Mini-Lesson: Using Strong Verbs

Often, we use adjectives and adverbs to elaborate and enrich our writing. Professional writers, however, tell us that using adjectives and adverbs is not always the best way to enhance writing. Ursula Le Guin (1998), for example, recommends “a watchful attitude and a thoughtful, careful choice of adjectives and adverbs, because the bakery of English is rich beyond belief, and narrative prose, particularly if it’s going a long distance, needs more muscle than fat.” (62) Specific verbs provide the needed muscle.

Goal for Student Writers

To generate specific verbs to replace general verbs and then use these strong verbs in narrative writing.

Resources

Set of “Action Cards” (Fig. 5.4) for each group of three or four students in the class. These may be reproduced on card stock or construction paper and then laminated.

Teacher and Students

In small groups, students select one person to carry out the actions that are described on one of the cards. The name of the student who does the actions is used in the blank in each sentence. Another student reads the first sentence on the card. The group generates specific verbs to replace the verb and adverb in the sentence, using dictionaries or thesauri. For example, students may replace “closed the door carefully” with “nudged the door closed”, or “slid the door closed.” One student in the group records the specific verbs generated by the group. The new sentences are read using the more specific verbs and the actor performs the actions. Students can create new sentences with additional adverbs, as well. Students repeat the process using all the remaining sentences on the card. For the next cards, students within the group switch roles so everyone has a chance to be the reader and actor. Students post their charts and then do a carousel activity by moving in their groups from chart to chart, noting the specific verbs that each group has generated.

Students

When writing or revising their narratives, students may use these charts to help them find stronger, more descriptive verbs.
### Action Cards

#### Using Strong Verbs

Photocopy and cut into sets of cards—
one set for each group of three or four students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student 1</th>
<th>Student 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>closed the door carefully.</td>
<td>held the ball carefully.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>closed the door angrily.</td>
<td>held the ball carelessly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>closed the door</td>
<td>held the ball</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialogue 1</th>
<th>Dialogue 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Hello,” said loudly.</td>
<td>walked down the street loudly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hello,” said quietly.</td>
<td>walked down the street quietly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hello,” said sadly.</td>
<td>walked down the street sadly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hello,” said disgustedly.</td>
<td>walked down the street disgustedly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Hello,” said</td>
<td>walked down the street</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 5.4

DESCRIPTION AND DETAILS
Guided Writing: Strategies to Help Students Become Better Writers

__________ took the pencil angrily.

__________ took the pencil quickly.

__________ took the pencil timidly.

__________ took the pencil confidently.

__________________ took the pencil ____________.

__________ hit the ball lightly.

__________ hit the ball forcefully.

__________ hit the ball timidly.

__________ hit the ball confidently.

_____________________ hit the ball ______________.

__________ looked out the window quickly.

__________ looked out the window for a long time.

__________ looked out the window sadly.

__________ looked out the window angrily.

__________________ looked out the window ______________.

__________________ ate the piece of cake daintily.

__________________ ate the piece of cake rudely.

__________________ ate the piece of cake slowly.

__________________ ate the piece of cake quickly.

__________________ ate the piece of cake ______________.