READING LIKE A WRITER: Examining an Author’s Craft
(Diction, Detail, Imagery, Syntax, Tone, Structure)

**Diction** – author’s word choice. Each word has a connotation: a quality or idea the word makes you think of
- What words does the author choose? Consider his/her word choice compared to another.
- Why did the author choose that particular word?
- What are the connotations of that word choice?

*Considering diction . . .
- *Laugh*: guffaw, chuckle, titter, giggle, cackle, snicker, roar
- *Self-confident*: proud, conceited, egotistical, stuck-up, haughty, smug, condescending
- *House*: home, hut, shack, mansion, cabin, residence
- *Old*: mature, experienced, antique, relic, senior, ancient
- *Fat*: obese, plump, corpulent, portly, porky, burly, husky, full-figured

**Details** – facts, observations, or incidents used to develop a subject
- What details does the author choose to include? What do they imply?
- What does the author choose to exclude? What are the connotations of their choice of details?
- PLEASE NOTE: Details are facts or fact-lets. They differ from images in that they don’t have a strong sensory appeal.

*Considering details. . .
- The speaker’s perspective shapes what details are given and which are not.
- Consider the OBJECTS the author links with a character, person, or place.
- Metaphors or other comparisons are also details.
- Details have connotations, just as words do.

**Imagery** - A passage that has lots of sensory details and is easy to picture, hear, smell, taste, and/or feel.
- What images does the author use? What does he/she focus on in a sensory (sight, touch, taste, smell, etc.) way?
- The kinds of images the author puts in or leaves out reflect his/her style? Are they vibrant? Prominent? Plain?
- NOTE: Images differ from detail in the degree to which they appeal to the senses. Details are small parts of a passage; imagery is a longer passage itself.
Considering imagery . . .

- Imagery depends on diction and detail, that is, vivid diction + careful selection of detail = imagery (a passage that is easy to picture, hear, smell, taste, and/or feel).
- Authors slow down and describe in detail when they want to EMPHASIZE something, so pay attention to WHAT is being described at length.

Syntax – the way sentences are constructed

- What are the sentences like? Are they simple with one or two clauses? Do they have multiple phrases? Are they choppy? Flowing? Sinuous like a snake? What emotional impression do they leave?
- If we are talking about poetry, is there a rhyme scheme? Examine the line lengths. Which words are emphasized because they are the last words on the end of a line?

Considering sentences . . .

- Parallel syntax (similarly styled phrases and sentences) creates interconnected emotions, feelings and ideas.
- Short sentences are punchy and intense. Long sentences are distancing, reflective and more abstract.
- Short sentences are often emphatic, passionate or flippant, whereas longer sentences suggest greater thought.
- Authors manipulate punctuation to achieve a desired effect. They use dashes, periods, and colons to create pauses and emphasize certain parts of a sentence.
- They use commas and semicolons to connect ideas.

Structure – How the author organizes information. Good authors are rarely monotone. A speaker's attitude can shift on a topic, or an author might have one attitude toward the audience and another toward the subject. The following are some clues to watch for...

- key words (but, yet, nevertheless, however, although)
- punctuation (dashes, periods, colons)
- paragraph divisions
- changes in sentence length
- sharp contrasts in diction

Considering structure: Look for...

- Ruptures in text
- Organizational patterns (how does the author organize information: compare contrast, narrative, chronological, etc.)

Tone – the author’s attitude toward the subject or audience. A reader must understand tone to understand meaning.

Considering tone...

- Diction, syntax, detail selection, and imagery all contribute to tone.

Adapted from Voice Lessons: Classroom Activities to Teach Diction, Detail, Imagery, Syntax, and Tone by Nancy Dean