

From Directed to Creative: A Deliberate Approach to Poetic Voice in Prose

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INTRODUCTION

In my senior English classes, I had despaired of finding a majority of students who knew that imagination was a part of writing. My students would give me less than that for which I asked and then try to cover more subjects than anyone possibly could in one paper. Then, I was given four creative writing classes and no curriculum. I thought I had awakened in the deepest pits of a certain hell. I dreaded the moment I would have to begin to grade. I had no idea what to expect. I was, however, pleasantly surprised. These students had imagination! Loads of it! They even knew how to tell a story!

“Whew,” I sighed, wiping my brow. “That first hurdle was not as high as I had feared!” I girded my loins and weighed further into the fray.

Sure, there were some problems. That’s why I have a job and a career I love. The students didn’t know how to properly format dialogue, and paragraphing appeared to be beyond their comprehension. Most of them lacked any hint of subtlety. But, these were things we could work through as we concentrated on those essential literary elements inherent in writing. There was, however, one major problem. It was Diction. Big, bad, Voice.

Though mature writers know that voice is extremely important, my students did not seem to see the significance of word choice. If they said what they meant and meant what they said, they figured they were through. *They had gotten their point across, hadn’t they?* Forget choosing specific words to make sure that their main points were illuminated and indelibly imprinted in the minds of their readers. They had no desire to paint vivid pictures of people, things, events, and emotions for elucidation, posterity, or the sheer fun of it! They did not seem to understand Garrett Hongo’s contention that:

... a feeling for language and its beauty ... brought me to poetry and kept me at it [because] I enjoy the sound of the language raised in quiet passion ... American poetry is a Memphis of languages – a place ... that sits at the confluence of rivers and cultural slipstreams ... [and] the poets I admire ... partake as much to me of a tradition of sacred speech, heightened speech – a reverence for the power, precision, and beauty in language ... [The] best of it teaches and encourages us that there is a glory and splendor in us, that delight is in our languages and in our capacities to be susceptible to them, to be moved by them. (xxxviii-ix)

For my students, language is simply a means to an end. Forget the deliberate arrangement of words on the page. That’s too much like work. That’s too much like a job – something they don’t realize that it could be and at which they could excel and enjoy, even as they make a lucrative living from it.

Well, I just couldn’t let this indifference fester, suppurate, and infect their writing to the point that it withered and they failed, so I endeavored to find ways to strengthen this aspect of their

writing short of amputation one grade range by agonizing grade range. Praying to find a means to ensure their writing health and class success, I sought avenues through which I could improve their word choices and the ways they placed those same words on the page. Lo and behold, poetry appeared to be the best answer to the questions posed. What better way to express yourself and the world around you or in your mind than through poetry? And who said poetry should only be used in poems? Why can't it be the stuff of which prose is composed – the bits and pieces, short side trips, and concise quests which make up the author's longer journey to his/her resolute truth in words?

With this thought in mind, and a definite goal before me, I set out to find materials that would aid in achieving my ultimate purposes – producing some of the world's finest future writers. And beyond this, I wanted to encourage my students to savor the fruits of their labor and the labor of their contemporaries who are destined to inhabit a world beyond the everyday realm because of their works. I felt that through the experience of practicing what is demanded of writers to live in the creative genius zip code, they would gain a greater appreciation of the written word. So, I actively sought out sources to use to show these things to my students. The results of my search? For the most part, I turned up empty-handed.

Though there are books, units, and chapters devoted to poetry writing and even to prose poetry, I found it very difficult to find materials which addressed in detail how to incorporate poetry into the writing of short stories, novellas, essays, and the like. I didn't give up, though. And my persistence was rewarded. The 2006 Houston Teachers Institute decided it was time to offer a Creative Writing seminar.

The major focus of this particular seminar was poetry in all its glory – from the schools and movements, to forms and discussions of the fruit, to clues imbedded and the teaching of the same – and it perfectly addresses my quest. Here I could find contemporary poets, new venues, and the works of educators who have both taught and written to the subject! All of the information I need in one place, where I could gather the data needed and compile it in a curriculum to disseminate to my students, who can then use it to let their words and worlds flow to a discriminating public which begins with me.

