

The Tiger Cub: Teaching Notes

Rose Lu

1.

Part A: Years 7-13

Abstract Nouns vs Concrete Nouns

Getting students to understand this difference, and learn to avoid abstract nouns, is the number one way to improve their line-level creative writing.

I usually run through a few examples of nouns and get them to call out whether they're abstract or concrete, to make sure they've got it.

Emphasize to them, also, that the more concrete and specific they can be, the better. E.g. 'a white Suzuki Swift with peeling paint' is better than 'a car'. You can run through a few objects and urge them to be as particular as possible when describing them.

Part B: Years 7-13

The Neighbourhood Where I Live

This is a useful exercise – it helps them realise that a city or town can be a very different place to people living in different areas.

Alternatively, they can describe their street or their house. This should help them realise that a street or a house means different things in different parts of the world. You can never write 'a typical street', 'a typical house' (though they may try to!) Often, I draw the below diagram on the board. These are the elements of setting available to them whenever they write.

Country
City, town or region
Suburb
Street
Building
Room

Decade
Year
Season
Month
Day of the week
Time of the day

Volunteers read aloud. Give feedback as a class.

2.

Part A: Years 9-13

The Telling Detail vs The Tired Detail

Too often, students will write about people in terms that are abstract ('he is kind and loving', 'she fills our house with love'). If they write lines like this, ask them why they think that? What specific examples can they use to show, instead of tell, this aspect of character.

Part B: Years 9-13

Character in Action

Action is the best way to characterise some. It will force them to be concrete.

3.

Part A: Years 7-13

Reaching Back into Memory

1. Change this date as need be.
4. Someone will always say that they ‘can’t remember’. Remind them that you are only asking for their earliest memory. They may have to pick between a couple if they’re not sure which one came first.

Volunteers read aloud. Give feedback as a class.

4.

Part A: Years 7-13

Scene vs Summary

I usually give them some examples here, e.g.:

‘And then I looked at Joe, and he looked away, but he kept his hand there, on the table next to mine.’ vs ‘Joe and I had been flirting for weeks’. (This makes them laugh but may not be age appropriate for all.)

‘The second hand seemed to stagger forward like a drunk: slow and erratic. The minute hand was immobile.’ ‘It felt like hours before I was called in to see my GP.’

It is crucial that they understand the difference. Writing all in summary is one of the most recurrent flaws I see in student creative nonfiction. (For some reason, they are better at this when it comes to fiction.)

It’s fine for some stories to be written all in scene – if they take place over a very short period, and all the action is interesting and deserves its place on the page.

Part B: Years 7-13

Writing to You

You will need to remind them to include scenes, not just summary.

Volunteers read aloud. Give feedback as a class.

Part C: Years 12-13

The ‘you’ in second person is not the reader – it is the narrator. It operates in the same way as first person, but with ironic or emotional distance. It is useful for writing about topics which are funny or painful, or finding the humour in the painful topics.

How to Have a Healthy Relationship with Your [Insert Here]

You will, again, need to remind them to include scenes, not just summary.

Lorrie Moore’s ‘How to Talk to Your Mother’ (while fiction) is a good example of second person to show them.

Volunteers read aloud. Give feedback as a class.

5.

Part A: Years 11-13

Firsts and Lasts

Define a lyric essay – in New Zealand, many students hear the word essay and imagine five paragraphs with SEXY (**S**tatement, **E**xplanation, **eX**ample, **analY**sis) structures. This is, instead, a contemporary creative nonfiction form which can combine qualities of poetry, essay, memoir, and research writing.

You may need to explain ‘show don’t tell’ to your students, and make sure they are including (real or imagined) actions. Their essay shouldn’t read as a series of ‘thoughts’.

When they write about considering the event from five years in the future, they need to make it clear (either through their writing or the way they frame their writing) that this is a projection.

Read the World exercises and teaching notes by Ruby Porter, a prose writer and poet. She teaches creative writing at The University of Auckland and was the inaugural winner of the Michael Gifkins prize for her debut novel *Attraction*.

Supported by the Freemasons Foundation