

Unit 5 Descriptive and Imaginative Writing

Recommended Prior Knowledge A reasonable standard of written English up to O/GCSE level

Context This Unit has as its subject the acquisition of skills for Paper 2 Section A, and can be undertaken at any time during the course

Outline The Unit is devoted to descriptive and imaginative writing, focusing on the skills and practice needed for writing a good description or imaginative essay of 600-900 words in one hour under examination conditions.

Learning Outcomes	Suggested Teaching/Learning Activities	Resources
<p><u>1.Working with Description</u></p> <p>To describe is to use words to express the qualities of something, and is one of the most basic human language activities.</p> <p>A good place to start is to use the five senses to help in describing: the senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell convey the experiences of living to our consciousness and are essential if experience is to be put into words expressively to communicate to someone else. These senses are sometimes called visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory and olfactory. It is common to describe what something looks like (sight) but not so common to evoke the sounds and smells of the place, for example. Another sense important to description is the sense of movement or energy (kinaesthetic)</p> <p>Using the present rather than the past tense for description can be very effective as it creates a sense of immediacy for the reader of the work.</p>	<p>Working with the senses gives students immediate material for description. Start with individual senses and build up to a full sensory description, leaving the most obvious (sight) until last.</p> <p>With eyes closed, the sounds of the environment can be concentrated upon, or music or a specific tape played. Food can be brought and its taste, smell and texture discussed; fabric, leaves and other small interestingly textured items can form the basis for exploration. A sentence can be written for each sensory experience.</p> <p>Students should build up to the description of a place, event, or person attempting to use all the senses, including the sense of motion or energy. A useful task is to write a description of a walk, recounting the sights seen, sounds heard, feel of the pavement, smells of the environment and sense of movement striding along. If eating at the same time, or tasting the pollution in the air, or the salt near the sea, then all senses can be evoked. This work can be undertaken in pairs, with one student responsible for ideas on half of the senses, and the other for the remainder.</p> <p>It will be obvious that a good vocabulary is essential for precise, apt description and any</p>	<p>www.bbc.co.uk/education/asguru/english www.angelfire.com/wi/writingprocess www.beginningwriters.com</p> <p><u>Exploring Language and Literature</u>: Croft and Myers (Oxford) ISBN 0-19-831457-4</p> <p><u>Descriptions</u> by Janet and Andrew Goodwyn CUP ISBN 0 521 39969 6</p> <p>Vocabulary</p> <p>Imagist poetry</p> <p>Ray Bradbury's short stories</p> <p>T S Eliot: 'Preludes'</p>

	work to extend vocabulary will pay dividends. Words of colour and shape, sound and texture will all help to make description expressive.	
<p><u>2.Using comparative figures of speech</u></p> <p>The most effective writing often employs comparative figures of speech, such as simile, metaphor and personification, which are all a form of metaphor. This is sometimes known as imagery, and will be useful in Paper 1 too. Using it will help students to identify it in others' work. Descriptive work is rarely literal in its methods and effects.</p> <p><u>Symbolism</u> – or the use of physical objects or situations to represent feelings – is an effective method in descriptive writing, as well as an effective method for drawing stories together (see Unit 4)</p>	<p>Exercises using comparison can form the basis for useful group or pairs work.</p> <p>Looking at paintings/photographs and trying to describe the scenes depicted is a valuable exercise which forces focus and thus enhances the opportunity for description.</p> <p>Students should be encouraged to discover descriptive poetry and to read it aloud.</p> <p>The Cloze exercise – where words and phrases are removed from poems and the class must find their own alternatives – is encouraging to the descriptive faculties, as well as stimulating discussion. Poems by particularly descriptive poets are most suitable here. Photocopy poems and blank out descriptive words and phrases. Groups can work to fill in the blanks with appropriate substitutes: this is not a guessing game, but a useful framework for imaginative and descriptive activity, to help to develop these faculties.</p>	<p>Revision of metaphor and other figurative language is a feature of the text books and websites recommended in Unit 1.</p> <p>The writing of E Annie Proulx is rich in similes and metaphors</p> <p>Paintings by any expressive or naturalistic artist</p> <p>Poetry by Ted Hughes</p> <p>Poetry by W B Yeats is rich in symbolism</p> <p>Tennyson: The Lotus Eaters</p> <p>Coleridge: The Rime of the Ancient Mariner</p>
<p><u>3.Using sound effects such as alliteration and onomatopoeia</u></p> <p>Sound repetitions are a distinctive feature of poetry, but they are also effective in prose.</p>	<p>Descriptive sentences can be enhanced with the judicious use of repeated sounds, or by the use of words whose sounds echo meaning.</p> <p>Students can remember alliteration and its effects by writing a sentence about themselves</p>	<p>The opening of 'Great Expectations' by Charles Dickens</p> <p>Comic verse frequently uses alliteration</p>