Thus, my passage began! As a 2006 Fellow, I intended to stay my course. That was the only way my students would have a chance to master diction. From the information I gathered to give them, I am certain their prose will wax poetic. Their words will ring ... from their verdant minds, across their computer screens, onto the paper, out into the classroom, down the halls of the school, around the world!

It is my intent to see that they tell their stories. But it is also my intent that each and every part of their stories is heard. Therefore, I want to ensure that they learn to tell their stories fully, but in pieces like most works, in the beginning, were published. And, each of these pieces will be constructed in pieces. They will tell their stories, beginning with the essential literary elements, and each of these elements will be divided into the bits that make up each of them. They will, then, be expressed in words that intimately describe their each and every facet. If it's setting, it will tell time and place, surely, but it will tell time in the passing of moments and with those sensory and imagery details which make up those moments, and it will give us places we can see, smell, hear, taste, and touch. Their characters will be characters we know and love or hate based on aspects of personality and actions we have personally witnessed and/or experienced and responded to because they have been made real to us. This task will be accomplished through the students' mastery of that key ingredient, diction – the deliberate choice and arrangement of words on the page to evoke or elicit a certain emotional response, an epiphany, the eruption of a cry from the soul surging forth. "Ah! What beauty! Aesthetics personified." A feat made possible through the use of poetry in prose.

Is it ambitious? Yes. Is it possible? With certainty! Is it desirous? Absolutely! That's why I have a job and a career I love.

BACKGROUND

"A prose poem is a poem written in prose rather than verse. But what does that really mean? Is it an indefinable hybrid? An anomaly in the history of poetry? Are the very words 'prose poem' an oxymoron?" (Lehman, jacket) "The prose poem has the unusual distinction of being regarded with suspicion not only by the usual haters of poetry, but also by many poets themselves," Charles Simic observed. So when Simic won the Pulitzer for *The World Doesn't End* in 1991, "It ... mark[ed] an event ... in the place of the prose poem ... Its validity as a form or genre with a specific appeal to American poets could no longer be denied" (11). With this acceptance, the prose poem becomes a viable medium through which students can express themselves without having to defend their use of poetry. Therefore, I am eager to "kill two birds with one stone" and to use this genre to further develop the distinctive voices of my students. To do this, I will have them write a novella.

The writing of this novella will be a semester project. The assignments for the first six-week cycle will focus on the language of poetry and the different types of poems we encounter on our journey to artistic veracity. These types include diamantes, haikus, odes, sonnets, epics, lyrics, raps, narratives, found poems, and free verse. Of these types of poetry, the students will learn the parameters and prescribed structures, and they will then use this knowledge to create original examples of these forms, both in groups and individually.

To make this more palatable, the students will be introduced to a variety of poetry from various cultures, so that they will not only have examples of most of the poetry types but examples to which they can relate and find relevant to their experiences and their worlds. For "in the twentieth century U.S ... we see the traces of several contests of cultures similar to what we now take for granted in our own several, even many, 'Americas'" (Gibbons 9). And, in the words of Garrett Hongo in his introduction in *The Open Boat: Poems from Asia*, this is important "because [it] is a plain fact that recognition has come to us and to our work as part of the American voice that is great within us. We are already upon the shore of the land, though, undeniably, there have been losses and lands left behind. We will not forget them" (xii). And we won't. We'll read them, and we will work from them.

Using these poems from diverse cultures as their patterns for form and theme, the students can then write their original pieces and rest comfortably knowing that they are directed by the poems and me, not merely put out there on their own to sink or swim as they will. Their guide, or their pattern, will be their safety net, and these assignments will serve as practice for future lessons where similar tasks will be required. These tasks will be of interest to them and, thus, should find them readily embracing the concepts to which they will be exposed and using them in the works they create.

