs or have students hunt for them. Have them divide into groups according to the numbers inside the eggs. Students are then instructed to discuss the unit: what they learned, what they wish they learned, favorite activity to do or watch, what they liked, what they didn't like. This is a way to wrap up the unit and also get informal student feedback about revision of the unit. Representatives from each team will share a few of the things they discussed in their group.

Assessment

A sample pre-test is included in this packet of teacher resources. For a cumulative assessment, this team elected to use students' own writing for revision because we believe authentic revision is the best way for students to learn. However, because of time constraints, a sample post-test was designed. It is also included in this packet.

References:

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Mitchell, Margaret. Gone with the Wind. New York, NY: Warner Books, 1936.

Obst, Lynda. "Sweet Scarlet: Kate Hudson." Cosmopolitan. March 2003. 157. Ed. Kate White.

Romano, Tom. Writing with Passion: Life Stories, Multiple Genres. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995.

"Understanding Poetry" Complex Instruction Unit given to CTSE 4150 class by Dr. Alyson Whyte. Spring 2003.

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Activity 1: The Wonderdogs' Dating Game

Creating characters and introducing them to your audience is important for you as writers. When describing a person, it is important to *show* rather than tell personality characteristics as well as physical characteristics. It often helps to use all your senses when describing a character: sight, smell, hearing, touch, and taste.

- What are different words to describe a person physically? Can you think of alternatives to boring, ordinary descriptions: brown hair, black hair, blue eyes, tall, and short?
- Can you describe a person through an action or gesture they use? How does a phrase like “she nervously gnawed on her fingernails while staring up at the blank ceiling” show a character’s personality?
- Can you think of ways to show the emotions of the character? Do you think it is important to describe what the character sees, feels, hears, smells, and tastes?
- Would it be helpful to describe a character by telling what others think of them?

As a group, create a dating game drama to “sell” a member or members of your group (or be creative by choosing a celebrity or inventing a character) as a presentation for the entire class. Remember to use descriptive words that *show* the qualities of the person, not just tell them.

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Activity 2: Building Description

Synonyms: words that share the same dictionary meaning but maybe suggest different tones, moods or atmospheres
(example) ugly, hideous, unattractive, grotesque

Using synonyms is a good way to make your writing more specific. The words *hideous* and *unattractive* can both mean *ugly*, but it is much more insulting to something *hideous* rather than *unattractive*. By choosing synonyms carefully you can **show** your reader exactly what you mean and make your writing much more interesting.

- How do you already use synonyms in your writing?
- Can you think of synonyms for the word *big*?
- Close your eyes and imagine a *big structure*; picture in your mind what it looks like. Share your ideas with your group. How are everyone's ideas similar and different?
- Do the descriptions on the resource card create a picture in your mind of specific *structures*?

The structure is big.

The sentence above tells a boring fact. Discuss as a group the many different possibilities for what the writer may be trying to say. As a group, revise the sentence into at least one paragraph describing the structure. Then, create a model that reflects your revised description. Be sure to **show** what you tell.

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Activity 3: Show With Song

Descriptive language is an important part of life around us. For example, think of the songs you hear. They depend on description to tell a story. For example, in Justin Timberlake's "Cry Me A River," the chorus is:

*You told me you loved me
Why did you leave me all alone?
Now you tell me you need me
When you call me on the phone*

*Girl, I refuse
Must have me confused with some other guy
Bridges were burned
Now it's your turn
To cry me a river*

This song, as many other songs, isn't vividly specific in order to leave images to the imagination. That way each person who hears the song can have his or her own personal experience with the song. Consider the following sentence:

The rain makes me think of sad times.

- What are some possibilities for the "sad times"?
- Why does the rain make you think of sad times?
- How might you feel when you think of sad times?
- What besides the rain could trigger these memories?
- Is it the sound of the rain? The wetness of it? The dark sky?

Those are just some possibilities for questions you might ask yourselves.

