

Imagery

Consider:

And now nothing but drums, a battery of drums, the conga drums jamming out, in a *descarga*, and the drummers lifting their heads and shaking under some kind of spell. There's rain drums, like pitter-patter pitter-patter but a hundred times faster, and then slamming-the-door drums and dropping-the-bucket drums, kicking-the-car-fender drums. Then circus drums, then coconuts-falling-out-of-the-trees-and-thumping-against-the-ground drums, then lion-skin drums, then the-wacking-of-a-hand-against-a-wall drums, the-beating-of-a-pillow drums, heavy-stones-against-a-wall drums, then the-thickest-forest-tree-trunks-pounding drums, and then the-mountain-rumble drums, then the-little-birds-learning-to-fly drums and the-big-birds-alighting-on-a-rooftop-and-fanning-their-immense-wings drums . . .

— Oscar Hijuelos, *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*

Discuss:

1. Read the passage aloud. How does Hijuelos create the auditory imagery of drumming? In other words, how do the words imitate the sounds they represent?

2. Hijuelos repeats the word *then* eight times in this passage. What does this repetition contribute to the auditory image of drumming?

Apply:

Write a paragraph in which you capture two different sounds at a sporting event. In your paragraph try to imitate the sounds themselves with your words. Don't worry about correct grammar. Instead, focus on creating a vivid auditory image. Share your paragraph with a partner.

Imagery

Consider:

She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again. Edna heard her father's voice and her sister Margaret's. She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air.

— Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*

Discuss:

1. Although the narrator “looks into the distance,” the images are primarily auditory. What are the auditory images in the passage? What mood do these images create?

2. The last sentence of this passage contains an olfactory image (*the musky odor of pinks fill the air*). What effect does the use of an olfactory image, after a series of auditory images, have on the reader?

Apply:

Write a paragraph in which you create a scene through auditory imagery. The purpose of your paragraph is to create a calm, peaceful mood. Use one olfactory image to enhance the mood created by auditory imagery.

Imagery

Consider:

It was a mine town, uranium most recently. Dust devils whirled sand off the mountains. Even after the heaviest of rains, the water seeped back into the ground, between stones, and the earth was parched again.

— Linda Hogan, “Making Do”

Discuss:

1. What feelings do you associate with images of dusty mountains and dry earth?

2. There are two images associated with land in the third sentence. Identify the two images and compare and contrast the feelings these images evoke.

Apply:

Write a sentence describing a rainstorm using imagery that produces a positive response; then write a sentence describing a rainstorm with imagery that produces a negative response. Share your sentences with the class. Briefly discuss how the images create the positive and negative responses.

Imagery

Consider:

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
And fiddled whisper music on those strings
And bats with baby faces in the violet light
Whistled, and beat their wings
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
And upside down in air were towers
Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours
And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.

— T. S. Eliot, “The Waste Land”

Discuss:

1. Paraphrase the image of the first two lines. What mood does the image create?
2. List the auditory images in these lines. How do these images help create the mood of the passage?

Apply:

Write four or five lines of poetry which create – through imagery alone – a mood of absolute triumph. Do not state the nature of the triumph; do not explain or analyze. Instead, let the images create the feeling of triumph. Use both auditory and visual images. Share your lines with a partner.

Imagery

Consider:

At first I saw only water so clear it magnified the fibers in the walls of the gourd. On the surface, I saw only my own round reflection. The old man encircled the neck of the gourd with his thumb and index finger and gave it a shake. As the water shook, then settled, the colors and lights shimmered into a picture, not reflecting anything I could see around me. There at the bottom of the gourd were my mother and father scanning the sky, which was where I was.

— Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*

Discuss:

1. What kind of imagery is used in this passage? Circle the images.
2. Compare and contrast the imagery of the last sentence with the imagery of the first four sentences.

Apply:

Write a sentence which uses precise visual imagery to describe a simple action. Share your sentence with a partner.

Imagery

Consider:

I sat on the stump of a tree at his feet, and below us stretched the land, the great expanse of the forests, somber under the sunshine, rolling like a sea, with glints of winding rivers, the grey spots of villages, and here and there a clearing, like an islet of light amongst the dark waves of continuous tree-tops. A brooding gloom lay over this vast and monotonous landscape; the light fell on it as if into an abyss. The land devoured the sunshine; only far off, along the coast, the empty ocean, smooth and polished within the faint haze, seemed to rise up to the sky in a wall of steel.

— Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*

Discuss:

1. Fill out the chart below with images from the passage:

Images of Land	Images of Sea

2. What attitude toward the land and the sea do these images convey?

Apply:

Select a partner and describe an utterly silent experience you have had. Your partner should write down one visual (and nonfigurative) image from your description. Switch with your partner and repeat the procedure. Share the images with the class.

