



Nonfiction Analysis – “Being Mean” Grade Seven

Skill Focus

Levels of Thinking					
Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyze	Evaluate	Create
Close Reading		Grammar		Composition	
Reading Strategies Annotation Inference Paraphrase Summary Literary Elements Diction connotation denotation vocabulary Theme Tone Figures of Speech Metaphor Personification Simile Sound Devices Alliteration Onomatopoeia Literary Techniques Argumentation cause/effect comparison/contrast	Parts of Speech Usage Direct/Indirect Objects Phrases Infinitive Prepositional Clauses Dependent/Subordinate Independent Syntax Techniques Parallelism (8) Repetition		Types (modes) Expository analytical cause/effect Narrative Style/Voice Imitation of Stylistic Models		

Materials and Resources

- “Being Mean” from *Living Up the Street* by Gary Soto

Lesson Introduction

The activity that follows allows students to use close reading techniques to practice all of the levels of thinking: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. This type of multi-layered thinking is possible most of the time when students analyze a text through discussion or writing. An instructor’s questions should ideally lead students into this progression of thinking. With enough practice, students will begin to move through the levels naturally as they read, discuss, and write about literature, film, and visual media.



Nonfiction Analysis – “Being Mean” Grade Seven

Activity 1: Analysis of a Nonfiction Text

Read “Being Mean” by Gary Soto. Then complete the activities listed below.

1. Draw and label the neighborhood described in this narrative. Use a blank sheet of paper. Be sure to include all the following: Braly Street, the Soto’s house, Coleman Pickles, the junkyard, Sun-Maid Raisin with its concrete tower, the sycamores, Challenge Milk, a printing shop, the 7-Up Company, the alley, a broom factory, Western Book Distributor, the Molinas’s house, the name of the city, the year.
2. In your own words, explain what the words listed below mean in the context of the story.
 - a. Orneriness (1)
 - b. Inherently (2)
 - c. Provocation (3)
3. Identify the figurative language and sound devices in the lines below.

A-Simile B-Metaphor C-Onomatopoeia D-Personification

- a. _____ “we played with the Molinas who lived down the alley from us right across from the broom factory and its brutal ‘whack’ of straw being tied into brooms” (2).
- b. _____ “a baby in her arms crying like a small piece of machinery turning at great speed” (2).
- c. _____ “Screaming, his mouth opened wide enough to saucer a hat into” (3).
- d. _____ “Furious as a bee I ran to fight the kid” (3).
- e. _____ “A small flame lit my brain” (4).
- f. _____ “I called to it and it came, purring” (4).



- g. _____ “I wailed like a siren” (5).
- h. _____ “his crazed laughter like the mad scientists of the movies...” (5).
- i. _____ “he threw a tomato and it splashed my T-shirt like a bullet wound” (6).
- j. _____ “her mouth was puckered into a dried fruit...” (6).
- k. _____ “my fear disappeared like an ash picked up by the wind” (7).
5. Choose three of the comparisons in the excerpts above and explain what the comparisons added to your understanding or perception of the scene or object being described.
6. Explain the phrase “wiser by vision of death” (5).
7. Why do the Soto children call one another “Jap” and “damn German” when playing war?
8. Why do you think the Soto children were so mean?
9. Give two effects of the children’s watching the program on fire prevention.

10. What inference can be made about the effect of television on kids by looking at the actions of the Soto children? Do you think the inference suggested by the story is a valid one?

11. Why do kids sometime go “looking for trouble”?

12. Draw your own neighborhood. Use actual buildings and people who really exist in a story you write, a story about a time when you or someone you know has been “mean.”

Activity 2: For Further Study

Read the following passage from the essay.

This was 1957. My brother Rick was six, I was five, and Debra was four. Although we looked healthy, clean in the morning, and polite as only Mexicans can be polite, we had a streak of orneriness that we imagined to be normal play. That summer – and the summer previous – we played with the Molinas who lived down the alley from us right across from the broom factory and its brutal “whack” of straw being tied into brooms. There were eight children on the block that year, ranging from twelve down to one, so there was much to do: Wrestle, eat raw bacon, jump from the couch, sword fight with rolled-up newspapers, steal from neighbors, kick chickens, throw rocks at passing cars.... While we played in the house, Mother Molina just watched us run around, a baby in her arms crying like a small piece of machinery turning at great speed. Now and then she would warn us with a smile, “Now you kids, you’re going to hurt yourselves.” We ignored her and went on pushing one another from an opened window, yelling wildly when we hit the ground because we imagined that there was a school of sharks ready to snack on our skinny legs.

1. Write the two things being contrasted in the second sentence.

2. Identify one example of alliteration and one of onomatopoeia.



3. Examine the list of activities engaged in by the “eight children on the block.”
 - a. What part of speech is each element in the parallel list?

- b. Write those that seem to be normal activities for children this age.

- c. Write those that seem quirky, odd, or out-of-place in the list.

4. Rewrite this sentence, using Soto’s syntax but changing the words. Write about your own class. Use this pattern:

There were twenty-five students in the classroom, ranging from twelve to fifteen, so there was much to do.

one-word verb (*wrestle*), verb plus direct object (*eat raw bacon*), verb plus

prepositional phrase (*jump from the couch*), verb plus prepositional phrase

(*sword fight with rolled-up newspapers*), verb plus prepositional phrase (*steal from*

neighbors), verb plus direct object (*kick chickens*), verb plus direct object plus

prepositional phrase (*throw rocks at passing cars*).

5. Write the simile. Complete this sentence: A _____ is being compared to a _____ because what the two have in common is _____.

6. Examine the diction in the last sentence.

- a. Which word does not seem to describe accurately a “school of sharks”?

- b. What is the rhetorical effect of using this light-hearted word when referring to sharks? In other words, why do you think Soto chose this word?

7. Examine the alliteration in the last sentence.
 - a. How does Soto’s use of all those *S*’s make the sentence sound?
 - b. Is this sentence’s meaning as appropriately terrifying and brutal as one would expect of a “school of sharks”?

8. Imitate the grammatical form of this last sentence. Here is your pattern:

We verb (*ignored*) and verb (*went on pushing*) one another prepositional phrase (*from an opened window*) participial phrase (*yelling loudly*) dependent clause (*when we hit the ground*) dependent clause (*because we imagined*) dependent clause plus adjective (*that there was a school of sharks ready*) infinitive phrase (*to snack on our skinny legs*).

9. Write the words and phrases that have negative meanings in the left-hand column. Two are written for you. Write the words and phrases that have positive meanings in the right-hand column. Two are done for you.

Negative Connotations	Positive Connotations
“streak of orneriness” “brutal”	“healthy” “clean”

10. Is the tone of this passage more like the positive words or like the negative words?

Challenge Activity

Write a paragraph explaining how Soto develops this tone through rhetorical devices. Choose any three devices.

- diction
- figurative language
- repetition
- contrast
- parallelism