As a group, discuss and decide upon possibilities for answers to the above questions and revision to the sentence. The above sentence needs vivid words to help the reader know what the writer is trying to say. As a group, discuss potential plans for revision as well as the tone or mood you want to create with your revision. Write a new song that *shows* instead of *tells*. Present your revision in the form of a song or read it to the class using music. Remember to think about the different types of music, such as jazz, rap, country, rock 'n' roll, pop, classical, rhythm & blues, punk, metal, and hip-hop, and the tones, or mood, that each type of music conveys.

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Activity 4: Drawing Words

Writers often draw pictures and graphics of what they are writing about. Making graphics and drawing is a writer's tool that helps them visualize what they see in their mind in order to describe it more vividly for readers. Consider the following sentence:

The house is near the mountains.

- What does the house look like?
- Is it big? Small? Old? New?
- How big are the mountains?
- What color are they?
- Are they covered by snow? Trees?
- Who lives in the house?
- How far from the mountains is the house?
- What does the area around the mountains and house look like?

The sentence tells a boring fact. Discuss the possibilities for what the writer could mean. As a group, revise the sentence to **show** the reader what you mean using descriptive language. Then, prepare a graphic representation of your revision and present it to the class. Make sure your reporter is prepared to read your revision to the class along with the presentation of your graphic.

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Activity 5: Acting Out

Sometimes when we write, we tell something that we can see happening without *showing* our reader what we see. An example of telling something happening instead of *showing* is the following sentence:

The food is good.

The sentence tells a boring fact instead of *showing* the action. Discuss some of the different things the writer could mean. Some things you may want to consider are:

- What kind of food is it that is “good”?
- What does the food taste like?
- How do you know the food is good?
- Was there a reaction to the food?
- Facial expressions?
- Sounds?
- Words?
- Physical reactions?

Those are just some of the things to consider when discussing as a group. There are many other things to consider. Use your imagination.

As a group, create a drama that *shows* the boring fact instead of telling it. You are at a restaurant attempting to make your customers want the food. “Sell” the food to your customers as well as your audience, the entire class. Set the scene for us. Your reporter should be prepared to tell us how you arrived at your interpretation.

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Activity 6: A Revision Map

When writing, sometimes we get in the habit of writing telling sentence instead of *showing* sentences. Take the following series of sentences as an example:

I got up. I got ready. I went to school.

There is much more that happened from getting up until leaving for school. *Showing* and not just telling means that the writer fills in the parts that are missing. The writer pays attention to even the smallest details of a process. Discuss the series of sentences. Some things you might want to consider are:

- What happened when the writer got up?
- What all did the writer do to get ready?
- Did getting ready go just as planned or did something happen to throw off the routine?
- Did he/she eat breakfast?
- How did he/she get to school?

Revise the series of sentences above. You are late for school and must make up an excuse at the front office. Be convincing. Make sure you *show* someone getting ready for school with your words. Pay attention to every step of your revision process.

Then, create a diagram/map/graphic that shows the steps of that process. You will present this to the entire class along with your revision of the sentences.

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Activity 1: The Wonderdogs' Dating Game Individual Report Sheet

Write a thorough description of a person. This person may be someone who you admire, a teacher, mentor, coach, peer, or anyone else who has made a personal impact on your life; someone who you do not particularly care for, an enemy, a bully, etc.; or someone who you now realize that you have not paid much attention. Truly think about the person you have chosen and use words that "show" the reader this person rather than simply tell about this person. Discuss not only his/her physical characteristics but also his/her personality characteristics. Make sure that you proofread your work through the eyes of the reader to ensure that, as the reader, you can truly "see" the person through your description. Avoid words such as "big," "tall," "pretty," or "blonde" because these words do not truly create an image for the reader. Use metaphors, similes, and strong synonyms that portray a strong image.

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Activity 2: Building Description Individual Report Sheet

The plant has big leaves and lots of large roots.

The above sentence uses many words that do not convey strong images. Can you identify these words? Think critically about these words and write a paragraph explaining why these words do not create strong images. Think about possible synonyms for these words and identify these in your paragraph. Explain why these words might be a better choice for this sentence in order to create a stronger image.