Imagery

Consider:

I also enjoy canoeing, and I suppose you will smile when I say that I especially like it on moonlight nights. I cannot, it is true, see the moon climb up the sky behind the pines and steal softly across the heavens, making a shining path for us to follow; but I know she is there, and as I lie back among the pillows and put my hand in the water, I fancy that I feel the shimmer of her garments as she passes. Sometimes a daring little fish slips between my fingers, and often a pond-lily presses shyly against my hand. Frequently, as we emerge from the shelter of a cove or inlet, I am suddenly conscious of the spaciousness of the air about me. A luminous warmth seems to enfold me.

— Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life*

Discuss:

1. Since Helen Keller was blind and deaf, tactile imagery becomes a focus in her writing. Underline the tactile images in this passage.
2. Which images in the passage are more specific: visual or tactile? Support your answers with reference to the passage.

Apply:

Close your eyes and touch some familiar objects at your desk. Then open your eyes and describe to a partner how those objects felt. Be sure to use specific, tactile images, not visual images or figurative language.

Imagery

Consider:

Queen: There is a willow grows askant the brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
There with fantastic garlands did she make
Of crowsfeet, nettles, daisies, and long purples . . .
There on the pendent boughs her coronet* weeds (5) *coronet
Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke,
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up,
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds,* (10) *hymns
As one incapable of* her own distress, *insensible to
Or like a creature native and indued* *endowed
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay (15)
To muddy death.

— William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Discuss:

1. Examine lines 8-13. How does the imagery in these lines help the reader understand that Ophelia (the *she* of the lines) is mad?
2. Line 10 is not figurative. Would it strengthen or weaken the line to change the image to a simile such as, “Which time she sang like a flawed recording”? Defend your opinion.

Apply:

Write an image which captures a moment of intense exuberance. Your image should be no more than one sentence and should contain no figurative language. Share your image with the class.

Imagery

Consider:

A ripe guava is yellow, although some varieties have a pink tinge. The skin is thick, firm, and sweet. Its heart is bright pink and almost solid with seeds. The most delicious part of the guava surrounds the tiny seeds. If you don't know how to eat a guava, the seeds end up in the crevices between your teeth.

When you bite into a ripe guava, your teeth must grip the bumpy surface and sink into the thick edible skin without hitting the center. . . .

A green guava is sour and hard. You bite into it at its widest point, because it's easier to grasp with your teeth. You hear the skin, meat, and seeds crunching inside your head, while the inside of your mouth explodes in little spurts of sour.

— Esmeralda Santiago, *When I Was Puerto Rican*

Discuss:

1. The imagery in the second sentence is simple and direct. What effects do such simplicity and directness have on the reader?
2. Santiago uses an adjective (*sour*) as a noun in her final image. What effect does this have on the meaning of the image?

Apply:

Write a sentence which contains an image that captures the taste of something you hate. Your image should contain an adjective used as a noun. Share your image with a partner.

Imagery

Consider:

As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair
In leprosy; thin dry blades pricked the mud
Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood.
One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare,
Stood stupefied, however he came there:
Thrust out past service from the devil's stud!

— Robert Browning, “Child Roland to the Dark Tower Came”

Discuss:

1. What feelings are produced by the image of the grass in lines 1-3?
2. Does the imagery of the horse (lines 4-6) inspire sympathy? Explain your answer with direct references to specific images.

Apply:

Write a description of an old, sick person. Convey an attitude of horror through the imagery of your description. Do not explain the sense of horror; do not use figurative language. Instead, use specific imagery to convey the meaning of your description. Share your description with the class.

Imagery

Consider:

All the hedges are singing with yellow birds!
A boy runs by with lemons in his hands.

— Rita Dove, “Notes From a Tunisian Journal”

Discuss:

1. How does the image of the boy in the second line intensify your understanding of the hedges in the first line?

2. How would the effect be different if the second line read, “A boy runs by with apples in his hands”?

Apply:

Write a sentence that conveys a feeling of extreme exuberance through the image of someone walking and carrying an object. Use only images, no figurative language. Share your sentence with a partner.

Imagery

Consider:

In the midst of poverty and want, Felix carried with pleasure to his sister the first little white flower that peeped out from beneath the snowy ground.

— Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

Discuss:

1. What do you understand about Felix from the imagery of this sentence?

2. How would the effect be different if Felix carried his sister a big bouquet of spring flowers?

Apply:

Write a sentence which expresses the joy of renewal through a visual image. Share your sentence with a partner.

Imagery

Consider:

But when the old man left, he was suddenly aware of the old hogan: the red sand floor had been swept unevenly; the boxes were spilling out rags; the trunks were full of the junk and trash an old man saves – notebooks and whisker hairs.

— Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*

Discuss:

1. What scene is created by the images in this selection? Brainstorm with the class a list of adjectives that describe this scene.

2. What attitude toward the old man does the final image (*the trunks were full of the junk and trash an old man saves – notebooks and whisker hairs*) reveal?

