zSpace

Setting the Tone

Grade Range: Middle School

Lesson Time: 40 minutes

Key Terms
Connotation
Denotation
Impact
Mood
Tone
Visualization

Materials and Resources
Tone Word Bank and Mood Word Bank
Tone vs. Mood Graphic Organizer

Activity Overview

Evil. Sarcastic. Depressing. Ecstatic. The words we choose can impact how people respond. In a world heavily influenced by social media, the words we choose are perhaps more important than ever before. In literature, tone and mood combine the feelings of an author and reader and draw the reader deep into the action of the plot. Understanding of an author's word choice can impact a reader's ability to identify essential story elements such as conflict and theme. In this activity, students will learn about word choice and its impact on literature.

Essential Questions

1. How does an author's word choice affect tone?
2. How does visualization help readers understand mood?
3. How do specific word choices have an impact on the meaning and tone of a text?

Objectives

- Distinguish among connotations and words with similar denotations
- Identify and interpret the author's use of tone and mood in a passage
- Analyze the impact of word choices on meaning and tone of a literature selection

Introduction

Middle school students often confuse tone and mood and struggle to differentiate between the two. Explain to students that tone is writer-centered and is the attitude a writer takes towards the reader. In contrast, mood is reader-centered and is the overall feeling or atmosphere created by a literature selection. Partner students and distribute a copy of the Tone Word Bank and Mood Word Bank and Tone vs. Mood Graphic Organizer to each student. Have students complete the graphic organizer and share their ideas with the whole class. Have students discuss whether there were any similarities and/or differences between the completed graphic organizers from each partnership.

zSpace Activity

Activity Questions Provided in StudioA3

Answers may vary. Sample answers are provided below.

1. The first step to understanding tone and mood is to distinguish between connotation and denotation. In literature, authors may choose words that have an implied meaning (figurative language) authors may choose words because of their implied meaning (literal language). Denotation is the dictionary meaning of a word. Connotation is the implication or emotion associated with the word. Take, for example, the words "house" and "home." A "house" is a building a person lives in, but the word "home" might have a different meaning. A "home" could represent your family and the bond you share, not just the physical building you live in. Select one or more models from the Backpack to represent the difference between "house" and "home" and add them to the scene. Take a photo and explain your selections.

    Photo. For the word "house" I chose a model of a building. For the word "home" I chose a heart, because it reminds me of the love I have for my family and our home.

2. Denotation: In order to understand the connotation of a word, it is important to first understand the denotation. Denotation is the literal or dictionary meaning of a word. For example, "rock" literally means stone, but can also be used to refer to someone who is solid and strong. Give an example of a word that has both a denotative and a connotative meaning. Explain both the denotative (literal) and connotative (figurative) meaning. Select two models from the Backpack to represent the two meanings and place them in the scene. Take a photo.

    Photo. A crown has both a connotative and a denotative meaning. The literal meaning of "crown" is a piece of large jewelry worn on the heads of royalty. The connotative meaning refers to royalty in general. I selected the model of a prince character, because he wears a crown and it shows both the denotative and connotative meanings.

3. Connotation: The connotative meaning of a word can have a large impact on the meaning of the sentence where it is used. Read the following examples and interpret how the author feels based on the connotative meaning of the word in all capitals. Connotation example one: "Joey's LEADERSHIP will affect how people vote in the class election." Connotation example two: "Joey's BOSSINESS will affect how people vote in the class election." Describe how the connotative meaning of the word in all caps differs between the two examples.

    The word "leadership" has a positive connotation because people like good leaders. The word "bossiness" has a negative connotation because no one likes to be bossed around.

4. The word "bossiness" in example two shows that the author does not have a positive view of the character. The word "bossiness" has a negative connotation. Write two sentences, using a word with a positive connotation in one and a word with a negative connotation in the other. Select models from the Backpack to represent the positive and negative connotations and add them to the scene. Take a photo.

    Photo. "Duke is brave in battle." "Duke is reckless in battle." Model for brave: Prince Character. Model for reckless: Death Speech Bubble.

