

Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum

Lesson or Unit Plan for Teaching Descriptive Writing
using excerpts from *Life on the Mississippi* by Mark Twain for Inspiration

Created by: Tricia Rozanski

School: Boylan Catholic High School

City, State: Rockford, IL

Mark Twain Teachers' Workshop, July 14, 2017

Hannibal, Missouri

Drawing Inspiration from Mark Twain's Beloved Mississippi River

<i>Life on the Mississippi</i>	
Concept or Topic: Descriptive Writing	Suggested Grade Level(s)/Course: 12--Senior Composition and Modern World Literature
Subject: English	Suggested Time Frame: 50 minutes per day for about two weeks
Objective(s): <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Students in Senior Composition and Modern World Literature will identify imagery from excerpts of Twain's <i>Life on the Mississippi</i> showing at least 80% accuracy when listing 10-15 examples.2. Students in Senior Composition and Modern World Literature will create a group Found Poem using imagery from the reading excerpt. Every student will contribute at least one group of words or suggestion for rearranging lines or omitting material to create the whole group poem. Contribution from each student will count as a 10 point completion grade.3. Students in Senior Composition and Modern World Literature will bring in song lyrics or a poem with words that describe how they have felt at a time in their lives and have the option to share it with the class but will be required to turn it in for a grade. Students will earn a 10 point completion grade for turning in a copy of the song lyrics or poem. Any student who chooses to share her song or poem will earn 2 points extra credit added to this assignment.4. Students in Senior Composition and Modern World Literature will use the examples of descriptive writing in Twain's work and their chosen song or poem to inspire a plan and draft of their own descriptive essay mimicking Twain's use of imagery to describe one of the following topics:<ol style="list-style-type: none">a) describe your favorite piece of art to someone who has never seen itb) describe your favorite place in the world (near or far)	

c) describe your fondest childhood memory scoring at least a 77% (equivalent to a C-) on their final essay (see attached grading rubric). Students who score below a 77% are required to conference with the teacher, revise, and turn in a second final draft.

Common Core State Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2: *Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text*
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4: *Analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.*
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.3: *Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style*
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.5: *Demonstrate understanding of figurative language*
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1: *Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.*
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.2: *Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally).*
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.D: *Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.*
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.4: *Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)*
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5: *Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.*

Assessments (at least two):

1. Students will create a title for the group Found Poem and write a paragraph explaining their chosen title.
2. Students will bring in a copy of song lyrics or a poem that accurately describes how they felt at a time in their lives and create their own found poem focusing on the specific language that conveys their feelings.
3. Students will identify different kinds of imagery (simile, metaphor, personification, etc.).
4. Students will practice descriptive writing with an object in the classroom.
5. Students will plan, draft, peer edit, and revise a final Descriptive Essay.

Vocabulary (Tiers 2 & 3):

Imagery, Found Poem, Simile, Metaphor, Personification, Hyperbole, Onomatopoeia, Description, Vantage Point, Dominant Impression

Subject Area Integration:

History, Music

Background Information Required for Lesson:

On day 1, teacher will briefly review Mark Twain's (Sam Clemens's) boyhood in Hannibal and his time on the Mississippi as a riverboat pilot. This is information that our students learned the prior year, their junior year, during the *Huck Finn* unit.

Materials:

Excerpts from *Life on the Mississippi*
Plain paper (cut in strips) and markers
Cd player for optional song lyric sharing
Required class materials for note-taking and homework
Reflections text for reading and notes on Descriptive Writing

Technology:

Projector to show images of Mississippi River after excerpt has been read
Chromebook cart for drafting and revising in the classroom

Related Twain Quotes/Passages:

Student will choose a Mark Twain quote as the title of their Descriptive Essay.

Lesson Sequence:Day 1

1. Teacher will be playing *Run Mississippi* from the Mark Twain cd as students enter the classroom.
2. Teacher will tell students to close their eyes and listen as she reads excerpts from *Life on the Mississippi* describing sunrise and sunset on the river. (5 mins)
3. After students have listened, they will turn to a peer sitting near them and discuss what they heard. (1 minute)
4. Teacher will introduce unit on Descriptive Writing and using Twain's words to inspire their own writing. (10 min)
5. Together, class will briefly review different types of figurative language (simile, metaphor, personification, imagery, hyperbole, etc.). (15 min)
6. Teacher will read the passage again, directing students to listen for examples of the imagery in the passage. (5 min)
7. Teacher will pass out copies of excerpt to each student.
8. Homework--identify and label 10-15 examples of imagery.

