

## Level 3 Elective – Descriptive Language

### ‘Words’

Ah, language, that most fortuitous turn of evolution that separated us from molluscs slithering upon the ground, and other creatures almost as intelligent as us, but lacking what we have perfected; the extraordinary use of words.

Ah the tool-kit with which we have been endowed, that allows us, should we desire it, to let every word that drops from our lips have precise and unique intention, and create intricate magical worlds.

Not content with mere speech we humans have ascended even loftier heights, inventing a plethora of tricks, formulae and techniques that power-boost our talent, and elevate mere storytelling to rhetoric, eulogy, and even poetry.

Who would think that only using words that start with the same letter; ‘he bravely broached his boiling bloody breast’, or alliteration, that most treasured of writers’ tools, could produce such exquisite listening?

Or that a polyptoton, using a trusty word again, in the same or slightly different grammatical context, could turn the common into the exotic: ‘I am a stranger, in a strange land.’

Even just separating one thing from another with a semi-colon, or practicing antithesis, sounds erudite, or is Oscar Wilde’s phrase: ‘The well-bred contradict people; the wise contradict themselves,’ not utterly self-assured?

We have perfected the art of making our remarks memorable by altering the wording, and a set of phrases strung together becomes a speech, something our species loves to hear.

Nowhere more than in this room, where Toastmasters gather to speak publicly, to regale each other with oration, to evaluate and compete, do we see how much words matter.

As Toastmasters, our self-professed calling is to safeguard the heritage handed down to us by our fireside ancestors over generations, and recognise the constructions we sometimes unconsciously use. We should know that words follow an order; opinion, size, shape, colour, origin, material, purpose, so that: 'The green handsome little frog young French', cannot be said.

We should know that when we say 'Ladies and Gentlemen' we are using merism, which succeeds by its long-windedness, for is not 'people' adequate and available?

That a merism taken too far becomes a blazon, an awkward gushing torrent: 'Thine eyes are diamonds, thy voice music, thy breath sweet perfume, etcetera...'

We must be measured then, we must know what we want, we must not overindulge nor be anorexic with words; we must choose well.

And in seeking greatness we should look back at the greats, at those who went before, knowing exactly what they said and why.

Who used synaesthesia to effect, describing one sense in terms of another: 'She smelled the way the Taj Mahal looks by moonlight.'

Who made a verbal sandwich, or diacope; a word, another word, the first word again: 'The name is Bond, James Bond'.

Who personified, beautifully, thus: 'His eyes are orange, his tongue is black, he has purple prickles all over his back.'

In ancient times the Greeks already used aposiopesis, from 'becoming silent'; punctuation with three dots in order to slow... things... down.

For eons poets have known to write in meter; 'It is an ancient Mariner'; papum, papum papum; trimeter. Tetrameter sounds even loftier, more romantic; papum, papum, papum, papum: 'Tis better to have loved and lost...'

And mighty pentameter, five papums, sounds Shakesperean: 'If music be the food of love, play on'.

Palindromes were invented long ago; 'radar', 'madam' and 'a nut for a jar of tuna'.

As were rhetorical questions: 'How cute is that Koala?' needs no answer, does it?

My friends, we use words to impress, and should know we do so.

That: 'Marry in haste, repent at leisure' is an isocolon, aptly used.

That this: 'Can we kick it, yes we can' is prodding hypophora.

That: 'As thin as a rake' is a simple simile.

But friends, now I must confess my own trick.

Some have seen it already, I am sure.

My sentences have been getting ever shorter.

Precisely one word shorter per sentence.

I started with thirty-six words.

This only has four.

A gimmick undoubtedly.

But effective?

Judge!