

Paint Me a Description

Subject: English III – American Literature

Grade level: English III (but can be used at the 9th and 10th level too)

Rationale or Purpose: To teach the use of imagery, figurative language and descriptive writing, by using an excerpt from *Main Street* by Sinclair Lewis and 1920s period postcards to model and stimulate descriptive writing.

Materials:

- Paper and pen or computer for word processing – computers are ideal for this lesson
- Excerpt from *Main Street* by Sinclair Lewis - accessed through *Teaching the American Twenties*
- Ransom Center period postcard collection
- Internet Access to *Teaching the American Twenties* (Excerpts and postcards can be viewed by individual students on computers or displayed by the teacher from a single computer.)
- NOTE: Other images of life in the 1920s from *Teaching the American Twenties* can be used as well
- Hard copy of excerpt from *Main Street* by Sinclair Lewis

Lesson Duration: One 90-minute class period or two 45-minute class periods

Objectives:

- English 110.44 TEKS (1A) write in a voice and style appropriate to audience and purpose
- English 110.44 TEKS (2A) use prewriting strategies to generate ideas, develop voice, and plan
- English 110.44 TEKS (2C) proofread writing for appropriateness of organization, content, style, and conventions
- English 110.44 TEKS (2E) use technology for aspects of creating, revising, editing, and publishing texts
- English 110.44 TEKS (3A) produce legible work that shows accurate spelling and correct use of the conventions of punctuation and capitalization such as italics and ellipses
- English 110.44 TEKS (3B) demonstrate control over grammatical elements such as subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, verb forms, and parallelism
- English 110.44 TEKS (5A) evaluate writing for both mechanics and content
- English 110.44 TEKS (5B) respond productively to peer review of his/her own work
- English 110.44 TEKS (8A) read to be entertained, to appreciate a writer's craft, to be informed, to take action, and to discover models to use in his/her own writing

Activity:

Step 1: Give students a hard copy of Sinclair Lewis's excerpt from *Main Street* (one is provided within *Teaching the American Twenties*, "Who Were Babbitts and Bohemians") and display the excerpt on either a single computer with a projection device or on individual student laptops. Alternately, an overhead projector and vis-à-vis pen can be used to highlight key aspects of the text.

Step 2: Read (or have the students read aloud or silently) the excerpt; note (or have them note) the use of imagery and figurative language. Let students write on the hard copy as the class reads and explores the piece.

Step 3: *NOTE—If necessary use this time to review figurative language and imagery – point out similes, metaphors, personification, etc and the author's use of vivid vocabulary and descriptive phrases to paint a picture with words. AND this may be a good time to discourage the use of "be" verbs and other dull verbs.

Step 4: Have the students view the Ransom Center postcards (located in "Who Were Babbitts and Bohemians" Introduction) using either a single computer with a projection device or on individual student computers (or both) and discuss the images. Encourage students to describe what they see in each image (or have them brainstorm in writing)

Step 5: Tell each student to choose one postcard (or another image from the site) from which to write a description modeled in the style of Sinclair Lewis.

Step 6: Allow students time to draft a one to one and a half paged description of the postcard (image) they have selected. Encourage them to add details reflective of their study of the period. This will take longer for some and less time for others. As students finish, have them read their work and revise it to include (more) figurative language and imagery—Remind them that imagery appeals to the senses.

NOTE: If students are able to DRAFT on a computer then tell them about the TRACKING option (On the top tool bar go to **Tools**—scroll down to **track changes** or hit Ctrl+shift+E.) This tool tracks revision and editing). Otherwise their revision and edition should be apparent as they complete this step in pen or pencil.

Step 7: Once the students have drafted and revised, (print drafts if necessary) have students peer edit—looking at the whole piece and commenting on pros and cons, offering suggestions for more vivid writing and ideas for improving the use of figurative language OR have student peer edit for specific things—i.e. Spelling, punctuation, syntax, grammar and such.

Step 8: Have student write a second draft (or remove tracking tool for a more polished copy and then, if necessary complete a second revision and editing and additional peer editing.

Step 9: Share (if desired) final drafts

Step 10: Hand in final drafts.

Modification: If necessary team up students, require short descriptions or add student/teacher conferencing to the process.

Student Product:

Evidence of the drafting, revising and editing process

Evidence of peer editing

Rough draft(s)

A final typed descriptive draft

Closure: Use a brief question or activity to consolidate and synthesize the day's learning. How will you know students have grasped the day's main concepts? How can they demonstrate this to you in 2-3 minutes? If a product is created, it can also be included as a Student Product and/or daily Assessment.

Assessment or evaluation: Teacher graded final draft (A rubric with specific requirements is recommended).

Extension: Sharing the descriptions – some students will enjoy reading theirs aloud, others will appreciate the teacher reading for them and still others will not want to share at all. Have students write a personal descriptive piece (their room, neighborhood, school, a favorite place, etc.)

Laurie A. Coker
Westwood High School
Austin, Texas