To find a task of interest to them I, as a teacher, must look at themes. They are familiar with ones like unrequited love, so it should be simple to introduce them to the sonnet. As a class, we can write a sonnet on the subject of a love unreturned. We have only to look at some of the television shows they watch and find someone who obsesses over someone who barely knows the character is alive. We can take a recent show and have them tell of the interplay between these characters, jotting down key words and phrases. We can then turn these words into 14 lines of iambic pentameter, using the first eight to tell of the relationship and the last six to tell how the issue is resolved or why it can't be at present. Since it is their show, their words, and their beliefs on the subject, the students should buy into the assignment readily and put forth their best efforts to make the sonnet viable and provocative.

The focus of the second six-week cycle will lean more heavily towards prose writing where poetic language is used. The tools and techniques of the poet which would have been covered during the first six-week cycle – assonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia, similes, metaphors, rhyme, rhythm, sensory language – will be deliberately utilized in these writings which will focus on depicting the essential literary elements in story writing. We will begin with the speaker, whose voice will express the feelings and motivations of the writer. Then, the student will go through each of the main characters who carry the action of the story and end with plot development which will give us the highs, lows, and the solutions to the problems posed.

To begin this type of writing, I believe that the first few chapters need the most direction. Thus, when I tell the students to write about a particular character, I will also give them the scenario in which that character finds him/herself. For example, I would tell the students to write a chapter about the hero. I would continue my directions by telling them not only to write about the hero but also to write about the hero when he/she first discovers that he/she possesses special abilities, talents, or skills which set him/her apart from the general populace. Finally, I would ask them to have the hero go through a process where the implications of these special abilities are realized and wherein the responsibilities inherent in the same are manifested.

Though these parameters place a burden on the creativity of the student simply because they are boundaries, they also give the student a guide to follow. They know exactly what is expected of them in this scene, and they have been given a path to travel. Also, they are free to add anything else to the chapter that advances their plot and wins the interest of their readers. Even with parameters, they can make the piece uniquely theirs.

In the third six-week cycle, the students will edit and revise their work. It is in this phase that the major portion of this unit will come into play. Using the forms of poetry and the poetic tools and techniques they have learned, the students will expand their writings into chapters of a novel which has as its telling point the poetic language they will deliberately incorporate into their stories by using certain types of poems to gather the words and then transfer them into their tales in highly crafted sentences designed to make the writing more vivid, engaging, and engrossing.

To achieve this, I would ask the students to review one of their chapters, like a chapter centered on the villain and a stock character that also includes at least a brief mention of the hero. Then I would ask them to write a particular type of poem that reflects some of the elements found in that chapter. Diamantes seem particularly suited to this purpose since the students can be asked to write a synonym and an antonym diamante in which the villain is the major focus. After writing these diamantes, the students will then be asked to take each word in the poem and fit it, in a sentence that advances the plot and makes the writing more vivid, in the appropriate place in the chapter. To ensure each word is used, each sentence inserted will be recorded on the page on which the student has written the original diamante. If both a synonym and an antonym diamante are used, the student will add approximately 24 sentences to their original chapter during the editing and revising stage, fleshing out the chapter without using empty phrases or padding which adds nothing to the storyline.

IMPLEMENTATION

Since I believe that full immersion is the only way to go, I will start my students out on sonnets. I will give them the three major forms (Petrarchan, Shakespearean, and Spenserian), their structural similarities and differences, and the major theme(s) covered by each. After providing them with the argument and the answer format, the forms, the rhyme schemes, and the themes inherent in each, we will write class sonnets in each style. Then, I will have the students write both a group sonnet and an individually-crafted sonnet, again in each of the styles. Though they will grumble, they will do fairly well. Some of them, exceptionally well. And though they

are unaware of it, it is this type of poem that they will later have to write and use in the chapters they have devoted both to conflict and the archetypal temptress.

These first sonnet writing assignments, however, are particularly taxing. Forcing their thoughts into 14 lines of iambic pentameter (“Miss, does every line have to have ten syllables!?!”) and having those lines fit a particular rhyme scheme based on the type of sonnet it is, takes its toll on the students. Therefore, I take pity and center the next poetry writing assignment around the haiku.