Day 2

1. Students will take out their homework and share with a peer on the opposite side of

the classroom. (2-3 minutes)

2. Students will go back to their seats and then we will go around the room and have everyone share 1 piece of identified imagery. Students cannot repeat one that's already been said. (10 min)
3. Teacher will put images of the Mississippi River at sunrise and sunset up on the overhead and put on *Safe Water* from Mark Twain cd while students write a 10 sentence prose passage or a poem about the images or feelings evoked by the images. Students have 5 minutes to write and will turn it into teacher when they are finished.
4. As a class, discuss who the narrator is (vantage point) and how he seems to feel about the subject he is describing (dominant impression). (5)
5. Ask students to get out their copies of the passage.
6. Teacher will give each student 3 slips of plain paper and a marker.
7. Tell students to reread the passage with the theme of beauty in mind. After they have reread, they should go back through the passage and identify 3 words or phrases that emphasize the theme and copy each phrase on the 3 slips of paper--large enough to be easily seen. (15 mins)
8. When everyone is done, explain the concept of a FOUND POEM and as a class create our own poem about the beauty of the river based on the descriptive writing of Twain. (15)
9. Homework--students should bring in song lyrics or a poem that accurately describes how they have felt at a particular time in their lives; may share song or poem for 2 pts.

Day 3

1. Ask for volunteers to share lyrics or poem and then collect homework.
2. Review types of figurative language with an oral review game. (10)
3. Put images of Mississippi River back up on projector and remind students that we are hoping to gain inspiration from Twain that can fuel their own descriptive essay. (2)
4. Give oral and visual notes on descriptive writing, with emphasis on imagery, vantage point, and dominant impression. (25)
5. In-class: Choose any object in our classroom and practice using imagery in descriptive writing by creating at least 10 examples of figurative language describing the object. Don't reveal the object being described. (15)

Day 4

1. Choose 5 students to share the object imagery with the class. Based on their descriptions we will guess the object. Collect from every student for a homework grade. (10)
2. Review planning techniques and plan for all 3 possible topics for descriptive essay. Topic choices are: a) Describe your favorite piece of well-known art to someone who has never seen it, b) describe your favorite place in the world (near or far), or c) describe your fondest childhood memory. (10)
3. Student chooses type of planning and plans for essay in class. (20)
4. Homework--narrow topic for Descriptive Essay.

Day 5

1. Teacher will share 10 sentences using imagery to describe a student in the class and the class will guess who is being described. (10)
2. Pass out Guidelines, Requirements and due dates for Descriptive Essay and go over together. (15) (attached below)
3. Note: Title of Descriptive Essay must be a Mark Twain quote relevant to their topic.
4. Pass out Grading Rubric that I will use (attached below)
4. Students will share topic ideas with the person sitting to their left. (5)
5. Students will begin drafting their descriptive essay either on paper or on the Chromebook

Days 7-8

1. Drafting descriptive essays in class.
2. Teacher will conference with students and offer feedback as needed.

Day 9

1. Descriptive essay draft due for a homework grade.
2. Students will peer edit with guidelines from teacher (attached below).
3. Teacher will remind students about submitting their final drafts to turnitin.com.

Day 11

1. Descriptive Essays are due.
2. Celebrate their hard work with a game and treats.

Homework:

See individual days above

Strategies for Exceptional Students:

Students who finish early, or students who are strong writers, can assist peers with drafting suggestions and edits. Highly skilled students can also read additional Twain short stories (suggested by the teacher) and create a Google slide show highlighting figurative language used in the story. Students who are strong writers will also have the option to conference with the teacher and revise their final draft to turn in for a higher grade. Struggling writers can schedule a time to meet with the teacher (before or after school, or during their 20 minute study hall after lunch) to get some one on one help. Students can also use the Academic Support Center in our building to get help from teachers and honors students who tutor.

Suggested Follow-Up Activities:

*Read additional excerpts from *Life on the Mississippi*

* Read *Mrs. McWilliams and the Lightning* by Mark Twain and attempt to draw your favorite descriptive passage.

