

## 7) Creating Strong Images

### OBJECTIVES

Students will explore the difference between showing and telling.  
Students will understand the concept of painting a mental image in songwriting.  
Students will demonstrate the ability to create strong images.

### STANDARDS

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1**  
**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4**  
**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.5**  
**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7**

### VOCABULARY

abstract, imagery, images, metaphor, sensory details, simile, theme (review)

### PREPARATION

- Make copies of “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry” Lyric Sheet.
- Locate audio version or live performance of “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry,” written by Hank Williams.
- For advanced students, make copies of “Spotlight on Images” (in the Appendix).

### FREE WRITE (5 minutes)

### DISCUSS HOMEWORK (2 minutes)

Allow students to share their favorite rhymes with the class. (**Note:** This pertains to the second part in the homework assignment.)

### BRAINSTORM (6 minutes)

This exercise will help students become more aware of the details that their senses constantly pick up.

**Prompt:** In your journal, list as many details about your current surroundings as you can in 30 seconds. Try to move past the obvious things you see and try to find tiny details that someone else might not notice.

Ask students to raise their hands if they listed anything other than a visual detail (a sound, a smell, a feeling, or a taste) in their list. Share with students that we often rely on visual details, but using all five senses creates even stronger images.

**Prompt:** For the next 30 seconds, close your eyes and listen. Pay attention to every little sound. Open your eyes and list as many sounds as you can in 30 seconds.

Repeat this prompt for each of the other senses (smell, taste, touch), allowing 30 seconds to think with eyes closed and 30 seconds to write. If students have trouble with smell and taste, ask them to list memorable aromas or tastes that they have experienced recently.

Ask students to share some of their details with the class.

**ACTIVITY (30–35 minutes)**

1. Share this information with students:

Every waking moment, we absorb a tidal wave of information through our senses, often without recognizing the various pieces that make up what we are experiencing. But when we concentrate on each sense, we are able to identify the **sensory details**, the individual sights, sounds, tastes, aromas, and touch sensations that allow us to take in our surroundings. When we isolate these details and describe them in vivid and expressive language, we can stir mental pictures, or **images**, in our listeners' minds. We know this already from the fiction we all read and enjoy. Whether spoken, read, or sung, words have the power to fire our imaginations, involving us in someone else's senses, memories, and feelings, almost as if we are experiencing them, too. Sensory details are the most powerful tool to create the images that evoke our emotions. When we use images in writing, it's called **imagery**.

2. Ask students to think of a time they felt one of the following emotions: sadness, joy, calm, or anger. Allow a few students to share their experience with the class. Urge them to try to tell the story without using the actual word for the emotion they are recalling (sadness, joy, etc.).

3. Share this information with students:

When you hear stories like this that communicate feelings, it's easy to picture them in your mind. These images allow you to show your audience an emotion instead of simply telling them you were sad, happy, angry, or calm. Songwriters use images to show emotions to their listeners instead of directly stating, "I feel angry," or "I felt sad." Images support the theme, which is the message of the song. So when you use a strong image in your writing, it shows your audience more about your subject than if you just told them about it. Remember that it's always more powerful to show, rather than tell.

4. Share this information, as well:

Two figures of speech, **simile** and **metaphor**, also can be used to create strong imagery in your lyrics. A simile is a descriptive comparison that uses "like" or "as." For example, "He was as fast as a whirlwind on the basketball court," or "The sun rose like a neon tangerine." A metaphor makes similar comparisons without using "like" or "as." Notice how similes and metaphors compare two unlike things that share a similar feature. For example, "He was a whirlwind on the basketball court," or "At dawn, the sun was a neon tangerine."

5. Distribute "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" Lyric Sheet, then play the song. Note that it is considered a landmark song in country music. Hank Williams wrote it in 1949, when most popular songs did not contain similar poetic images. It is, for instance, the oldest recording on *Rolling Stone* magazine's list of the "500 Greatest Songs of All Time." Divide students into pairs to pick out descriptive imagery, including metaphors, and strong, active verbs. Use the following questions to lead a class discussion:

- How does Hank Williams set a mood with his description of familiar images?
- How do the verbs contribute to the power of the images?
- Pick one of these images to examine more closely. What emotion or feeling is the image communicating?
- What does Williams mean by "Did you ever see a robin weep" and "The moon just went behind the clouds to hide its face and cry"? We know robins don't weep, and neither does the moon. What feeling is he creating by using these images?