Apply:

Draw a sketch of your room. In your sketch, select images that reveal your character. Trade sketches with a partner. Interpret each other's sketches based on the images and discuss each other's interpretations. Share your insights with the class.

Imagery

Consider:

This is the time of year
when almost every night
the frail, illegal fire balloons appear.
Climbing the mountain height,

rising toward a saint
still honored in these parts,
the paper chambers flush and fill with light
that comes and goes, like hearts.

— Elizabeth Bishop, “The Armadillo (for Robert Lowell)”

Discuss:

1. Read the two stanzas aloud. What kind of imagery does Bishop use in these lines? How does the use of imagery contribute to the reader’s understanding of the lines?

2. The image of the balloons rising and filling with light ends with a simile (*like hearts*). How is the effect of the simile different from that of the image?

Apply:

Write an image of an unusual sight you have witnessed on a vacation. Use ten words or less. Now describe the same sight using a simile. Discuss the differences in effect with a partner.

Imagery

Consider:

There were some dirty plates
and a glass of milk
beside her on a small table
near the rank, disheveled bed –

Wrinkled and nearly blind
she lay and snored
rousing with anger in her tones
to cry for food.

— William Carlos Williams, “The Last Words of my English Grandmother”

Discuss:

1. These stanzas contain visual, olfactory, auditory, and gustatory images. Fill in the chart below with concrete images from the poem.

Visual	Olfactory	Auditory	Gustatory

2. Contrast the attitude toward the old woman in the two stanzas. How does it change? What images create this change in attitude?

Apply:

Think of a group of young people cheering at a sporting event. Write a paragraph describing them in a positive way; then write another paragraph describing them in a negative way. Use at least two types of imagery in your descriptions. Post your descriptions around the room.

Imagery

Consider:

The *egwugwu* house was now a pandemonium of quavering voices: *Aru oyim de de de dei!* filled the air as the spirits of the ancestors, just emerged from the earth, greeted themselves in their esoteric language.

— Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

Discuss:

1. Read this passage aloud. How does Achebe’s use of the Ibo language contribute to the reader’s ability to “hear” the auditory images?

2. Compare Achebe’s passage with:

The “egwugwu” house was now full of voices which filled the air as the spirits of the ancestors, just emerged from the earth, greeted themselves in their esoteric language.

In which passage can the reader “hear” the voices? How does the ability to “hear” the voices help readers understand the passage?

Apply:

Write a sentence about a parade. Create an auditory image by capturing sounds and actions. Use Achebe’s sentence as a model. Share your sentence with a partner and see if your partner understands the image.

Imagery

Consider:

The rainy night had ushered in a misty morning – half frost, half drizzle – and temporary brooks crossed our path, gurgling from the uplands.

— Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*

Discuss:

1. Brontë uses both visual and auditory imagery in this passage. Which words create visual images? Which words create auditory images? Which words create both?

2. What feelings are traditionally associated with rain, mist, and frost? How would the feeling of this passage be different if the *rainy night had ushered in a brilliant, sunny morning*?

Apply:

Write two sentences that create a mood of terror. Use visual and auditory imagery to describe the weather, thereby setting and reinforcing the mood. Share your sentences with the class.

Imagery

Consider:

I was born the year of the loon
in a great commotion, My mother –
who used to pack \$500 cash
in the shoulders of her gambling coat,
who had always considered herself
the family’s “First Son” –
took one look at me
and lit out again
for a vacation in Sumatra.
Her brother purchased my baby clothes;
I’ve seen them, little clown suits
of silk and color.

— Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, “Chronicle”

Discuss:

1. Examine the image of the baby clothes in lines 11-12: *little clown suits of silk and color*. No specific color is mentioned. What effect does this have on the meaning of the lines?
2. Contrast the description of the mother’s *gambling coat* in lines 3 and 4 with the image of the baby clothes in line 11. What attitude do these images reveal about the mother?

Apply:

With a partner, think of items of clothing that can suggest either seriousness or frivolity. Identify four such items of clothing then fill in the following chart:

Item of Clothing	Images Expressing Seriousness	Images Expressing Frivolity

Imagery

Consider:

Part of a moon was falling down the west,
Dragging the whole sky with it to the hills.
Its light poured softly in her lap. She saw it
And spread her apron to it. She put out her hand
Among the harp-like morning-glory strings,
Taut with the dew from garden bed to eaves,
As if she played unheard some tenderness
That wrought on him beside her in the night.
“Warren,” she said, “he has come home to die:
You needn’t be afraid he’ll leave you this time.”

— Robert Frost, “The Death of the Hired Man”

Discuss:

1. Identify the visual, auditory, and tactile images in the lines above.
2. How does the poet use imagery to prepare the reader for the announcement in lines 9-10?

Apply:

Write a one-sentence description of some element in a garden or yard. Be certain your sentence contains a visual or tactile image. Share your sentence with a partner.