T. Rozanski
English 245

DESCRIPTION ESSAY Guidelines
Inspiration from Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*

- 1. BEFORE you begin drafting, read pages 276-279 in your textbook on *Choosing a Subject for your Description Essay, Collecting Details, Finding Comparisons, Creating a Dominant Impression, and Drafting your Description Essay*. Be certain to read carefully--it will serve as a helpful review of what is required in your essay as well as how to draft your essay.**
- 2. Using your planning as your guide, draft your essay. Remember your essay should: use sensory details, create a dominant impression, use connotative language, and assume a vantage point (Are you in the photo? Are you behind the camera? Are you a bystander watching the picture being taken?- there are lots of options) Also remember that it's appropriate to use first person in your essay, regardless of your vantage point because you are describing what you see.**
- 3. Remember that your essay should have an introduction, body, and a conclusion. Review your notes or pages 238-239 in your textbook for information about what belongs in each part of your essay.**
- 4. Your essay should be a MINIMUM of five paragraphs.**
- 5. Due MONDAY 11/28: a typed draft of your description essay. Your typed draft counts as a 20 point homework grade. A hand-written essay or an incomplete essay will only earn you 10 points. You will peer edit in class on Monday.**
- 6. Due TUESDAY 11/29: a final draft of your description essay. The final draft is required to be typed and formatted according to MLA. A title is required. Please ask me or consult the owl@purdue for MLA formatting questions—you SHOULD know this by now.**
- 7. Please turn in your planning sheet, first draft with peer edit sheet, grading rubric and final essay on Tuesday. Staple all pieces together in this order: final on top, draft and peer edits next, and planning on the bottom. Leave the rubric unstapled please.**
- 8. This description essay will count as a 50-point test grade. Take the time to write it well and proofread before you turn in your final draft. Let the writing process help you and take pride in your writing.**

T. Rozanski
English 245

DESCRIPTION ESSAY Peer Edits

My name is:

I am editing _____'s essay.

- 1. Read the essay without making any marks on it. What is your first impression of the essay?**
- 2. Check MLA formatting in the header, title, and spacing. Please make corrections as necessary.**
- 3. Evaluate the title. Make suggestions for improvement if necessary...**
- 4. Pick up your red pen and revise for content first. Indicate areas that are vague, oddly worded, or confusing.**
- 5. What is the DOMINANT IMPRESSION? (How does the writer feel about his or her subject?)**
- 6. Be certain that the dominant impression is stated (indirectly or directly) in the introduction and the conclusion. Make changes as necessary on the draft.**
- 7. From what VANTAGE POINT is the essay being told? How do you know?**
- 8. List sensory details that appeal to the sense of:**

SIGHT-

SOUND-

SMELL-

TOUCH/FEEL-

TASTE-

9. List some connotative language or imagery used in the essay. Comment on whether or not it's effective. Make suggestions for where the author could add some if necessary.

10. Does the essay have a CLEAR introduction, body, and conclusion?

11. Check for transitions—add transitions where they are needed (most likely between paragraphs).

12. Look closely at the sentence length—be certain that the author has varied sentence length and make suggestions for improvement on the draft.

13. Look for fragments, run-ons, and comma splices. Make corrections as necessary on the draft.

14. Check for correct MLA formatting in the header, title, indentation, and spacing. Make corrections on the draft.

15. Describe the weakest part of the essay and give suggestions for improvement.

16. Describe the best part of the essay.

Final comments?

STAPLE PEER EDITS TO THE FRONT OF THE ESSAY AND RETURN BOTH TO THE
AUTHOR WHEN YOU ARE FINISHED.

T. Rozanski
English 245

Name:

DESCRIPTION ESSAY
Grading Rubric

I. INTRODUCTION

Background/setting _____/5
Dominant Impression (implied thesis) _____/7

II. BODY

Adequate Sensory Detail _____/5
Use of Connotative Language _____/5
Uses a clear Vantage Point _____/5
Use of Transitions _____/2

III. CONCLUSION

Reinforces Dominant Impression (thesis) _____/5
Draws essay to a satisfying close _____/5

IV. GRAMMAR

MECHANICS
SPELLING _____/10

IV. ORGANIZATION

MLA Formatting

Header _____/2

Title _____/2

Double-spaced _____/2

Final/draft with p.e./planning _____/5

Total points: _____/60

Percentage and letter grade:

Comments:
