



Language

You're Saying That Again?: Avoiding Clichés Grades 9-12

Rationale

- ✚ Students use clichés because they are familiar; however, using clichés makes writing boring and trite. Students who learn to avoid clichés and develop fresh ways of expressing complicated ideas will add interest to their writing passages and improve their writing skill.

Goal

- ✚ To recognize and avoid clichés in one's own writing

Standards

- ✚ **L9-10.5a** Interpret figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze their role in the text.
- ✚ **L.11-12.5.** Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Objectives

- ✚ Students will identify commonly used phrases and clichés that they use frequently.
- ✚ Students will revise text in order to avoid the use of clichés and add interesting phrases to their writing.

Materials

- ✚ A list of commonly used phrases and clichés for teacher reference. A good place to find such a list: ClichéSite.com (<http://www.clichesite.com>), a place that lists several clichés in English and American usage. You can hand out the list or create a poster to hang in the classroom.

Procedures

- ✚ Introduce the lesson by writing a list of half-finished clichés on the board. You can use the following list for reference. (Bear in mind that some clichés are regional and don't translate well to other areas. If students are unfamiliar with these, come up with some familiar ones used in your area.)
 - That test was as easy as _____[pie]
 - It's raining cats and _____[dogs]

- A little _____ told me... [bird]
- Take the _____ way out [easy]

- ✚ Have students finish the clichés and add more. Talk about the meanings.
- ✚ Then hand out the list of common clichés. Ask students why most people would use clichés. Explain that clichés are phrases that have lost their meaning or effectiveness through overuse.
- ✚ Choose a few clichés and brainstorm with students more interesting or figurative ways to express the same thing. Model for students, and relate the resulting figurative language to terms students may have already learned: **metaphor, simile, oxymoron, hyperbole** (exaggeration), **litotes** (understatement), or **personification**.
- ✚ Divide students into groups or pairs. Give students a topic, such as *love* or *friendship*, that can spark many common clichés. As a class, identify a few good clichés on the list that students can use in their texts.
- ✚ Allow each group to write a paragraph or poem that contains at least five of the clichés mentioned. Encourage students to add as many as they can, even if the clichés were not mentioned by the rest of the class. Circulate to monitor the class and be available to ask questions. Remind students when there are five minutes remaining.
- ✚ Ask groups to exchange papers when time is completed. Allow each group 10 minutes to underline the clichés and revise the texts using interesting, fresh ways to say the same thing. Circulate to monitor the class and be available to ask questions. Remind students when there are five minutes remaining.
- ✚ Have each group share their most “creative” revisions. Discuss with the class the effectiveness of the revisions.
- ✚ **Closing:** Have students discuss the difficulties they may have had with the lesson and what they could do to make avoiding clichés easier.

Teacher Tips

- ✚ Differentiate between cliché and slang. While both should be avoided, slang is particular to a certain segment of the population and is not as commonly used or as widely known as a cliché.
- ✚ Recognize that some clichés may not be familiar to your students. Make sure that “unfamiliar” clichés are well explained.
- ✚ If some students struggle with the revision process, allow pairs to work together on the revisions.
- ✚ To challenge students, consider using the following activity to replace the initial activity in the lesson:
 - Give students a topic, such as *love, fear, food, or life*.
 - Give students 2 minutes to come up with as many familiar sayings as they can.
 - Create a complete list when students share out on the board.
 - Use this list when students write their poem or paragraph

Extension Activities

- ✚ Have students do a “cliché hunt.” Ask students to watch TV, look online, or read newspapers/magazines and record the instances of cliché that they find. (You may want to give students more than one day to complete this assignment.) Discuss the results as a class.

- ✚ Compare two stories – one pop fiction and one “literature” (don’t tell the students which is which) and have them identify which has, per page, more clichés. (You could also do this with literary and popular magazine articles.) Relate the use of clichés to the quality of literature.
- ✚ Have students look up the etymology of the word cliché and analyze how its original meaning relates to its meaning today.
- ✚ Discuss as a class: Is there ever a time when using clichés is appropriate? Have students either write an essay to defend their position, or you could develop students’ ideas into a debate.
- ✚ Work with students to develop a poster that illustrates a single cliché and lists several new, fresh ways of saying the same thing. Post prominently on a bulletin board for future reference.