**TEACHER TIP**

Imagery can be realistic or **abstract**. Unlike realistic imagery, abstract images are not based on tangible external reality. “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry” uses more abstract imagery than realistic imagery. Students may benefit from a discussion of this distinction. For an example of more realistic imagery, see any of the following songs: “Long Ride Home” by Patty Griffin, “Southern Comfort Zone” by Brad Paisley, or “Automatic” by Miranda Lambert. Unlike those songs, “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry” has no chorus, though the title phrase repeats.

6. Give students the following writing prompt, incorporating long pauses when asking them to imagine or recall information:

Close your eyes and imagine a room that is familiar to you. Let your mind wander to a few different memories that have taken place in this room. Now open your eyes and list the following details about the room in your journal. List as many details as you can, and try to move past obvious characteristics.

- **Sight:** What things can you see, big and small?
- **Smell:** What odors and aromas are usually present in the room?
- **Sound:** Think back to a few memories or one specific memory you had in this room. Do you remember any sounds? If it is a downstairs room, can you hear anything upstairs? If it is an upstairs room, can you hear anything downstairs? What about typical house noises—creaky stairs, a ceiling fan?
- **Taste:** Do you have any memories in which you have tasted something in this room? What was it?
- **Touch:** What textures do you associate with this room? Do you recall touching anything with your hands or feet? What did that feel like?
- **Emotion:** What feelings are associated with this room in your memories? Do you have happy memories? Anxious memories? A little of both? What other emotions come to mind?

7. Give students the following writing prompt:

In your journal, write a paragraph or poem retelling your memory. Use as many of the details from your list as you can. Your writing should include at least one detail from each of your five senses plus your emotion for a total of six details. You may complete this assignment as part of your homework.

8. If time allows, share with students that songwriters choose details and images carefully to evoke feelings in their listeners. Read aloud these lyrics written by a student who participated in the Words & Music program:

*Sitting on the porch*

*Listening to the breeze*

*Watching the street scorch*

*Feel so at ease*

Ask the class:

- What kind of mental images do you see when you hear these words?
- What senses does the writer involve?
- What kind of emotion does the imagery create?

Now read aloud the second verse of the student's song:

*Sitting on the porch*

*On a cold and dreary day*

*Listening to the storm*

*That just won't go away*

Ask the class:

- What is different about the images in this verse?
- How does this lyric relate differently to your senses than the first verse?
- How is the emotion different from the first verse?
- What other senses could you use to build on the imagery in these two verses?

*For advanced work on images, similes, and metaphors, see "Spotlight on Images" in the Appendix.*

## HOMEWORK

Give students the following prompt:

Examine the lyrics of some of your favorite songs. Find at least one that uses images to paint a mental picture. Copy it down in your journal and highlight at least four of these images in the lyrics. Pay attention to the kinds of images that are powerful to you. Think about how you could use these sorts of images in your own work.

Next, pick one of the following words and think of a situation in your life when you felt that emotion:

Happiness		Fear
Sadness		Joy
Friendship		Worry
Anger		Calm

For example, here's a situation for joy: "My brother is in the army, and he's been away for six months. But last week, there was a knock on our front door. When my mom opened it, there he was. I ran to him, and he scooped me up. We hugged and cried."

Write a paragraph, poem, or song retelling your memory. Use all of your five senses to paint strong mental pictures.

## LYRIC SHEET

**I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry***Hank Williams*

Hear that lonesome whippoorwill  
He sounds too blue to fly  
The midnight train is whining low  
I'm so lonesome I could cry

I've never seen a night so long  
When time goes crawling by  
The moon just went behind the clouds  
To hide its face and cry

Did you ever see a robin weep  
When leaves begin to die  
That means he's lost the will to live  
I'm so lonesome I could cry

The silence of a falling star  
Lights up a purple sky  
And as I wonder where you are  
I'm so lonesome I could cry



*Hank Williams wrote about intense heartbreak in songs like "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry." Although he died young, in 1953, he remains one of country music's most celebrated songwriters.*