Though the haiku is not truly an easy form of poetry, its very size misleads students into thinking that it is. Three lines don’t seem that threatening. The same is true of the 17 syllables divided between these three lines appear to be a breeze. And nature, place, and time seem to be natural subjects for this form. Therefore, the students will approach this assignment swaggering with confidence. They don’t have a clue that, later, these little three lines can make a huge difference in the setting they put in place in their novellas. They simply memorize the requirements, create and share their haikus, and move on to the next phase – the diamante.

The diamante, especially the antonym diamante, is simple. More importantly, it is visual. The students can see their words forming a picture, a diamond. It excites them. And their feelings about the subject matter are clear. Their descriptions are to the point, right on the money, and waste no words. It is the form of today — immediate, instantly gratifying. Boom, it’s over, done, and on the paper. The obvious relation to comparison and contrast doesn’t strike them. Nevertheless, I, the teacher, see it. And I use it in a later assignment where the students have created a chapter highlighting a meeting between the hero and the villain of their novella. The poem becomes an extremely helpful tool in fleshing out the traits of each of the characters when every word in it is translated into a sentence incorporated into the chapter during the editing and revision stage.

And, when we speak of translation, it goes beyond from word to sentence. Sometimes it crosses cultures. And this becomes relevant when we look at the cultures represented in our classrooms. Now, practically every teacher can say, “My school, where the world comes to learn!”

We have students from everywhere, representing every culture, religion, language imaginable. And we cross the spectrums in each culture – from the very devout to the practically atheistic, from extremely poor to unbelievably wealthy, from the unbound by any precept to the culturally shackled. And English may be the fifth or the first language, even for those born and bred in the United States, to families both well educated and illiterate. Therefore, we have to find lessons applicable to each and every one. In our case, we have to find examples of poetry that speak to issues in our students’ lives. One of these would be a Mexican poem, “Letter to the Wolf” by Carmen Boullosa that begins:

Dear Wolf:
I’ve reached here by crossing the open sea of forest,
The vegetable sea you inhabit,
The clearing of rage in the darkness and the light stealing across it,
In its dense, uninhabitable night full of howling that prevails even in the
daytime or in silence
A sea of leaves that fall and fall and grow and sprout, all at the same time,
of intertwined grasses,
Swells of birds,
waves of hidden creatures. (84)

This poem compares the sea and the forest to describe Mexico, but a sea and forest which are made up of the natural resources – including the fiery emotions of the people — and the natural beauty of the region in all their glory. Because it does so, the students whose roots are firmly imbedded in this culture find a bond, a tie, and relate to the poem because it reveals something they feel deeply. And I can use this bond to get them to mimic, then to expound on, and finally to create within the framework given. When they have done this, the students can then go on to expand the poem into an outline from which they can work to create a setting for a scene or chapter within their novella. They will already have much of the poetry needed to make the scenery aesthetically appealing visually, and they can pull its edges firm by adding other lines which make the reader touch, taste, smell, and hear their plot advancing, even as Boullosa does with *howling* wolves and *silence, swells of birds* with flapping wings and pounding *waves*, as well as *vegetable* seas promising sustenance in hers.

And just as setting can be handled through cultural poetry, so can some aspects of characterization. Take “Power” by Andrei Rerum:

Power is an inferiority complex would up like a clock by an inability to relax.
At the height of my power I have to be taken to a power source in the woods where I am recharged.

This power source is not actually in the woods: It’s in my mother.
It hums quietly in her heart like an atomic plant the place to plug in is her eyes.
(Handout from Claudia Rankine)

This poem can be used to show relationships between characters, as well as to reveal characters’ traits – the mother’s strength and determination; the son’s connection to and healthy dependence on his heritage and his ability to regroup and complete the task at hand. This is a poem both of cultural and familial pride. It can be used to tap into the students’ lives to make them comfortable using something personal to make their voices come through in their works. It shows an intimate part of them, and it speaks to something very dear to most of them – a mother’s love and what she exudes and exerts because of it to ensure the success of her offspring. This is something they recognize, value, and have no problem accepting; indeed, something they actively seek. Therefore, it should be something they can use to enhance their writing, even in something as simple as making it a trait of one of their main characters, a character that has just become more real because of its inclusion.

