

Lesson: Paragraph Imitating – Changing Gears

Problem: Transitions that are meaningless

Solution: Paragraph Imitating – Changing Gears

The Point: Sometimes students paste on transition words that don't seem to mean anything or serve any function. This exercise teaches them to let the transition words truly drive the direction of a thought.

Teaching it:

We're going to do a short exercise about transition words. The purpose of this is NOT to produce a great piece of writing, but to get the feeling of transition words. Look through your journal or your thoughts and select a person you can talk about. Look up when you have one. Now write a sentence about that person, naming one characteristic of that person. For instance, "My grandmother was kind." Or "My brother was stingy." Now write your sentence and stop. Look up when you are done. (Pause while audience writes.) Still writing about the same subject, think about one thing that person did that demonstrates that characteristic. In other words, write one thing you saw them do that tells you they are really as you described them. (Pause) Begin the next sentence with "When asked why he (or she) behaved in this manner," and finish the sentence. (Pause) Begin the next sentence with 'Gradually.' (Pause) Begin the last sentence with 'To this day.'

Let's see what happened. Read yours to someone near. (Pause) Did anyone hear one that made sense? (Share several.) Read your piece without the transition words and phrases. What do you notice?"

Let's look at the paper by the writer who used these words originally. Her name is Elisa Leal, and she's a high school student. (Show the paper by Elisa Leal.)

Debriefing questions:

1. Can anyone talk about what it was like to focus on an assertion and be handed the words, "Gradually," etc.?
2. How would you lead this exercise differently at a younger grade? Would you teach what these words do at a younger grade?

Spin-offs:

1. Go back to a piece of your writing. Read through it, looking for transitional words, phrases, or sentences. List them and try a paragraph imitation with them.
2. Read through any short passage and mark transitional words, phrases, and sentences that you see. List them and imitate.

Elisa Leal
Score Point 4

Once, in a bog not far from here, there lived a toad. Timothy Toad, they called him, and he was a very nice toad, though not very pretty. His skin was all brown and warty, and his eyes were yellow and watery. However, despite his appearance, Timothy had many friends.

One day as he was hopping along merrily, Timothy saw a sight that bewitched him. He had laid eyes on a fairy. Not just any fairy, but the Great Fairy of the Bog, other wise known as Magenta. Timothy instantly fell in love with the Great Fairy. He admired her pearly, glossy wings and lusted after the deep violet hue that radiated from the pixies fair skin. Her chestnut hair and light blue eyes beckoned to Timothy and forgetting who and what he was, he stepped forth into the clearing.

Magenta, a beautiful yet narcissistic spite, took one look at Timothy and nearly flew away. “What business have you here, toad?” Magenta asked naughtily.

“None, except my wish to look upon your grace, for I believe that I am in love,” answered Timothy courteously.

“Love? Thou believest that one as lovely as I would take interest in thee? Ha! Surely you jest, O Squatting One,” Magenta replied most disrespectfully. She took notice of the many warts that plagued his brown patchy skin. She became repulsed at the sight of those watery, yellow eyes that looked in admiration up her. “Oh, what funny legs!” She thought to herself, “Surely, I, Magenta, the Great Fairy of the Bog deserve better than this beast?”

“Be gone!” she said finally, after a long pause of silence. “I have no time to sit here and waste my time with one so unworthy as you.” And with a flick of a glittery wings, she left the poor toad weeping in the clearing.

Timothy **was heartbroken**. He wouldn't eat and wouldn't sleep. He stopped conversing with friends and neighbors and became bitter towards all. **When asked why he behaved in this manner, he** merely replied, “Blame it on the so called Great Fairy.” **Gradually,** his friends gave up and just left him alone. **To this day,** he sits alone on his stump and both curses and longs for the Great Fairy, Magenta.