

Putting it All Together—Tone Analysis
“The Tell-Tale Heart”
Foundation Lesson—Middle School

Objective

Students will

- analyze the effect of the point of view in a short story.
- determine the tone of an excerpt from a short story.
- analyze the effect of a writer’s use of vivid verbs and specific nouns in a text.
- determine how a writer’s use of figurative language helps to reveal character and tone in a text.
- analyze the effect of various syntactical elements (phrases, clauses, and repetition) in an excerpt from a short story.

Level

English: Middle School

Common Core Standards

RL.6.1	L.6.3	W.6.2
RL.6.2	L.6.4	W.6.3
RL.6.4	L.6.5	W.6.5
RL.6.6	L.7.3	W.7.2
RL.7.1	L.7.4	W.7.3
RL.7.2	L.7.5	W.7.5
RL.7.4	L.8.3	W.8.2
RL.8.1	L.8.4	W.8.3
RL.8.2	L.8.5	W.8.5
RL.8.3		
RL.8.4		

Connections to AP*

Analysis of tone and the literary and rhetorical devices that create tone is a skill that recurs in both the free response and multiple choice sections of AP English Literature and AP English Language Exams.

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Materials

“The Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe
 PAT lesson student activity pages

Skill Focus

Levels of Thinking					
Remember	Understand	Apply	Analyze	Evaluate	Create
Close Reading		Grammar		Composition	
Reading Strategies Inference Summary Literary Elements Detail Diction Imagery Point of View Theme Tone tone determined through diction, imagery, detail, Figures of Speech (Figurative Language) Metaphor Personification Literary Techniques Characterization Literary Forms Fiction		Parts of Speech Usage Pronoun/Antecedent Agreement Phrases Infinitive Prepositional Clauses Dependent/Subordinate Independent Syntax Techniques Repetition anaphora Analysis of a Text Meaning and Effect related to parts of speech, phrases, clauses, sentences, and syntax		Types (modes) Descriptive Expository analytical Narrative Multiple Mode Personal The Process of Composition Revision of Multiple Drafts precise diction sentence variety Editing sentence structure usage choosing vivid verbs Style/Voice Conscious Manipulation of Sentence Patterns Coordination/Subordination Imitation of Stylistic Models (beyond sentences) Selection of Detail Selection of Vocabulary Use of Literary Elements	

Teacher Notes

Ideally, most lessons in an English classroom using Pre-AP strategies would be like this one, blending the skills of close reading, grammar, composition, and thinking. Focusing on a rich text, however brief, analyzing the use of language in it, and using those language techniques to enrich the writer’s own technique—these activities inform and reinforce students’ abilities to form connections among all the aspects of language study. Any short, complex text can form the basis of this kind of lesson.

In this lesson, each of the major ELA strands is covered separately. Teachers can use all or parts of the lesson, depending on the needs of their classes. It’s very important, though, that students are not asked to complete the lesson on their own. The lesson is intended as a guide for teachers to lead students to more complex, higher levels of thinking.

Definitions and Examples

Teachers should review the following terms before using this lesson:

- Point of View
- Diction
- Imagery
- Metaphor
- Personification
- Persona

Additional activities

As an alternative to simply having students mark text on question numbers 7–9, teachers may create an activity that includes manipulatives.

Have students write their examples of diction, imagery, and detail on notecards. On the board or a flipchart, have them place their examples under these labels (diction, imagery, and detail). Then have students brainstorm what patterns they see and then group the cards by those patterns. For example, they might see sounds (groan, crying, chuckled) or actions (spring, stalked, enveloped). This will help students answer questions 10–12.

Resources available on the LTF website:

- Phrase toolbox
- Clause toolbox (with lists of subordinating conjunctions)
- List of tone/mood words
- PAMDISS foundation lesson on revision
- Literary terms

Suggested responses*

1. The narrator sticks his head into the old man’s bedroom and accidentally awakens him. The narrator stands still for a long time, trying to avoid being detected, and thinks about the fear the old man is experiencing. The narrator observes the old man’s attempt to discount his fears but knows that his attempts are in vain because Death (the narrator) stalks the old man.

