

DIDLS: A Method for Analyzing Prose

Tone: The writer's/speaker's attitude toward his/her subject or audience.

- This is described by a single adjective (ex. a sarcastic tone, a playful tone, a bitter tone).
- Tone is important because understanding a writer or speaker's attitude towards his/her subject enables us to decipher meaning and purpose.
- To determine tone
 - Examine the diction in the passage.
 - Using your knowledge of the diction, determine the possible tone(s) of the passage.
 - Check your tone determinations by examining imagery, detail, and syntax and seeing if they match the tone(s) you have identified.

DIDLS: An acronym that aids in analyzing a fiction or nonfiction *prose* passage.

D Diction
I Imagery
D Detail
L Language
S Syntax

Diction: Word choice

- Writers choose their words with purpose. If we can analyze diction, it can help us understand their theme and purpose.
- In order to analyze diction, we have to be able to analyze...
 - **Denotation:** The dictionary or literal meaning of a word.
 - Ex: *Plump* = a full, round, and pleasing figure
 - **Connotation:** All the meanings, associations, or feelings that a word suggests.
 - Ex: *Fat* = while similar in denotative meaning to plump, it has a very harsh and mean connotation
- Examine the diction in the following sentences. Write the connotation associated with each phrase. Circle + for positive; - for negative connotation.
 - You look unique today. + or - / Connotation: _____
 - You look odd today. + or - / Connotation: _____
 - You look weird today. + or - / Connotation: _____
 - I'm crazy about him. + or - / Connotation: _____
 - I love him to the depths of my soul. + or - / Connotation: _____
- Circle + for positive; - for negative connotation; / for neutral connotation
 - Friendly + - / Clever + - / House + - /
 - Dislike + - / Love + - / Home + - /
 - Sincere + - / Infatuation + - / Admit + - /

Imagery: Sensory language

- Words and phrases that appeal to the senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and/or taste. Sensory details create vivid descriptions that re-create sensory experiences for the reader, creating "word pictures."
 - Ex: "*a thundering downpour of rain*"
 - To what senses does this example appeal? _____
 - What image does it create? _____
- The writer "shows" rather than "tells," thus allowing the reader to participate in the experience more fully. Therefore imagery helps to produce mood and tone.
- When reading a piece containing imagery, you need to ask yourself two questions
 - *What do I hear, taste, smell, or feel?*
 - *What effect is the author trying to convey with these messages?*

- Imagery helps to create
 - **Mood**: The feeling or atmosphere that the writer creates for the reader using imagery and setting details.
 - BE VERY CAREFUL NOT TO CONFUSE MOOD AND TONE!! THEY ARE TWO VERY DIFFERENT THINGS!!
- What senses do the following quotes appeal to, and what image and mood do they create all together?
 - “Flashes of lightning illuminated the ink-black sky.” Sense: _____
 - “Another cobweb stuck to her cold, clammy skin.” Sense: _____
 - “The foul smell of dead mice hung in the air.” Sense: _____
 - “She could not get the metallic taste of fear out of her mouth.” Sense: _____
 - “There was an ominous scratching on the door.” Sense: _____

Overall mood _____

Details: The facts included OR omitted by the writer/speaker.

- The kinds of details that a writer includes about his subject are very helpful in determining his attitude toward that subject or tone.
- Based on the details in this passage, what is the speaker’s attitude toward hobbits?
 - "I suppose hobbits need some description nowadays, since they have become rare and shy of the Big People, as they call us. They are (or were) a little people, about half our height, and smaller than the bearded Dwarves. Hobbits have no beards. There is little or no magic about them, except the ordinary everyday sort which allows them to disappear quietly and quickly when large stupid folk like you and me come blundering along, making a noise like elephants which they can hear a mile off. They are inclined to be fat in the stomach; they dress in bright colours (chiefly green and yellow); wear no shoes, because their feet grow naturally leathery soles and thick warm brown hair like the stuff on their heads (which is curly); have long clever brown fingers, good-natured faces, and laugh deep fruity laughs (especially after dinner, which they have twice a day when they can get it). Now you know enough to go on with." --J.R.R. Tolkein. *The Hobbit*. Ballantine Books, New York. Copyright 1937, 1938, 1966, p. 16.