MATERIALS USED

The students will be provided several handouts to use in the writing process before beginning their novella. These will include, among others, a handout entitled Essential Literary Elements Study Guide.

Literary Elements

- I. Setting
 - A. Time
 1. Year/Date
 2. Time of Day
 3. Season

- B. Place
 - 1. Country
 - 2. City
 - 3. Urban/Rural
 - a. Size
 - b. Appearance
 - c. Significant Factors
- C. Climate
 - 1. Weather
 - 2. Political
 - 3. Economic
 - 4. Moral
- II. Characterization
 - A. Name
 - 1. Proper
 - 2. Title (*Dr., Mrs., Mr., Ms., etc.*)
 - 3. Diminutive (*nickname*)
 - B. Description
 - 1. Physical Appearance
 - a. Age
 - b. Gender
 - c. Ethnicity
 - d. Distinguishing Characteristics
 - C. Personal History
 - 1. Intellectual Capacity & Education
 - 2. Economic Status & Occupation
 - 3. Mental Disposition/Frame of Mind
- III. Perspective
 - A. Point of View
 - 1. Person & Number
 - 2. Specific
- IV. Plot
 - A. Exposition [Background]
 - B. Conflict(s) [Problem(s)]
 - 1. Type
 - 2. Specific
 - C. Climax [Turning/Highest Point]
 - D. Resolution
- V. Diction
 - A. Formal/Informal
 - B. Figurative Language
 - 1. Simile
 - 2. Metaphor
 - 3. Hyperbole
 - 4. Personification
 - 5. Other
 - C. Imagery

The following section should be in composition, rather than columnar, format:

VI. Summary/*Precis*/What is story about?

- A. What caused the problem?
- B. What was its effect?
- C. How was it solved?
- D. Your personal observations
- E. Do you feel the author was successful in meeting his/her purpose in writing the story?
Why? Why not?

Also included in the packet will be a cast of possible characters that introduces both the archetype and the stock character, as well as a list of expected parts of the novel.

Components of the Novella

The Speaker

A story always has a speaker. He/She/It should be identified or identifiable very early in the story. The initial assignment in the process will be to introduce the speaker in whatever way you, the writer, choose. The assignment will be at least two pages long.

The Setting

Where and when does the story take place? What is going on? To what senses does it appeal? Being as descriptive as possible, and using as vivid imagery as you can, answer these questions – fully. Provide at least two pages of writing. Be sure to use paragraphs.

The Hero

There should be a protagonist. There should be someone to whom the reader is supposed to be sympathetic. There should be someone that the story is about. Tell us about him/her/it. And don't start at the beginning ...yet. Tell us why we are meeting this person/thing. In what situation does he/she/it find him/her/itself? No, don't fully reveal the problem yet, but do hint at it. Tease us! And do it in more than a page, using paragraphs.

The Problem

Now tell us what's wrong. What has happened? What does the hero need to accomplish or bring about? What obstacles are before him/her/it? Take a couple of pages to tell us about it.

The Villain

Who/What stands in the hero's road to victory? Why? Introduce us to him/her/it. And tell us his/her/its story. When did he/she/it initially confront the hero or the knowledge of the hero? In what capacity? What happened? Why? What has it caused? Two or three pages should be sufficient to bring us up to speed about this character.

The Trickster

This character makes the life of the hero more interesting,

The Sage

This character is a wise man who is familiar with the hero and the situation and to whom the hero defers. The hero considers this character's advice. Indeed, he seeks it

The Temptress

This character seeks to seduce the hero and sway him from his destined path. He/She/It is to be shown in a scene with the hero where seduction is the weapon of choice and digression from the hero's task is the ultimate goal.

The Fool

This character often tags along with the hero or the villain and reveals particularly useful information, usually amid gibberish, as he/she alternately annoys and amuses others in the saga. And, in this chapter, one of the stock characters is to be highlighted along with the trickster or the fool. Scenario is one of your choosing.

