

DIDLS PROSE ANALYSIS METHOD

Just as each of us has a particular, unique way of presenting ourselves, writers have unique ways of presenting themselves. Our personalities shine through the way we talk, the words we choose, the gestures we use, the clothes we wear. A writer has only language to express his/her personality.

DIDLS stands for Diction, Imagery, Details, Language, and Syntax. They are basic elements of a writer's style. By analyzing and interpreting them together, it helps the reader to figure out the atmosphere, tone, and theme of a work.

By using DIDLS you should be able to answer the following questions:

- What atmosphere (effect upon the reader) is created by the selection?
- What tone (author's attitude toward the subject) does the selection have?
- To what overall theme/lesson does the relationship between these elements lead the reader?

DICTION

- **Diction is** the author's word choice, and it includes *connotation* (the suggested meaning of a word) and *denotation* (the literal meaning of the word). Diction guides the meaning an author wants the reader to take away from the text.
- **To analyze diction**, find noun phrases, verb phrases, adjective phrases, or specific words that jump out at you
- **When interpreting diction, some questions you should ask yourself are:**
 - Why did the author choose that word over that word?
 - How does the author's word choice affect my understanding?
 - What was the author's motive in choosing this specific word or phrase?
 - What is the relationship of word choice to the author's purpose and the effectiveness of the piece?

IMAGERY

- **Imagery is** an appeal to the five senses (sight, smell, sound, taste, touch). Images help convey the author's attitude and tone.
- **To analyze imagery**, find descriptions and figurative language that appeals to the senses.
- **When interpreting imagery, some questions you should ask yourself are:**
 - What imagery does the author use, and to what senses do these appeal?
 - What does he/she focus on in a sensory way? Is there one more than the others?
 - How do the kinds of images the author puts in or leaves out reflect his/her style?
 - Are the images vibrant? Prominent? Plain?
 - Why did the author choose this particular image?
 - What sound devices (i.e., alliteration, assonance, consonance, repetition) does the author use, and what effect do these have on meaning?
 - How does this image affect this piece of literature?

NOTE: Images differ from detail in the degree to which they appeal to the senses.

DETAILS

- **Details are** facts that help color an otherwise drab "picture" for the reader. Details give life to characters, settings, and situations. It is through details that the reader is able to form precise mental images.
- **To analyze detail**, look at the specific facts the author choose to include or omit
- **When interpreting details, some questions you should ask yourself are:**
 - What details does the author choose to include? What does the author choose to exclude?
 - What do they imply?
 - What are the connotations of his/her choice of details?
- **NOTE:** Details are facts or fact-lets. They differ from images in that they don't have a strong sensory appeal.

LANGUAGE

- **Language is** the entire body of words in a piece of text. This is not the same as **diction**, which involves merely isolated examples of words. The language used in a text helps shape it as a whole.
- **To analyze language**, look at the diction collectively, the level of vocabulary, and how the words are all functioning together.
- **When interpreting language, some questions you should ask yourself are:**
 - What is the overall impression of the language the author uses?
 - Does it reflect education? A particular profession?
 - Is it plain? Ornate? Simple? Clear? Figurative? Poetic?
- **Consider overall use of language. Is it...?**

Colloquial (slang)	Old-fashioned
Informal (conversational)	Formal (literary)
Connotative (suggestive meaning)	Denotative (exact meaning)
Concrete (specific)	Abstract (general or conceptual)
Euphonious (pleasant sounding)	Cacophonous (harsh sounding)
Monosyllabic (one syllable)	Polysyllabic (more than one syllable)

SYNTAX

- **Syntax is** the way sentences are structured and the way they are crafted.
- **To analyze syntax**, look for varied uses of punctuation, paragraph divisions, sentence length, and sharp contrasts in diction. Also you should look for patterns.
- **When interpreting syntax, some questions you should ask your are:**
 - What are the sentences like? Are they simple with one or two clauses? Do they have multiple phrases? Are they choppy? Flowing? Why are some sentences long? Why are some short?
 - Is there a variety of sentence structure (simple, compound, complex, compound-complex)?
 - Does the author use specialized sentence variety, such as inverted word order, parallel structure, balance, etc.?
 - How does the sentence structure affect the reader?
 - What emotional impression do they leave?
 - How does it affect the text?
 - What purpose does the structure of various sentences serve?
- **The construction of sentences to convey attitude:**

○ Declarative	assertive—a statement
○ Imperative	authoritative—command
○ Interrogative	asks a question
○ Simple sentence	one subject and one verb
○ Loose sentence	details after the subject and verb—happening now
○ Periodic sentence	details before the subject and verb—reflection on a past event
○ Juxtaposition	normally unassociated ideas, words or phrases placed next together
○ Parallelism	show equal ideas; for emphasis; for rhythm
○ Repetition	words, sounds and ideas used more than once—rhythm
○ Rhetorical question	a question that expects no answer
- **Punctuation is included in syntax:**

○ Ellipses	a trailing off, equally etc.; going off into a dreamlike state
○ Dash	interruption of a thought; an interjection of a thought into another
○ Semicolon	parallel ideas; equal ideas; a piling up of detail
○ Colon	a list a definition or explanation; a result
○ Italics	for emphasis
○ Capitalization	for emphasis
○ Exclamation point	for emphasis; for emotion