Use Specific and Accurate Words

1. Focus

Explain Using Specific and Accurate Words

Say: Historical fiction authors write about events that could have or did take place at a certain time in history. They use words to animate the scenes in their stories. They choose words that add details to help readers see, hear, and feel the descriptions in their stories. They also choose words that provide an accurate representation of the time period. Today I’m going to show you how to use specific and accurate words to describe scenes and characters in your historical fiction stories.

Model Using Specific and Accurate Words

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Ask students to listen for words that provide details as you read the modeling text aloud.

Both wooden inner coffins had been ripped open. Inside were two gnarled, shrunken bodies. One seemed almost miniature, it was so small. To Mery, the gloomy room suddenly seemed too dark and cramped, the air deathly still.

Modeling Text

Say: This text describes the burial chamber. The writer of this story used her research and knowledge about Egyptian tombs, and then she created this description for her readers. The writer describes the room as gloomy, dark, and cramped and writes that the air is deathly still. These words help me picture the burial chamber very clearly. These words are very specific and detailed, but they are also accurate for this time period. This description is true to what a real Egyptian burial chamber would be like. The writer also uses specific words to describe the bodies in the coffins—gnarled, shrunken. To emphasize how small one of the bodies is, she uses the word miniature. These words create a mental picture in my mind. The gnarled, shrunken bodies are described accurately—the way mummies in Egyptian tombs would be.
2. Rehearse

Practice Using Specific and Accurate Words

Invite students to focus on one paragraph in their historical fiction stories, in which they have mentioned or described a person, place, or object specific to the time period. Students who have not yet begun to draft their stories should work with partners who has a text. Ask students to think of specific and accurate words they could add to their text to make their stories sound more authentic and help readers visualize them better. Partners should write down their revised sentences and be prepared to read the original and revised versions to the class.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together. Invite several students to read aloud their original sentences and their revised sentences. Ask them to explain how their revisions improve the story passage. Invite other students to comment on what they were or were not able to visualize and to state any questions or suggestions they have for the student writer.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We learned that historical fiction writers not only use specific details to help readers visualize the story, but they also use accurate details that correctly depict the time period. As you write your historical fiction stories, remember to use specific and accurate words. Then you will make sure readers see and understand what is happening and that they really believe that the story events happened.

Encourage students to consider how they can add specific and accurate details to their historical fiction stories. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to read aloud a section from their stories that includes specific and accurate details that bring the events to life for readers.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

While other students complete the practice activity (or during independent writing time), work with beginning ELs to help them learn to describe orally. Display a simple object or picture and ask students to describe it using words and gestures. Record their descriptive words on chart paper and help them elaborate on the descriptions with additional words. Repeat with other objects or pictures, creating a word bank of descriptive language.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity.

All Levels

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: describe/describir; details/los detalles; precise/preciso(a).