1. “Okay, today we’re going to talk about diction. Who remembers what diction is?”
2. Students answer.
3. I write the definition on the whiteboard.
4. “Very good. So the purpose of diction is for authors to influence you subtly. There are words that are automatically going to make us feel happy, sad, disgusted, or angry.”
5. I write on the board two headings: “Positive Diction” and “Negative Diction.”
6. “What are some words that make you feel good, or words that just sound good to you?”
7. I write down 3-5 examples the students call out.
8. Repeat steps 6-7 with “Negative Diction.”
9. “Perfect. Let’s apply this to a text.”
10. At this point, I will hand out and introduce the text “Border Story.”
11. This entire opening should take approximately 3-5 minutes.
12. “The text we’re going to spend time with today is called ‘Border Story’ and you can see its background on the page in front of you.”
13. I will read the author background.
14. “What I’d like to do now is to look at just the first two paragraphs, focusing on the diction.
15. At this point I will set “Border Story” up under the document camera, with the screen turned on and synced.
16. “Let’s look at those together and I want you to pick out words that are ‘Positive Diction’ and ‘Negative Diction.’”
17. It’s hard to accurately predict exactly how this will go, but needless to say the diction in the first two paragraphs is very negative. For each example students give, I will write it down on the board under “Positive Diction” or “Negative Diction” (there will be many more “Bad Words”). I might also ask students how each word they choose makes them feel.
18. Just as an example, some of the words in the first two paragraphs are: “herd humans”; “people-hunting”; “un-American”; “harsh”; “clatter”; “hard-focused lights.”
19. This should take approximately 3-5 minutes.
20. “These are pretty clear-cut cases of positive and negative diction. How do these words make you feel? What’s their impact on you? Do you feel happy or sad right now?”
21. Students answer.
22. “Okay, I want to explore the rest of the text on your own. I’m going to give you six minutes to read the rest of ‘Border Story.’ What I want you to specifically read for is diction—when a word choice powerfully affects you positively or negatively. When it does, I want you to underline, circle, or highlight it, and write how it makes you feel in the margin. Sound good?”
23. Students read for six minutes. During this time I will take attendance and walk through the room, observing the annotation.
24. At the end of six minutes, I’ll gently announce, “Time.”
25. “We’re going to take four minutes for this next part.”
26. “What I’d like you to do is turn to the person in front of you and give three words or phrases you highlighted. Tell them whether the diction makes you feel positive or negative, and why. Do that swap, because at the end of four minutes, you’re going to give me one of your partners’ examples.”
27. During these four minutes I will wander around the room to eavesdrop on student conversations.
28. At the end of four minutes, I will re-gather the class’s attention.
29. “Let’s come together as a group now.”
30. “I want you to tell me one example your partner said that you thought was really striking.”
31. I will call on volunteer students, who will provide answers.
32. For each answer, I will write on the text of “Border Story” under the document camera. I will underline the diction choice the student mentions, and draw a smiley face next to it if the effect was positive, or a frown face next to it if the effect was negative.
33. For each answer, I will also ask the student why the diction made them feel the way that it did.
34. The piece’s diction and tone are pretty overwhelmingly negative, so the students’ answers should reflect that. If not, I will need to think quickly on my feet and provide some counter-examples of my own.
35. I’d like this listing to be somewhat exhaustive, as practice for student annotation and textual analysis. If possible, I’d like to hear from all the groups, or certainly a majority of them.
36. There are various important areas of the text that should be highlighted. If the students do not mention the diction in these areas, I will need to draw their attention to them.
37. These areas include: the physical description of Tijuana; the description of being a woman migrant in the third-to-last paragraph; the last two paragraphs describing Tijuana as a paradise compared to some migrants’ homelands, contrasted with its own problems.
38. Again—and probably the biggest potential pitfall in this lesson—is if the students aren’t seeing and identifying the diction correctly. If they’re not, I’ll need to use examples and ask things like, “how does he describe innocent people at the essay’s end?”
39. When this run-through is completed, I will count the instances of positive diction the students provided, and the instances of negative diction provided. There will be more instances of negative than positive diction.
40. I will ask the students, “Is there more negative or positive diction?”
41. The students will answer that there is more negative.
42. “Okay, we have all these negative diction examples and descriptions piled on top of one another. What sort of tone does that give this piece?”
43. Students answer, a negative tone.
44. “I agree. You feel frightened reading this. You feel upset. There’s one other thing that really contributes to the tone for me. I wonder if any of you can guess what else in here really stands out?”
45. The answer I’m looking for is the second-person POV narrative. If the students don’t come up with it, I will use leading questions to get them there.
46. “Right, he uses ‘you’ throughout the entire piece. Does anybody know what that’s called?”
47. The students either answer second-person or I provide them with the answer.
48. “What’s the impact of second-person on the reader? I want to look at one excerpt: the woman in the bathroom in the third-to-last paragraph. What’s the impact of using ‘you’ there?”
49. Students answer that you feel like you’re really there..
50. “Let’s all do something. Reread that passage, and let’s visualize that bathroom. What does it look like? What does it sound like? What does it smell like?”
51. Students are probably going to pick some really negative diction words here.
52. For each answer, I will write it in a different place on the whiteboard than before.
53. “Do you think we would see the bathroom in so much detail if he didn’t use you”
54. Students answer probably not.
55. “So this is a deliberate choice on the author’s part, to bring you into that scene and make the tone that more vivid.
56. “This is now the important part. We’re going to do a little writing as a class.”
57. I will then hand out and explain the attached worksheet.
58. “List 3-5 pieces of diction in the piece that you find the most striking or powerful.”
59. “Then, explain what you believe Urrea’s view is on American immigration policy. What argument is he making? Justify your response with examples and quotes from the text.”
60. The students will have 7-8 minutes to work on this piece of writing. During this time, I will move about the room to supervise and confer with students as needed.
61. At the end of this time, I will re-gather the class’s attention.
62. “What did we come up with?”
63. I will take the answers of 2-3 students, who should answer that Urrea’s view is that current American immigration policy is barbaric, and he’s arguing for more humane treatment. I’m particularly interested in how students use the previously discussed examples.
64. “Is that pretty much what everyone got?”
65. Students answer.
66. “I think what’s important for us to see here, both as readers, and as writers, is this: where does Urrea come out and say exactly what he’s arguing?”
67. Students answer that he never really does, although I’ll accept that using the term “un-American” early in the piece comes really close.
68. “So even though he never states it, all of us understood what his view was and what argument he was making. He did all that through diction and tone; essentially, through word choice.”
69. “I want you to keep that in mind as you read and write for this class: the power that your word choices can have.”
70. “Any questions?”
71. If students have none, I will direct them to turn their papers in.

Name

Hour

AP Language & Composition

Mrs. Himsel

“Border Story” Questions

1. Please list 3-5 instances of diction from “Border Story” that you find most striking.
2. What do you believe is Urrea’s view on American immigration policy? What argument is he making? Justify your response with examples and quotes from the text.