Conflict

This chapter reveals the problem and shows the initial steps taken by hero to reach a resolution. Glimpses of the villain are to be given in this chapter.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson 1

In writing the novella, the first step would be to let the reader hear the speaker's voice. This character should be identified or identifiable very early in the story. The student is given the freedom to introduce the speaker in whatever way he/she chooses, as long as it is done in at least two pages. Parameters set include this length, as well as a brief insight into the major problem of the novel and a glimpse of the hero of the piece. The student is then given a brief modeling of what is expected.

I can still recall how he was before "it" happened ... so sweet, so innocent, so open and free. Now he's closed and silent. Sullen, even. And he rarely smiles. He's a totally different person. Thanks to Tully.

Tully's a Gnotderng. Better than most, but still a Gnotderng. He can beg, borrow, and steal with the best of them. And lying ... it should be his middle name. Or, maybe, his first 'cause that's what he did to Aaron. Told a big, whopping, fat lie and nothing's been the same since! Who could have known that one lie – a lie supported and built upon innumerable layers of other lies – would cause a whole world to change. Deception, thy name is Tully! (Dabbs)

After a discussion of the elements contained and revealed in the modeled piece, the student is asked to write his/her "Introduction to the Speaker" chapter. After having done this, a fellow student will critique the chapter using the following rubric:

A Writer's Rubric to Critiquing

This is a writer's rubric – one designed to help you pick a work to pieces so that you learn how to put one together; therefore, it is much longer than a normal rubric.

1. What is implied/stated main idea? Provide supporting ideas and paraphrase what you gained from the reading.
2. Using reasoning and what you read, predict where the story is going. Draw conclusions and generalizations about what you think will happen.
3. Are there any cultural characteristics related which could be developed to make the story more interesting and unique?
4. What do you know about the story? What else would you like to learn?
5. Who is the best audience for the story? Will this audience find the logic in the story credible? Or are there errors that need to be addressed?
6. Conventions: Appropriate word choice. Correct sentence structure, transition.
7. Mechanics: Correct capitalization, punctuation, spelling.
8. Does the passage capture your interest?

9. Is the speaker's voice and stance established?
10. Is at least one central matter revealed?
11. Is the first sentence memorable?
12. Any other personal comments/observations?
13. What elements (*appropriate literary elements*) are covered?
14. Is the writing lively, neither too casual nor too stiff?
15. Is the work concise, or are more words than necessary used to make a point?
16. Is the writing redundant, or are there expressions that repeatedly say the same thing?
17. Is figurative language in place to add vividness?
18. Has sensory language been put in place to help reader become a part of the story?
19. Have intensifiers been excised or pruned?
20. To make a character more real the writer uses certain tools. As you critique your classmates' scenario, make note of whether or not they've used the following to help the reader better "see" and "know" the characters:

Description	Cause	Effect
Comparisons	Contrasts	Problems
Examples		
21. Expound on the diction used in the scene. What literary tools/devices are used?

Editing and revising will follow the critique, and the student and I will have a conference, one-on-one, following completion of this step to discuss whether or not he/she has met the criteria set forth and what can be done, if anything, to make their piece more intensely descriptive and, thus, more interesting to potential readers. Following this, the chapter will be set aside until such time as all written chapters are put together and the final editing and revising stage begins.

Lesson 2

The first logical step in the process would be the writer showing the reader when and where the story takes place; therefore, the next step in the process is for the student to establish the major setting for the action to take place. He/She is asked to be as descriptive as possible in this chapter, and to consider more than time and place when writing this chapter. Given the instruction that literature reflects life and mirrors – even if distorted – a particular period of time, the student is asked to include in the setting climate, as in weather, but also as in political, economic, and moral. This gives their work a realistic flavor that becomes invaluable in keeping the reader's attention. And, like with their speaker, the student is not simply turned "loose." Parameters are set, including that the chapter appeals to all of the senses, be as descriptive and vivid as possible, and is at least two pages long. And, modeling is done here as well to give the students a guide and an example of what is expected of him/her:

