Create an Ominous or Dark Tone

1. Focus

Explain Creating an Ominous or Dark Tone

Say: When we write science fiction stories, we want to find ways to keep our readers interested and entertained. Many authors do this by using a narrative voice with an ominous or dark tone. Authors add words, phrases, and punctuation marks that suggest something bad is about to happen in a story. This kind of language creates drama and suspense that make readers curious, so they keep on reading. Today I’m going to show you how to create an ominous or dark tone in the narrative voice of your own stories.

Model How Writers Create an Ominous or Dark Tone

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

1. There was a gasp on the other end. “They arrived yesterday, Mona. I . . . we . . . that is, Tony and I . . .”

“What’s wrong, Sylvia? You sound so odd.”

2. Mr. Ramos came on the line, speaking in a harsh whisper. “Listen, something’s going on. All the kids seem to have these Dino-things. Did Sylvia tell you what we heard? We were in the hallway outside the boys’ room and overheard the Dino-Pals say something about how all the kids should prepare for D-Day and keep the parents away.”

Modeling Text

Read the text passages aloud and ask students to listen for words, sentences, and punctuation the author uses to add an ominous or dark tone.

After example 1. Say: The conversation between the parents about the Dino-Pal toys has good examples of ominous, dark tones. When she’s asked about the toys, the mother, named Sylvia, gasps. When someone gasps, it usually means that the person is unpleasantly surprised or nervous about something. This makes me want to know what Sylvia is nervous about. Then the author adds to the ominous tone by breaking up Sylvia’s reply. The dots, or ellipses, between her words suggest that Sylvia is having trouble expressing herself and is scared. The other mother’s question supports this impression when she says, “What’s wrong, Sylvia? You sound so odd.”

After example 2. Say: The fact that the father whispers tells me he’s trying to keep his kids from hearing something. The way the parents speak in this story adds to the ominous tone of their conversation. The writer doesn’t just have the characters say things directly. By the time the author finally tells what the
2. Rehearse

Practice Creating an Ominous or Dark Tone

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

I walked up the stairs and opened the door.

Practice Text

Ask students to add an ominous or dark tone to this sentence. Students can change the existing sentence, and they can also add additional text so that readers will sense that something bad is about to happen. Encourage them to add to the suspense by hinting that the speaker will find something unpleasant behind the door. Students should write down their sentences and be prepared to read and explain them to the class.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and invite partners to read their sentences aloud and explain how they created an ominous or dark tone. Have students identify how they changed the practice text. Record some of the students’ sentences and post these as models for them to use as they write their own science fiction stories.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned how to add words, phrases, and punctuation to our stories to create an ominous or dark tone. When we write science fiction stories, the use of a dark tone can help us build suspense. As you write your science fiction story, look for places where you can add an ominous or dark tone to keep your audience reading.

Ask students to identify a section of their science fiction stories for which they can create a dark, ominous tone. During 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 science fiction stories in which they created an ominous, dark tone.

Ramos parents overheard, I expect it to be bad. It is. We learn that these creepy toys are planning something with the kids that they don’t want parents to know about. The use of a dark, ominous tone makes me want to continue reading.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Beginning ELs are not likely to be ready to practice the skill of building suspense in writing. Instead, help them create simple sentences about things that people find dark and scary. Display the visual prompts using the interactive whiteboard resources and encourage them to choose a scary item from the images. Pantomime being frightened as you model a sentence using the following sentence frames. Invite students to generate oral sentences using the frames and images:

I am scared by ______. I am worried about ______.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during partner practice. Use the visual prompts on the interactive whiteboard resources, but instead of having students simply name the frightening thing, encourage them to think of how they might build suspense about it. Supply sentence frames such as the following to help them create suspenseful sentences, modeling as necessary.

I was worried when ______. Then I heard ______.

All Levels

If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: conversation/la conversación; tone/el tono; voice/la voz.