Choose Precise Words

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

• Learn about using precise words rather than the first word that comes to mind.
• Practice choosing precise words for informational reports.
• Discuss how they can apply this strategy to their independent writing.

Preparation

Materials Needed

• Chart paper and markers
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If you will not be using the interactive whiteboard resources, copy the modeling and practice texts onto chart paper prior to the mini-lesson.

1. Focus

Explain Choosing Precise Words

Say: When I write an informational report, I choose my words carefully. I need to make sure that I use words precisely to tell facts. Being precise means being very accurate, or exact. I also want to choose words carefully to keep my writing interesting. Sometimes it takes a while to come up with precise words—these may not be the first ones we think of to describe something. For example, I might write something about a forest and say that some trees are tall. But saying what kind of tree they are, or whether they had leaves or needles, would be more specific. It’s much easier to write down the first word that comes to mind, but choosing precise words will help you present your information more clearly. Today I’m going to show you how to choose precise words for informational reports.

Model Choosing Precise Words

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Ask students to listen for the use of precise words as you read the text aloud.

Modeling Text

Nero’s cool concoction was the great-great-great-grandfather of today’s snow cone. Fruit-flavored syrups are dripped onto balls of crushed ice. The ices are served in paper cups. In Puerto Rico, snow cones are shaped like a pyramid instead of a ball. The treat is called a piragua (pi-RAH-gwa).

Modeling Text

Say: In this paragraph, the author describes icy treats. I notice the word concoction in the first sentence. A concoction is something made by mixing other things together. In this case, the writer told me earlier that Nero mixed ice with honey and nuts. He could have just used the word mixture here, but concoction is more interesting and sounds nice in the phrase cool concoction. The writer chooses words that make the writing precise and interesting. Next, I notice the phrases fruit-flavored syrups, dripped onto, and balls of crushed ice. These phrases seem carefully worded to me. The author could have said “different flavors are put onto ice bits,” but that wouldn’t have given me the information I need to picture the treats and how the syrup is added. Finally, to describe the treats from Puerto Rico, the author says they are “shaped like a pyramid.” The word pyramid describes a specific shape and helps me picture the treats. The author chooses the word pyramid because it is the precisely correct word. I’m going to underline these words and phrases and label them “precise words.” Underline and label the identified words and phrases.
2. Rehearse

Practice Choosing Precise Words

Display the practice text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Explain that these lines could be from an informational text that can be improved by adding precise words.

**A Butterfly Garden**

Butterflies need to eat two kinds of things. Before they become butterflies, they need leaves. When they become butterflies, they need flower juices.

**Practice Text**

Ask students to work with a partner to change and add to the sentences by choosing precise words. Encourage students to brainstorm for more precise words they can use in these sentences. If necessary, discuss types of leaves that butterflies often eat, such as milkweed leaves. Help students find other ways to say “flower juices.” Each pair should write down their sentences and be prepared to read them to the class. They should be ready to explain why they chose the words they did.

**Share Practice Sentences**

Bring students together and invite partners to read aloud their sentences and explain their word choices. Record students’ sentences and post these as models for students to use as they draft or revise their informational reports.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

**Say:** We learned that choosing precise words is an important part of writing informational reports. Sometimes we’ll have to think about and search for the right word, but it’s worth it! By using precise words, you will be able to present information accurately.

Encourage students to choose a section in their informational reports where they can use more precise words. During student conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring the class together. Invite two or three students who have used precise language to read aloud sentences from their informational reports.

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**Strategies to Support ELs**

**Beginning**

While other students complete the partner practice activity, work with beginning ELs to practice talking about foods they like or don’t like. Use sentence frames such as the following:

- I like ______.
- I do not like ______.

**Intermediate and Advanced**

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner activity. Help students think of precise words to use in the practice text. Ask: What is another word for kinds of things when we want to say that butterflies eat parts of plants? What is a butterfly called before it turns into a butterfly? What is “flower juice” called?

**All Levels**

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: informational/informativo(a); precise/preciso(a).