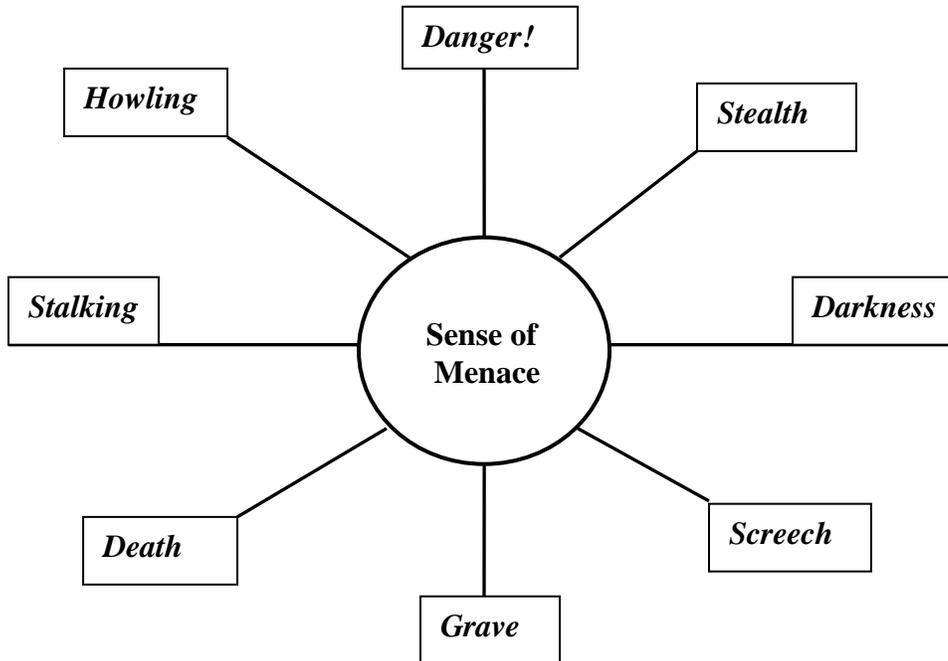
2. His intentions are bad. He doesn’t want to be caught—“I kept quite still” (l. 3) and he “chuckle[s]” at the man’s fear. His intention is to bring Death to the old man (l. 17).

3.

Something the narrator does or says	What does this suggest about the narrator? That he...	Explain your assertion.
“For a whole hour I did not move a muscle” (l. 3)	does not want to get caught	Only someone with a great deal of a fear that he will be heard could stand that still for an hour.
“just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches in the wall” (ll. 4–5)	is haunted by fear, expecting Death to come for him	He compares himself to the old man, who is sitting up in bed, afraid to lie down and go back to sleep.
“it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me” (ll. 9–10).	See above	The narrator has made the same sounds of terror he hears the old man make.
“I chuckled at heart” (l. 11).	enjoys the old man’s fear even as he understands it	The ambiguous emotions of the narrator at this point make us understand more about his motivations. His enjoyment of the old man’s fears indicates some kind of mental imbalance.

4. He is haunted by fear, which may have driven him to insanity.
5. The chance that the narrator might be insane makes him unpredictable and dangerous, thus contributing to the sense of menace established by the author.

6.



7. Death, groan, terror, pain, grief, soul, night, midnight, fears, black, shadow, victim
8. slipped, sprang, welled, pitied, stalked, enveloped, listening, lying
9. “sprang up in bed,” “crying out,” “groan of mortal terror,” “low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul,” “deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me,” “his fears had been ever since growing upon him,” “Death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him,” “it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow”
10. Active and passive
There is both a sense of action (sprang, stalked, enveloped) and inaction or the inability to act (slipped, pitied, listening, lying) which enhances the determination of the narrator and the helplessness of the old man, establishing a clear sense of menace.
11. Terrifying, disturbing
The vivid nouns used by Poe can all be associated with darkness, pain, and terror—ultimately with Death, increasing the sense of menace in the passage.
12. Tormented
The auditory images (“crying out,” “groan of mortal terror,” “low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul,” “deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me,”) all indicate someone in distress, caused by fear.