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Activity 3: Show With Song Individual Report Sheet

Think about your favorite kind of music and your favorite song. Think about this song and the various tones that it expresses. Write a short paragraph explaining why you think that these tones are presented in this song. Include particular words or phrases that convey strong images for you, the listener.

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Activity 4: Drawing Words Individual Report Sheet

The flowers are pretty.

Revise the sentence above so that the reader can actually “see” the bouquet. Make sure that you use vivid words and phrases (Example: metaphors and similes) that thoroughly describe the bouquet so that the reader feels as if he/she is actually looking at it. Then, draw a picture of a bouquet that reflects your description. Draw the bouquet either on the back of this sheet of paper or use a separate sheet of paper and attach it to the back of this sheet.

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Activity 5: Acting Out Individual Report Sheet

The food is good.

The above sentence is the same sentence that is presented in the activity. Think about this sentence. Do any strong and vivid memories form in your mind? Briefly describe a time in your life when you ate or drank something that you really enjoyed. Thoroughly describe the food or drink so that the reader feels as if he/she is experiencing the food or drink just as you once experienced it. Make sure that you use words and phrases that express exactly what you are thinking. Remember, it may be necessary to write and revise several drafts of your description in order to create an image that appeals to the reader.

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Activity 6: A Revision Map Individual Report Sheet

I had a lot of fun.

The above sentence is in desperate need of revision! Think about this sentence and the image that comes to mind when you read it. Thoughtfully revise the sentence so that it conveys a strong image to the reader and describes exactly the image that formed in your mind. Make your own revision that shows the process that you went through to revise this sentence. Include your final revision at the end of your revision map.

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Activity 1: The Wonderdogs' Dating Game Resource Card

From the March 2003 issue of *Cosmopolitan* magazine:

Kate Hudson breezes into the house where her Cosmo interview will take place with the dramatic flair expected of a young starlet. She is dressed fashionably in a pair of brown Marni men's style trousers and an off-white blouse, her enviable blond waves are free-flowing, and her billion-watt smile is beaming. What's not expected is what she's carrying—a home-baked apple-cheesecake pie. “It was the winning recipe in a magazine I read,” she reports, then hastens to say, “Oh, no, are you going to write that? It's *so* embarrassing.”

From Georgia Heard's *The Revision Toolbox*:

The sun came up over the sea. Cold water splashed my feet sending a chill over my body. The air smelled of sweet salt water. The sun rays made the water glitter like fireworks. The sand felt warm on my frozen feet. The wet rocks made a beautiful shade of gray. The stars came up. The little sparkling dots made me feel safe in bed.

Tell	Show
My grandfather loved classical music.	When he was ninety years old I remember my grandfather sitting in his rocking chair on the screened porch listening, sometimes for hours, to a Mozart or Beethoven symphony.

From *Gone with the Wind*:

He looked quite old, at least thirty-five. He was a tall man and powerfully built. Scarlett thought she had never seen a man with such wide shoulders, so heavy with muscles, almost too heavy for gentility. When her eyes caught his, he smiled, showing animal-white teeth below a close-clipped mustache. He was dark of face, swarthy as a pirate, and his eyes were as bold and black as any pirate's appraising a galleon to be scuttled or a maiden to be ravished. There was a cool recklessness in his face and a cynical humor in his mouth as he smiled at her, and Scarlett caught her breath. She felt that she should be insulted by such a look and was annoyed with herself because she did not feel insulted. She did not know who he could be, but there was undeniably a look of good blood in his dark face. It showed in the thin hawk nose over the full red lips, the high forehead and wide-set eyes.

