

This complimentary **idea development** lesson comes from the Northern Nevada Writing Project's "Going Deep with 6 Traits Language" Guide. Information on ordering a copy of this 194-page resource can be found by visiting <http://nnwp.org> and checking out the "NNWP Publications for Purchase" page.

Here's an **idea development** activity that focuses on setting details that use action words:

Action Words Bring Life to Setting Details

From the NNWP Traits Training Archives, appropriate for writers of most ages

Host a Treasure Hunt for *Setting Descriptions that use Action Verbs!*

Great details often hover around great action verbs, but students who are drafting often use those much-easier-to-think-of linking verbs, which are important to writing as well. Overuse of 'was,' 'is,' 'are,' and 'were' should be talked about a lot but don't do what many teachers do and teach this lesson as an absolute. "Never use linking verbs" is the message our students sometimes receive when we label linking verbs as "dead verbs" in a classroom.

Teach verb use as a thoughtful balance of action and non-action verbs. Just as too many linking verbs might make a draft dull, too many action verbs can make a draft obnoxious.

Students easily confuse *descriptions that use strong action words* with *story actions that move a plot along*; while teaching this lesson, many students will find any action word in a story and call it an "action word that enhances a description." Make sure they understand that most action words are for plot, and this treasure hunt is about finding action words that purposefully help a reader visualize what a place looks like. Such descriptions are harder to find, but looking for them helps teach this concept.

It's less confusing to illustrate action-based descriptions if you first focus just on setting descriptions. For that reason, this treasure hunt focuses on those types of descriptions.

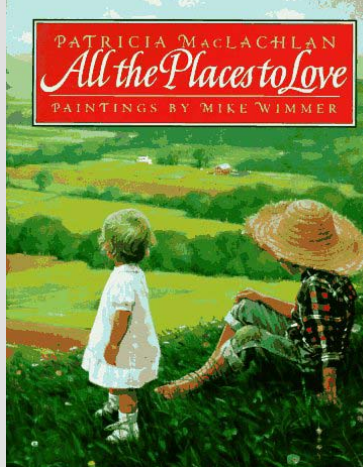
Verbs that enhance setting descriptions:

"What I saw first were all the places to love:
The valley,
The river **falling down** over the rocks,
The hilltop where the blueberries **grew.**"

"And the birds surrounded us:
Raucous black grackles, redwings,
Crows in the dirt that **swaggered** like pirates."

"When spring rains **came** and the meadow **turned** to marsh,
Cattails **stood** like guards, and
killdeers **called.**"

Awesome excerpts from:



All the Places to Love
by Patricia MacLachlan
paintings by Mike Wimmer
ISBN: 0060210982

Verbs that move the plot along:

"On the day I **was** born
My grandmother **wrapped** me in a
blanket
Made from the wool of her sheep."

"My grandfather **was painting** the
barn,
And when he **saw** me he cried."

"Grandmother **sailed** little bark boats
downriver to me
With messages.
I love You Eli, one **said.**"

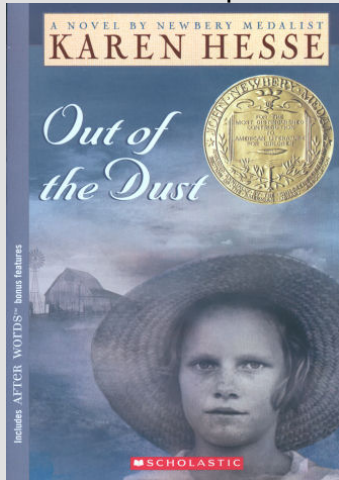
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Awesome excerpts from:



Out of the Dust
by Karen Hesse
ISBN: 0590371258

This is a marvelous book of poetry based on the dust bowls of Oklahoma. This is an excellent book to also use in your history curriculum.

"Dust
piles up like snow
across the prairie,
dunes **leaning** against fences,
mountains of dust **pushing** over barns."
--from *Driving the Cows*

"And later,
when the clouds **lift**,
the farmers, **surveying** their fields,
nod their heads as the frail stalks **revive**,
everyone, everything, grateful for this moment,
free of the
weight of dust."

--from *First Rain*

"We watched as the storm **swallowed** the light.
The sky **turned** from blue
to black,
night **descended** in an instant,
and the dust **was** on us.
The wind **screamed**."
--from *Blankets of Black*

The lesson, in brief:

1. Share some setting descriptions that use excellent action words with your students. Discuss how the examples use action words to paint a moving picture in the reader's head, and how the moving picture is focused on where and when the story is happening. Discuss how not to confuse action words that are involved in the plot with action words that describe the setting.
2. Challenge your students to go on a treasure hunt for complete sentences and paragraphs that use action words to describe setting. They may look in any of the texts used whole-class or in books from your classroom library. When students find a setting description, have them share it with a neighbor, then carefully write it down on an index card, checking their spelling against the text from which they are copying. Make sure they cite the books and authors and the page numbers from which they find their examples.
3. Offer extra smiles or extra credit to students who continue their search with books they are independently reading outside of class. You will end up with a bonus heap of examples by doing this.
4. You will still receive non-examples from students who are confused by plot verbs. Keep the non-examples in an envelope. Keep the good examples in a folder. The next time you do this lesson, use both the examples and non-examples when giving directions; the more examples you have—of both types—the better.
5. Challenge students to write their own setting description that uses a balance of action and non-action verbs. Have students self-evaluate their use of action and non-action verbs.
6. Remind your students the next time they write a setting description to remember this exercise. Revising writing based on action words is an excellent technique to go deeper with revision.

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Five Essays to Inspire Dialogue Among Teachers:

These five essays come with embedded Trait Post-Its so that teachers can not only discuss each essay’s message but also think about specific writing traits in new and unique ways.

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The Trait Modules:

These six modules contain lesson plans and resources from a variety of first- through twelfth-grade classrooms. These modules are not about giving away the lessons and resources to just the teachers who teach the exact same grade. The lessons and resources should not be quickly dismissed if it’s discovered that the providing teacher teaches a different age or socio-economic level of student.

These lessons and resources come from teachers who have gone out of their way to help students own trait language in their classrooms. Helping a student own an academic language is a universal concept, not a grade specific one.

The goal of these six modules is to promote “adaptive talk.” If, while exploring these modules, a teacher says, “I like the idea here, but I’d make it look different for my students, and here’s how,” then that teacher has succeeded in using this guide in the way it was intended.

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