She heard the faint report of laser guns in the distance. The balmy breeze carried a whiff of the ocean and the distinctly un-pleasant smell of burning wood – fresh and cured – and flesh. She shuddered. *"You would think, after 3000 years of living together, the Vlodging and man could get along; but, no! Someone had to vie for leadership – really enslavement – of the rest of the populace. That desire had cost everyone else their peace!"* And what a high cost it had been! Economic ruin and devastated infrastructures were just the tip of the iceberg! She wiped away an errant tear as she thought of the many gold-inlaid skyscrapers that lay in ignoble piles of rubbish in the city. Three thousand five had had an auspicious beginning. (Dabbs)

Again, after a discussion of the elements contained and revealed in the modeled piece, the student will be asked to write his/her "Setting" chapter. After having done this, a fellow student will

critique the chapter using the rubric initially provided. However, another aspect is added to this chapter.

After having had the chapter critiqued, and following its editing and revision, the student is asked to revisit and reread the chapter. Once this has been done, he/she is asked to write three haikus that are inspired by it. These haikus are to cover three aspects: sensory details (as in touch, taste, smell and hear), emotional aspects (as in what it makes the reader feel), and those things visually beheld (or seen with the natural eye). Once these haikus are evaluated, they are to be developed into mini-essays – each a minimum of three paragraphs that consist of at least three sentences. These paragraphs are to be inserted into the chapter, a sentence at a time, to expand it and to make it more descriptive.

Lesson 3

Characterization is the most essential element in writing. For this reason I will have the students devote more than one chapter to each of their major characters. One of the characters with which I believe the students will have the most fun is that of the Fool/ Trickster. With this in mind I will have them develop a chapter wherein the Fool/ Trickster is interacting with another character – the hero, the villain, an archetypal character, or a stock character. Then, at a later time, I will ask them to write another chapter in which the Fool/Trickster poses a riddle, the solving of which drives the action of this new chapter. I will model this for them, beginning my chapter with a riddle:

*Leaving a trail of varied colors in its wake
Without speaking it tells of what's gone before.
Small, yet sometimes deadly, is its effect
As it silently screams what's happening today
And what is possible tomorrow*

He didn't know where to begin. He wished that his foster mote wouldn't be so cryptic, but he was simply wishing in vain. He knew straightforward was a concept that she couldn't begin to comprehend. He sighed. *"There's no doubt about it. I'll have to find someone to help me solve this. I haven't a clue of what it is she's referring to in this impossible riddle, and I have no idea how the answer is supposed to help me in this ridiculous quest."* He bent over and kissed Kimeri's sleeping brow; then he gathered his pack and his sword, sheathing the latter at his side and slinging the former over his shoulder. Without a backwards glance, he stalked out of the small cabin and headed towards the dense forest which cast its shadow over the edge of the valley in which he'd grown to an early manhood. (Dabbs)

When the students have written this chapter, they will exchange it with their partner and each will critique the other using the writer's rubric provided. Following this, the students will be asked to again review the chapter to make the suggested changes where necessary and to add adjectives where intensity without redundancy is both necessary and possible. They will then be asked to once again review the chapter with the express purpose of again revising it, but this time by changing words when and where it is possible to create consonance, assonance, and alliteration. When the students have done this, they will submit their papers to me. And, after I have had an opportunity to read them, I will have conferences, one-on-one, with each student to praise his/her efforts, point out the best things in the chapters, and to make suggestions for improvement before the final work is presented, as a whole, to me.

CONCLUSION

By combining assignments that utilize different types of poetry and those writing assignments that are simply compositions in prose, my students will end up with pieces that reflect

components of each and are better because of it. They will have vivid, imaginative writing that has an aesthetic appeal as well as entertainment or informative value. Their novella will be descriptive and will have “the rich patina of elegant syntax and coloraturas of dense accentuals sliding into the syncopated rhythms of common speech” (Hongo xxxix). Their works will speak, loudly and clearly, to their readers. And I will know I have done my part to keep the job I have and the career that I love. That is its own reward.

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