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Activity 2: Building Description Resource Card

From *Gathering Blue* by Lois Lowry

Very little had survived the Ruin, but somehow the structure called the Council Edifice had remained standing and firm. It was immeasurably old. Several windows still contained patterned glass of deep reds and golds, amazing things, for knowledge of the way of making such remarkable glass had been lost. Some remaining windows, ones in which the colored glass had shattered, were now paned in a thick, ordinary glass that distorted the view through bubbles and ripples. Other windows were simply boarded over, and parts of the building's interior were darkly shadowed. Still, the Edifice was magnificent in comparison to the ordinary sheds and cottages of the village.

From *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

The avenue opened into a broad expanse of turf, and the house lay before us. In the fading light I could see that the centre was a heavy block of building from which a porch projected. The whole front was draped in ivy, with a patch clipped bare here and there where a window or a coat of arms broke through the dark veil. From this central block rose the twin towers, ancient, crenellated, and pierced with many loopholes. To right and left of the turrets were more modern wings of black granite. A dull light shone through heavy mullioned windows, and from the high chimneys which rose from the steep, high-angled roof there sprang a single black column of smoke.

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**Activity 3: Show With Song
Resource Card**

End-of-School Blues

by Wendy Hartman Tuttle and Amy Whitacre White, Seniors, Edgewood High School

Get up Monday mornin'
Alarm clock blarin' in my ears
Gotta face another school day
After twelve long gruelin' years.

Try to wake up in the shower
Soap is burnin' in my eyes
Gotta chemistry test in an hour
But all I wantta do now is die.

I got the end-of-school blues
Thank God you're not in my shoes
These days are draggin' like molasses
Up to the last day of school.

Drivin' along in my dump truck,
Pull in the parkin' lot
End up getting' yelled at by Buck
'cause there wasn't no cement block.

The two-minute bell is aringin'
I'm dashin' on down the hall
I almost make my locker
But I trip on the steps and fall.

I got the end-of-school blues
Thank God you're not in my shoes
Those days are draggin' like molasses
Up to the last day of school.

Gotta detention at lunch time
For steppin' on over the blue.
I'm so darn sick of those blue lines
Hallelujah! I'm almost through!

I got the end-of-school blues
Thank God you're not in my shoes.
Nothin's goin' right, I'm all full of spite
Up 'til the last day of school!

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**Activity 6: A Revision Map
Resource Card**

Adapted from *Thermal Years*

By Tari Shepherd, Senior, Edgewood High School

I slammed the door shut on my winter squall and drank the warmth of future's fire. Then I undressed.

First off, my blood-red toboggan, too tight around my head, a gift from my preacher. It's muddled righteousness confused my soul, and anyone, with a tug, could pull it over my brow and blind me.

Next, the sunset scarf, knitted by my grandmother of ancient fears and pigeon-holed paranoia. It strangled my voice and gave easy reins to anyone wanting a pack mule.

Then, the straightcoat Dad bought, "To keep you warm and safe." It's bulky hug tangled my arms and made traveling from home too hard.

Now, the concrete boots Mom, on my sixteenth birthday, gave me to keep me firmly on the ground and out of love's heaven.

Then, finally, I peel off layer upon layer of thermal underyears and toss them away.

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Pre-test

It was a hot day.

The night was kind of dark.

I bought some stuff at the mall.

She is nice.

It smells good.

The big animal is in the forest.

The concert was fun.

The sentences above tell boring, vague facts and do not stir emotions in the reader. They do not convey a specific image, or **show** the reader what is meant. Pick two of the sentences to revise. Add specific details to make the sentence **show** your meaning. Feel free to make any changes and write at least 4 sentences in your revision of each sentence.

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Post-test

Directions: Revise the description of a room in a house in *italics* below the directions. Remember everything you learned from writing description for your 4th quarter writing portfolio, as well as everything you learned from this unit about descriptive language, such as:

- Metaphors
- Similes
- Active verbs
- Descriptive adjectives
- Synonyms
- Imagery
- Elaborating and specifying
- Using the five senses

My favorite room in my house is pretty. There is lots of stuff in it. The furniture is pretty. There are also a lot of things on the walls. The floor feels good under my feet. The ceiling is very high. There is just enough light in the room. I can see lots of stuff from the window. The sight is beautiful.