5. Tone and mood are usually distinguished by an author's use of vocabulary, which can create an emotional attitude in a reader. Recognizing words that signal a positive, negative, or neutral tone and mood can be helpful for readers working to understand the overall theme of a story. In order to familiarize yourself with these words, please refer to the Tone Word Bank and Mood Word Bank worksheets. Select two words from each word bank, and then select and add to the scene a model from the Backpack to represent each. Record the words you chose. Take a photo.

    Photo. Mood Word 1: Excited. Model: Exclamation Thought Bubble.

    Mood Word 2: Enraged. Model: Disagree Thought Bubble.

Tone Word 1: Admiring. Model: Love Speech Bubble.

Tone Word 2: Bewildered. Model: Question Speech Bubble.

6. Tone is the author's attitude toward the audience. A writer's tone could be serious, sarcastic, evil, corny, and so forth. Clues in the text can help readers to interpret the tone and mood of a passage. Read the following example: "Pushing through the door, the enraged woman screamed at the innocent store clerk who forgot to remove the security tag." The following words are clues to the tone of the passage: "pushing," "enraged," and "screamed." These words indicate a negative connotation and set the tone as demanding or condescending. Why might an author use this tone in the passage? Select models from the Backpack to help you visualize the tone of the sentence and add them to the scene. Take a photo.

   Photo. The author might use the words "pushed," "enraged," and "screamed" to show readers that the character is demanding and that readers should dislike the character. I chose the disagree speech bubble to help me visualize the tone of the sentence.

7. Mood is the way a reader feels in response to a story. It is sometimes referred to as a reader's emotional attitude towards the story. Clues in the text can help readers to interpret the mood of a passage. Read the following example: "Smiling softly, the mother tucked the blanket under her toddler's angelic chin. She lightly stepped out of the room, gently closing the door to let the baby dream of puppies and playtime." The words "smiling," "softly," "angelic," "gently," "dream," "puppies," and "playtime" all indicate a gentle tone. How do these words make you feel as a reader? What is the mood? Select and add models from the Backpack to help you visualize the mood. Take a photo.

   Photo. The sentence makes me feel happy and reminds me of being little. I think the mood might be nostalgic. The model I chose is the heart speech bubble.

8. Read the following passage. "He retreated to the back of the closet, clutching his battered pillow to his chest. His ragged breathing was finally slowing to a normal pace as his eyes scanned the room, searching for the dangers that awaited his next move." Record the words or clues that reveal tone. Refer to the Tone Word Bank and Mood Word Bank worksheets. What is the tone of the passage? What is the mood of the passage? Explain your answer. Select at least two models from the Backpack to support your answer and place them in the scene. Take a photo.

   Clues: retreated, clutching, battered, ragged, searching, dangers.

   Photo. The tone of the passage is fearful and the mood is anxious. The words used by the author have a negative connotation and might make a reader feel scared or nervous about what will happen next. The models I chose are the black widow spider and the skull speech bubble, because this passage gave me the same feeling I get when I think about spiders.

Closing

Setting Tone

Instruct students to select one of the following scenarios: "First Day of School," "Embarrassing Social Media Post," "School Dance," or "Scoring a Winning Point." Tell them to select a positive and a negative word from the Tone Word Bank. For example, if the scenario were "Riding a Roller Coaster," the two words might be excited (positive) and terrified (negative). Ask students to write a one-paragraph passage for each of the contrasting tones.

Sample paragraphs:

Excited: I cannot wait to ride this roller coaster! I have been waiting for months and I can barely contain my excitement! Did you know it has three loops? OMG!

Terrified: I cannot believe you talked me into riding this roller coaster. I know I am going to vomit everywhere. I hate fast rides and I am terrified of loops and twists. I am never going to forgive you for this!

Differentiation

- Group students heterogeneously to allow students with a strong command of the English language to assist in reading or interpreting questions
- Provide paper copies of diagrams for students to use as a reference
- Provide a handout with a list of vocabulary terms and definitions that will appear in the activity
- Allow students to provide answers that are handwritten, typed, or verbal
- Give students a variety of presentation styles to choose from (using charts/graphs, PowerPoint, making 3D presentations, creating videos/movies, making posters)
- Have students work as partners or in small groups (younger children could partner with older buddies)
- Enrichment: Students could research similar topics and create presentations
- Enrichment: Students could build a model of a key concept