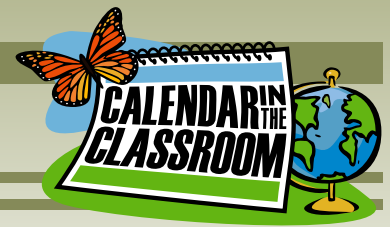




Natural Narratives



Overview

How would you describe the changes in the seasons? Descriptive writing that reports what is happening in nature, often conveys information without capturing the magic, beauty or emotion of the events. It is possible to tell the same phenological event factually while providing more evocative descriptions. The students will recreate a more descriptive version of a paragraph after hearing a somewhat dry description of a typical phenological event for the week.

Standards/Benchmarks *

- Write narratives and other creative texts to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences. ELA (4.6.3.3)
- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. ELA (4.6.4.4)
- With guidance and support from peers and adults, use a writing process to develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, drafting, revising, and editing. (4.6.5.5)
- Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; take notes and categorize information, and provide a list of sources. (4.6.8.8)

Background

One of the best ways to become familiar with good writing is to listen to excellent examples read aloud. Reading a selection or one of the essays in the first section of Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* provides wonderful examples of the use of metaphor and simile to describe seasonal activities around the family "Shack" in Wisconsin. His essays evolved from his field observations through a series of revisions to become gems of descriptive writing that have gained worldwide recognition.

Two of many other selections that you could read include the classic, Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, Annie Dillard's, Pulitzer Prize winning, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*.

The Activity

Day 1

- Tell students you are going to read to them a paragraph about what usually happens in nature during this week each year. Ask them to listen with an "editor's ear" to see how well they can picture what the author is describing.
- Read a short paragraph from the "Phenology" section of the *Minnesota Weatherguide Environment™ Calendar* that correlates to the current week (i.e. First Week of April).

Time:

- Day 1: 40 minutes
- Day 2: 20 minutes
- Day 3: 40 minutes

Skills:

- Critical thinking
- Observing
- Drawing conclusions
- Writing creatively

Vocabulary:

- phenological
- descriptive narrative
- observation
- revision

Materials Needed:

- *Minnesota Weatherguide Environment™ Calendar*
- Pencils
- Writing notebooks
- Whiteboard with markers or chart paper with markers

3. Ask students if they could picture what the author was describing. Discuss the idea that the writing was not bad, but it could be revised and improved by adding more “juicy” words, metaphors, and similes, and by focusing on more details. Work together to improve the paragraph.

Day 2

1. Read students *The Diary of a Worm* by Doreen Cronin and Harry Bliss. Discuss the point of view the story is told from and how it is told.

2. Explain that everyone will be writing a narrative from the point of view of a plant or animal experiencing phenological (seasonal) changes.

3. Tell students that you will be going outside to observe some of the phenological events that are occurring right now. Ask them to try to notice even the smallest details about their surroundings. Remind them to use all their senses (except taste) to observe.

4. Take students outside to a quiet place, somewhat removed from school if possible. Before leaving the classroom, remind them of the rules for being outside of class: it's still class, not recess. Once you arrive at your destination, ask students to spread out so they have their own area to observe and write their observations in their journal. Observations can be in the form of a list, a web, or whatever feels best and most efficient to individual students.

5. After about 20 minutes, bring them back inside to discuss some of their observations. Write them down on a whiteboard or chart to refer to tomorrow.

Day 3

1. Remind students of the story from yesterday and the point of view it was told from. Tell students that today we will be writing a short story, or narrative, told from the point of view of a plant or animal experiencing phenological changes. Start brainstorming some examples (if the lesson is done in the fall... a squirrel gathering food, a bird getting ready to fly south, a leaf turning color, etc). They must include phenological events in their writing, and try to write in the descriptive style that was practiced on Day 1.

2. Tell students that we will again be going outside, this time to write our narrative. They can sit in the same place as yesterday or choose a new place as long as they have their own space.

3. After 25 minutes (time will vary based on the group) gather students in a group. Ask for volunteers to share their “descriptive narratives.”

Questions for Discussion

- What makes descriptive writing enjoyable to read? The rich language helps us feel and picture what is happening and we feel more connected to the story and characters.
- How do you think scientists originally discovered these phenological changes? Much of science starts with observation, just like what we just did. Scientists observe and look for patterns from year to year. They record their observations. The more details and descriptive language scientists use the more accurately they can look for similarities and differences from year to year. These observations also help scientists discover unhealthy changes in nature, which leads to research about the cause of these changes (such as deformed animals caused by polluted waters).

Extensions

- Depending on the ability and experience of the group, it may be necessary to model some more of the steps along the way, i.e. outside observation, beginning a narrative, etc.
- This writing activity could be taken all the way to a published form if desired. Time for additional lessons on revising would be necessary.
- Use a roll of butcher paper or strips of chart paper to make an illustrated mural or phenology wheel (see web resources) of the descriptions.

Resources

Branley, F.M. and Maestro, G. *Sunshine Makes the Seasons*
 Cash, M.M. *What makes the seasons?*
 Dillard, A. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*.
 Gibbons, G. *The Reasons for Seasons*
 Gibbons, G. *The Seasons of Arnold's Apple Tree*
 Iverson, D. *Discover the Seasons*
 Leopold, A. *A Sand County Almanac*
 Morrison, G. *Nature in the Neighborhood*
Minnesota Weatherguide Environment™ Calendar
 Thoreau, H.D. *Walden*

<http://www.learner.org/jnorth/tm/pde/PhenDataCollect.html>

Phenology Wheels: http://uwarboretum.org/eps/tools_for_teachers.php

* Minnesota Academic Standards

Standards Met

Subject	Code	Standard	Benchmark
ELA	4.6.3.3	Access how the point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of text	Write narratives and other creative texts to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Orient the reader by establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally. Use dialogue and description to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations. Use a variety of transitional words and phrases to manage the sequence of events. Use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely. Provide a conclusion (when appropriate to the genre) that follows from the narrated experiences or events.
	4.6.4.4	Access how the point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of text	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience
	4.6.5.5	Access how the point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of text	With guidance and support from peers and adults, use a writing process to develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, drafting, revising, and editing.
	4.6.8.8	Access how the point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of text.	Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; take notes and categorize information, and provide a list of sources