	using their first name and all the words must alliterate with it (e.g. Louisa loves lounging on a lilo in the lake, licking a lemon lolly)	
<p><u>4. Creating an atmosphere</u></p> <p>Descriptions of places can be framed in such a way that individual sense images, descriptive words and metaphors or similes all work together to create a distinctive atmosphere.</p>	Practice writing for atmosphere by altering all the descriptive elements in a written exercise to change the prevailing mood. This can be an effective pairs or group exercise, and is helpful for vocabulary building.	www.short-stories.co.uk has many excellent examples
<p><u>5. Working with the imagination</u></p> <p>Not all students find it easy to use their imaginations, and different exercises should be used to stimulate imagination. A helpful starting point can be a described place or situation that seems ordinary, into which something surprising or strange intrudes or erupts. The surreal atmosphere of our dreams can be used effectively here. Even the most prosaic student has dreams that are surreal or fantastic and this is a good starting point. Imagining that you are another kind of being, such as an animal or object telling its story, is also a stimulus to the imagination.</p> <p>Imaginative response to another writer's work is an effective stimulus to the affective rather than the cognitive brain, and forms, in addition, an excellent practice for Paper 1</p>	<p>Just as an athlete warms up before exercise, the student can be encouraged to try Free Writing, in which for 5 or 10 minutes s/he writes without structure or punctuation anything and everything that comes into the head. This is entirely private and can be discarded. Then a more structured task can be tackled. This exercise clears the mind and helps anxious writers to free their blockages.</p> <p>Stream of consciousness writing can be used to reflect the complex activities of the brain, but this is generally adopted as a carefully chosen strategy, and is not the same as free writing.</p> <p>The student can imagine s/he is an object or an animal, and tell their story.</p> <p>Students can easily be persuaded to discuss their dreams, and the class will need to be controlled and channelled from such discussions!</p> <p>Imaginative responses can take the form of poems or part poems written in the style of the original; a continuation of dialogue or scene that isn't in the original play; another paragraph or</p>	<p>Virginia Woolf: 'To the Lighthouse'</p> <p>Many literary works are suitable for such extension work and students find it very enjoyable</p>

Question 2.	two from a novel. Empathy work – in which a story or play is told from the point of view of a character different from the original focus – can be very stimulating.	
<u>6. Working with Genre</u> The genre of an imaginative essay is its type or kind: some common imaginative genres are horror, science fiction, ghost, and fantasy. It is not necessary for candidates to choose to write in a particular genre unless the exam question specifies it.	This is a suitable area for pairs/small group work at first, to stimulate ideas before working on individual genre stories. Reading widely within the genre is important, and watching fantasy and science fiction films can also be stimulating to the imagination. However exam candidates should not retell the stories of films they have seen, as this will inevitably seem second hand to the examiner.	Works by Stephen King, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C Clarke, J R Tolkien, Mervyn Peake
<u>9. Good Practice</u> Analysing Reading Writing Sharing	Analyse the pieces of imaginative and descriptive writing suggested in the resources, and discuss their effectiveness. Read as many good descriptions as possible Read imaginative stories out loud and discuss their effectiveness Do much timed practice before the examination, including essay plans Read and comment on each others' work Display good examples on the walls of the classroom Make a booklet of the best imaginative writing	Past papers Standards booklet Exemplar material