

The Trait Crate[®]

TEACHING VOICE

USING *Samir and Yonatan***RUTH CULHAM**
with Linda Brock

Teaching Voice Using *Samir and Yonatan*



Voice is the tone and tenor of a piece—the personal stamp of the writer, which is achieved through a strong understanding of purpose and audience. It's the force behind the words that proves a real person is speaking and cares about what is being said. Writers engage readers with voice, drawing them in by making connections between the readers' lives and the piece's topic.

Voice is the heart and soul of the writing—its very life. When writers are dedicated to their topic, they apply voice almost automatically because they are passionate about what they are saying and how they are saying it. They inject a unique flavor that distinguishes them from all other writers. To create strong voice, the writer must apply its key qualities with skill and confidence:

Establishing a Tone

The writer cares about the topic, and it shows. The writing is expressive and compelling. The reader feels the writer's conviction, authority, and integrity.

Conveying the Purpose

The writer makes clear his or her reason for creating the piece. He or she offers a point of view that is appropriate for the mode (narrative, expository, or persuasive), which compels the reader to read on.

Creating a Connection to the Audience

The writer speaks in a way that makes the reader want to listen. He or she has considered what the reader needs to know and the best way to convey it by sharing his or her fascination, feelings, and opinions about the topic.

Taking Risks to Create Voice

The writer expresses ideas in new ways, which makes the piece interesting and original. The writing sounds like the writer because of his or her use of distinctive, just-right words and phrases.

Voice is challenging to teach, for many reasons. For one, most of us didn't learn about voice in school. We learned the rules—grammar, punctuation, and many more kinds of rules that now don't seem so hard and fast. And maybe that's the trickiest thing about voice—it's not quantifiable. You can't measure it. There's no "rule" you can follow to get it. But the great thing about voice is that just about everyone can recognize its presence in a piece of writing. Reading aloud, noticing and naming voice, and making it part of the classroom discussion of writing will go a long way toward helping students write with voice in their own work. The lessons that follow here are a great starting point for exploring various aspects of voice.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Hitting the Right Tone

DIRECTIONS: Read the basic idea. Then develop it into two short paragraphs, each with a different tone, as directed. Brainstorm details to include to create each tone; then write the paragraphs on another sheet of paper.

Basic idea: Jane and Sally walked through the forest. They stopped to listen to the birds.

Peaceful tone

Eerie tone

Basic idea: The two children played by the water's edge.

Cheerful tone

Tone of terror

Basic idea: The woman moved to the front of the line.

Sincere tone

Sarcastic tone

Basic idea: The football player intercepted the ball.

Determined tone

Aggressive tone

Basic idea: I looked at the food on the table.

Miserable tone

Ecstatic tone

Group members' names: _____

Get Ready, Set, Write!

Big idea: _____ Object 1: _____ Object 2: _____

Brainstorm some ways each object could be connected to your big idea. If this feels impossible, think back to the passage we read from *Samir and Yonatan*. The writer connected a wartime search with a boy getting his foot stuck!

Which object had more connections or was easier to connect to the big idea? _____

Use this object for your writing assignment.

Now zoom in on one of your brainstorming lists. Spend a little time digging a bit deeper to add to your list of connections.

As a group, decide what mode you would like to use—narrative, expository, or persuasive. Base your decision on which mode will allow you to connect with your audience (your classmates) the best. Once you have made this decision, you are ready to write. One person can be the writer, but make sure everyone contributes ideas to this piece of writing.

Sample Stream-of-Consciousness Writing

Original

What's that? What's that noise? I'm sure it was just a neighbor's dog. I've got everything I need right here—junk food, video games, music on my iPod. It can't get any better than this. Wait, what's that? Another sound? Scratching, scratching, scratching. This is not good. I'm shutting everything off so I can hear better. . . . Uh-oh, it's coming from inside the house! Oh no, oh no, oh no. What am I gonna do? No one is around. How can this be happening? Scratch, scratch, scratch. What is it? Hmmm, it stopped. I'm just being silly. Mom is gonna say I told you so when she gets home. If I'm here when she gets home. Don't think like that. This is dumb. Nothing outside. What was that?? Different noises now!! Where's my phone?? I'm calling Mom NOW!!!

Revised

There I was, enjoying my evening at home alone without the parents. I had waited for this for a long, long time, 13 years to be precise. Anyway, I was enjoying my junk food, video game, and the songs turned up on my iPod when it happened.

At first, I thought, no big deal. It's just a neighbor's dog outside my window. But it continued. Scratching, scratching, scratching. This was not good. I turned off my iPod to listen more closely. That was a mistake. Now I was convinced that the noises were coming from inside my house.

My thoughts ran away with me. What am I gonna do? No one is around. Why did this have to happen tonight anyway? Mom will say I told you so when she gets home. Will I even be here when Mom gets home? Don't think like that. This is dumb. Nothing outside. What was that? Different noises now!!! Where's my phone?? I am calling Mom NOW!

And that's how my first experience staying home alone became my last. At least for a little while!