



ELA Virtual Learning

Creative Writing

April 30, 2020



Creative Writing

Lesson: Thurs., April 30

Objective/Learning Target: Students will practice pacing and implement it in their own writing.



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Warm-up: Read [this excerpt](#) from Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*. (n.b. this describes in somewhat graphic detail a tribe of Native Americans from the point of view of a hostile military presence.) As you do, pay special attention to the pacing of the writing—that is, the speed or cadence of the words and phrases as they are written.



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Warm-up: Now, in your journal, respond to the following questions. What did you find most effective or notable about the passage? Think about pacing. Did you notice the entire passage (excluding the last line) is one sentence? Why do you think McCarthy chose to write the description this way? How might the pacing reflect the feeling of the observer (or the tone, overall, of the passage)?



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Lesson: In his collection of craft essays, *Thrill Me*, writer Benjamin Percy compares writing to film. “Just as special effects...ramp up in (movies like *Jaws* or *Transformers*),” he writes, “in literature, too, there is an amplification of language.”



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Lesson: (cont'd) “This moment is preceded by relatively calm language and relatively calm circumstances—descriptions of men riding through the heat and desert wastes. And then, as the attacking horde approaches, McCarthy goes off leash. The sequences grow wild and expansive, matching the material.”



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Lesson: (cont'd) In your journal you may have reflected on this kind of intensity or amplification in language, even how McCarthy breaks the rules of grammar. As hard as it is for an English teacher to acknowledge this, you can *break the rules* to achieve a particular effect! TRY IT!



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Practice: Choose a scene in one of your stories, or write a new one, in which some intense action takes place. Model the intense, breathless effect of McCarthy’s prose. Aim for the kind of “special effects” that Percy mentions. Make your language *burn*.



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Additional Practice: Alternatively, break up McCarthy's passage into separate sentences to examine the effect of slower pacing when describing the same scenes.



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Model: A legion of horribles, hundreds in number, appeared on the horizon. Some were half naked or clad in costumes wardrobed out of a fevered dream with the skins of animals and silk finery and pieces of uniform still tracked with the blood of prior owners. Others wore coats of slain dragoons, frogged and braided cavalry jackets. One had on a stovepipe hat. One carried an umbrella.



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Additional Resources/Practice:

[UNC Writing Center on “Style”](#)

[“Common Errors,”](#) from *The Art of Fiction* by John Gardner.

(see pp. 104-106)