Set the Tone of the Story Using Voice

1. Focus

Explain Setting the Tone of a Story

Say: When I write a story, I write about characters and what happens to them. As I write, I also create something called “tone.” The tone of a story is whether the story sounds sad, happy, scary, calm, or exciting. I can create the tone of the story through my choice of language. Today I’m going to show you an example of a story in which a writer creates a tone that gives readers hints that problems are about to happen. We’ll discuss how you can create this kind of tone in your own stories.

Model How Writers Use Language to Set the Tone of the Story

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

1. Tia knew that it was going to be a bad day. First she overslept. So she had to rush. She raced down the stairs. Jamal, Jalissa, Brooke, and Luke were waiting for her.

2. “Oh, no!” said Tia. She tapped her forehead. “I was rushing this morning, Ms. Parsons. I left my work at home! But I did it. I promise I did!”

Modeling Text

Read example 1. Say: In this example, the narrator uses language to tell me that some trouble is coming later in the story. When I read the words, “Tia knew that it was going to be a bad day,” I know that the main character expects that things are going to go wrong. As a reader, I am now waiting for something bad to happen. The writer is using the character’s thoughts and her own voice to set the tone of the story. The writer continues to set a tone that hints at trouble by listing things that went wrong that bothered Tia: “First she overslept. So she had to rush.” I know what happens when people rush, so I can hear the tone of the story here—the writer is hinting that more bad things will happen.

Read example 2. Say: I see that bad things are happening to the main character because she’s been rushing. The writer sets the tone here through Tia’s dialogue. She tells a problem she must solve in the story when she talks to her teacher here about the work she left at home. The tone of the story continues to hint at trouble and problems.

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

- Learn that a writer’s voice can set the tone of a story.
- Practice setting the tone of a story.
- Discuss how to 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. If necessary, write the sentence frame from “Strategies to Support ELs” on chart paper to support ELs.
2. Rehearse

Practice Setting the Tone of a Story

Write the practice text on chart paper or use the interactive whiteboard resources.

Juan rode the bus to school. He went to class. The teacher asked the students to get out their homework.

Practice Text

Ask students to add words or phrases to these sentences so that they have a tone of trouble or problems about to happen. Encourage students to suggest that Juan won’t be able to find his homework. Students can change the existing sentences. They can also add text so that readers will hear that there is a problem or that trouble is about to happen. Students should write down their sentences and be prepared to read them to the class. They should be ready to explain how they added a tone that suggests trouble or problems.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together. Invite pairs to read aloud their sentences and explain how they set a tone of trouble or problems that are about to happen. Record sample student sentences and post these as models for students to use as they write their own realistic fiction stories.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned that the words a writer uses create a tone for a story, such as a happy or sad tone, or a sense that something bad is about to happen. The writer creates the tone of the story through language and descriptions of characters’ thoughts and actions. Words used by the characters in dialogue and words that describe people and events all contribute to the story’s tone. As you write your realistic fiction story, think about the tone you want in your story and choose words that help you to create that tone for your readers.

Encourage students to apply their understanding of voice and establishing tone to their realistic fiction stories. 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 volunteers to read aloud a section of their realistic fiction stories in which they chose language to set a tone.