Tone: _____

Language: Refers to the entire body of words in a text to determine the *kinds* of words and language being used. This is not to be confused with diction, where we look at specific word choices. WE WILL NOT WORK WITH LANGUAGE FOR NOW.

Syntax: Sentence structure.

- When examining diction, we are looking for the way in which the structure reflects attitude, purpose, and meaning.
- Examine...
 - Sentence length. Are the sentences *telegraphic* (shorter than 5 words in length), *medium* (approximately 18 words in length), or *long* and *involved* (30 words or more in length)? Does the sentence length fit the subject matter? What variety of lengths is present? Why is the sentence length effective?
- Examine sentence beginnings. Is there a good variety or does a pattern emerge?
- Examine the arrangement of ideas in a sentence. Are they set out in a special way for a purpose?
- Examine the arrangement of ideas in a paragraph. Is there evidence of any pattern or structure?
- Syntax-Sentence Patterns
 - A declarative (assertive) sentence makes a statement: e.g., *The king is sick*.
 - An imperative sentence gives a command: e.g., *Stand up*.
 - An interrogative sentence asks a question: e.g., *Is the king sick?*
 - An exclamatory sentence makes an exclamation: e.g., *The king is dead!*

- Syntax-Sentence Patterns
 - A simple sentence contains one subject and one verb: e.g., *The singer bowed to her adoring audience.*
 - A compound sentence contains two independent clauses joined by a coordinate conjunction (and, but, or) or by a semicolon: e.g., *The singer bowed to the audience, but she sang no encores.*
 - A complex sentence contains an independent clause and one or more subordinate clauses: e.g., *You said that you would tell the truth.*
 - A compound-complex sentence contains two or more principal clauses and one or more subordinate clauses: e.g., *The singer bowed while the audience applauded, but she sang no encores.*
- Syntax-Sentence Patterns
 - A loose sentence makes complete sense if brought to a close before the actual ending: e.g., *We reached Edmonton/that morning/after a turbulent flight/and some exciting experiences.*
 - A periodic sentence makes sense only when the end of the sentence is reached: e.g., *That morning, after a turbulent flight and some exciting experiences, we reached Edmonton.*
 - In a balanced sentence, the phrases or clauses balance each other by virtue of their likeness of structure, meaning or length: e.g., *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.*
- Syntax-Sentence Patterns cont.
 - Natural order of a sentence involves constructing a sentence so the subject comes before the predicate: e.g., *Oranges grow in California.*
 - Inverted order of a sentence (sentence inversion) involves constructing a sentence so the predicate comes before the subject e.g., *In California grow oranges.* This is a device in which normal sentence patterns are reversed to create an emphatic or rhythmic effect.
 - Split order of a sentence divides the predicate into two parts with the subject coming in the middle: e.g., *In California oranges grow.*
- Syntax-Sentence Patterns cont.
 - Juxtaposition is a poetic and rhetorical device in which naturally unassociated ideas, words, or phrases are placed next to each other, creating an effect of surprise and wit: e.g., *“The apparition of these faces in the crowd/Petals on the wet, black bough”.*
 - Parallel structure (parallelism refers to a grammatical or structural similarity between sentences or parts of a sentence. It involves an arrangement of words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs so that elements of equal importance are equally developed and similarly phrased: e.g., *He was walking, running and jumping for joy.*
 - Repetition is a device in which words, sound and ideas are used more than once to enhance rhythm and create emphasis: e.g., *.....government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.*
 - A rhetorical question is a question that expects no answer. It is used to draw attention to a point and is generally stronger than a direct statement: e.g., *If Mr. Farchaff is always fair, as you have said, why did he refuse to listen to Mrs. Baldwin’s arguments?*