

Sample Lesson Plan: Activating Senses and Memories for Creative Writing

Teaching Artist: I-Chia Chiu (ichiachiuchiu@gmail.com)

Age: 12+

Guiding Question: *How can we create stories around the images we see everyday? What is the relationship between images and one's memory? How can we use different senses to build images in our writing?*

Objectives:

- To introduce the idea of image as a craft area in playwriting
 - To explore images through activating sensory experience
 - To explore central images in one's writing and how it is in conversation with one's memory
 - To practice building stories around images
 - To practice seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary and building a way of seeing for one's writing
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Materials:

- Image of René Magritte's painting "Lovers"
 - A bag of dry apple chips & a pre-survey of food allergies
 - Chart paper and markers
 - Excerpt of *The History of the Senses* by Diane Ackerman
 - Excerpt of the play *This Girl Laughs, this Girl Cries, this Girl Does Nothing* by Finegan Kruckmeyer
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0) PRE-ACTIVITY: Poster dialogue (10min)

- Welcome the participants. Play some music. Invite people who have just arrived to take a marker, visit the posters in the room, and write down their responses to the prompts on the posters.
- Invite the participants to visit each poster at least twice, read the others' responses, and put a checkmark if they see something they resonate with.
- The prompts are:
 - What are the things your eyes / ears/ tongue / nose /skin (fingers, elbows, toes, knees...) experienced in the past one month?
 - What are things your eyes / ears/ tongue / nose /skin (fingers, elbows, toes, knees...) crave to experience now or recently?

1) OPENING (10min)

- "Today we are going to practice building stories around images. Through activating our sensory memories, we will find different ways to describe central images in our writing."
- Introduce (or review) collaborative agreement:
 - Participate fully.

- Respect that full participation looks different for everyone.
- Listen to understand, not to respond
- Move Forward, Move Back
- Invite everyone to look at the posters in the room. Read the responses on the posters.

Transition: *Look around, we have created a list of things that our senses have experienced or want to experience. We have some great images here in this room. Now in order to explore ways to write about these memories, we are going to practice different ways to read an image.*

2) ENGAGE

Activity #1: Image Reading(15min)

Objective: To introduce and identify the roles different senses can play in our experience of the world.

- Present: Show René Magritte's painting "Lovers" to the participants.
- Describe: Invite participants to describe what they see in this image. Describe the choices of colors, light, and shapes.
- Discuss:
 - How do they know each other's existence without sight?
 - What senses do you think they are using?
- Share the following quotes with the participants:
 - "In heightened emotional state, vision is usually suppressed." (Francis Bacon)
 - "**What makes an apple sweet?** It's not because it's red or it's round but because of the moment when it enters your mouth." (John Berger)



Transition: *As shared earlier, today we are exploring the idea of image. In order to do that, we are going to study some objects. We are going to activate all our senses as we go through different objects. The apple is not an apple because it is red. How can we "un-apple" an apple? What are the secrets behind an apple?*

3) EXPLORE

Activity #2: Un-apple an apple (15min)

Objectives: To activate one's sensory memories. To explore one's central place and central images. To practice adding and mixing different sensory experience to describe a place.

Inspiration: *"What makes an apple sweet? It's not because it's red or it's round but because of the moment when it enters your mouth." (John Berger)*

- Invite the participants to look at the posters in the room again. Hold these memories and desires as inspiration for this activity.
- Invite them to think of a memory of joy and come up with an image of the memory in their mind. "We are going to call these images "**central images**" because these images play an important role in your memory and they might repeatedly appear in your writing."
Invite the participants to share their central place with the group.
SIDE-COACHING: When thinking of a place of joy, you might feel that experience manifested in your body. You might feel relaxed or excited when recalling that memory. The image could be anything. It could be a river, a cabin in summer camp, the back of a thrift store, a kitchen table. Hold your feelings about these images lightly in your heart. Remember that we are not obliged to share our feelings.
- Invite the participants to close their eyes. Place a slice of dry apple chip on each participants' hands.
SIDE-COACHING: Share with the participants that they are not just holding a piece of food. Invite participants to experience the elements of their images through different senses. What they are holding is the elements of their central image. It can be a thunder, or a ring of wind chime, or a drop of dust, or a pile of cinnamon and hot apples.
- Invite everyone to smell it, touch it, click on it, and finally eat it with eyes closed. (Note: a pre-survey for food allergies is needed.) Invite everyone to open their eyes.
- Invite everyone to write down what they experienced: their central images and memories that come to their mind / eyes / ears / nose / skin.

BREAK

Activity #3: Collective writing (30min)

Objectives: To practice collaborative writing. To practice building stories and images together through adding memories to a description of a geographic place.

- Read an excerpt of the description of synesthesia from the book *The History of the Senses* by Diane Ackerman.
- Introduce the definition of synesthesia--to experience things through more than two senses at the same time. In a bit, they will work in groups and apply the idea of synesthesia to build multi-sensorial descriptions of a geographic place.
- Divide the participants into groups of three. Have the participants to pick a geographic place and collectively generate a description of this place. Invite the participants to take turns adding memories to this piece of writing. Encourage them to try different combinations of their memories and sensory verbs, such as smell, taste, touch.

- The teaching artist will model this part with everyone’s help. Write a sample text on the board and invite the participants to brainstorm together to replace the underlined words with the elements of their central images.

Example:

It has been a long time since we visited this house. It feels different to be here again. The October air is crisp. It tastes like rings of windchimes. I can hear silence in this house. It sounds like the thick dust on the book shelves. I can see a couch in the dim light. It looks big and amber, like her apple pie (or any other central images), which was our favorite snack in summer times.

SIDE-COACHING: Put a list of objects the participants proposed on the side of the board. Try different combinations of these words in the sentences. Encourage them to feel the difference and discuss which works the best. Remind the participants that writing is about tweaking and experimenting.

- Invite each group to come up with a short description of a place. Pass chart paper and markers to each group. Have everyone write down their work on the chart paper.
- Share and Discuss: Invite each group to share their work.

SIDE-COACHING: Introduce the idea of “character”. Invite participants to pay attention to how these geographic places are built and what relationship the speaker (the character) might have with these places.

3) REFLECTION (15min)

Discuss:

- Describe what we did in this workshop / class today.
- How was the experience of feeling something with different senses?
- How does synesthesia impact your perception of the world you created in your writing?
- What sticks out to you? What stays in your heart?

Closing activity: It Makes Me Think:

Invite them to think of a word that they would like to take away with today. It could be any word we mentioned in the workshop. We will share fill this word in the sentence “____, it makes me think.” Invite everyone to share their sentences with the group as the closing activity for today.

EXTENSION:

Reading: Pass the excerpt of the play *This Girl Laughs, this Girl Cries, this Girl Does Nothing* by Finegan Kruckmeyer to everyone. We will talk about how characters interact with geographic places in a story.

Writing: Invite everyone to write a piece to describe a place. Interweave moments of memory and synesthesia in this piece. We will share and discuss how you can apply this work in the creation of a play.