13. personification
man / can sneak up on a person, just as the narrator is doing.
14. pitied and chuckled
juxtaposition
pity and glee.
ambivalent / the narrator has no real concern that the old man is terrified.
15. tears in someone’s eyes, or blood in a cut
the way blood might come out of a wound
metaphor
it brings to mind the possible violence that the narrator is planning.

Levels of Thinking: Create

16. disturbing
tormenting
death, pain, and the fear of the unknown

17.

Pronouns	Antecedent
“I had my head in. . .when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening . . .” (l. 1).	the narrator
“For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down” (ll. 3–4).	the old man
“Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me” (ll. 8–10).	the sound of fear (that rises from the bottom of the soul)
“He had been trying to fancy them causeless; but could not” (ll. 12–13).	the old man’s fears
“He had been saying to himself—It is nothing but the wind in the chimney—it is only a mouse crossing the floor. . .” (ll. 13–14).	the sounds that he hears
“All in vain; because Death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim” (ll. 16–17).	Death (or the narrator)

18. It adds to the sense of mystery, the unknown.
19. Because it begins with a subordinating conjunction, “when,” that, when added makes the thought “all the world slept,” is incomplete.
Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo; the terrors distracted me.
20. infinitive
prepositional
prepositional
infinitive
infinitive

21. The infinitives add the feeling that something is being done; the prepositions just add details.
22. The infinitives add to the idea that something is about to “happen,” therefore enhancing the tone of the passage.
23. I knew
anaphora
That perhaps this isn’t the first time he’s watched the old man.
I knew
the possibility that the narrator has been stalking the old man, that perhaps this isn’t the first time he’s watched him
someone who hides and watches others usually doesn’t have anything good in mind.
24. to feel
the fear of the old man
to feel
the fear of the old man
the more fearful the old man is, the more we expect something bad to happen

*Responses will vary. To obtain the maximum benefit of the lesson, ask students to go beyond the expected responses.

Putting it All Together—Tone Analysis
“The Tell-Tale Heart”
Foundation Lesson—Middle School

Read the following excerpt from Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Tell-Tale Heart.” Then follow the steps in the handout to analyze the passage.

I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting upon the bed, listening;—just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches* in the wall.

Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief—oh, no!—it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever since growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not. He had been saying to himself—“it is nothing but the wind in the chimney—it is only a mouse crossing the floor,” or “it is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp.” Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions: but he had found all in vain. All in vain; because Death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim. And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel—although he neither saw nor heard—to *feel* the presence of my head within the room.

*Death watches are beetles that bore into wood, especially of old houses and furniture. Some superstitious people believe that these insects’ ticking sounds foretell death.

CLOSE READING:

Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand

1. Summarize what happens in the passage.

2. Are the narrator’s intentions good or bad? What evidence in the text supports your answer?

Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply

What is First Person Point of View?

When an author chooses to use first person point of view, he or she tells the story as though the narrator were speaking directly to the reader. The narrator uses the pronoun “I” as a subject and tells the story using only what he or she, the narrator, would know personally about it. This point of view has both advantages and limitations—it is an intimate way of telling a story that involves readers personally, but the narrator is limited to “knowing” only what goes on in the mind of one character—all other characters’ thought and feelings must be suggested by the events of the plot and the narrator’s observations of them.

In order to fully understand the meaning of the story, the reader must make some educated guesses about the person who is telling the story and his/her situation. The speaker, or narrator, of the story may differ from the author—who usually creates a persona, a made-up character for that particular story.

When you read fiction, you should consider the point of view and the persona of the narrator.

3. Fill out the chart below in order to better understand the *persona* of the narrator.

Something the narrator does or says	What does this suggest about the narrator? That he . . .	Explain your assertion.
“For a whole hour I did not move a muscle” (l. 3).	does not want to get caught	Only someone with a great deal of fear that he will be heard could stand that still for an hour.

4. Looking at the details you provided in the chart, what conclusion can you reach about the narrator?

Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply

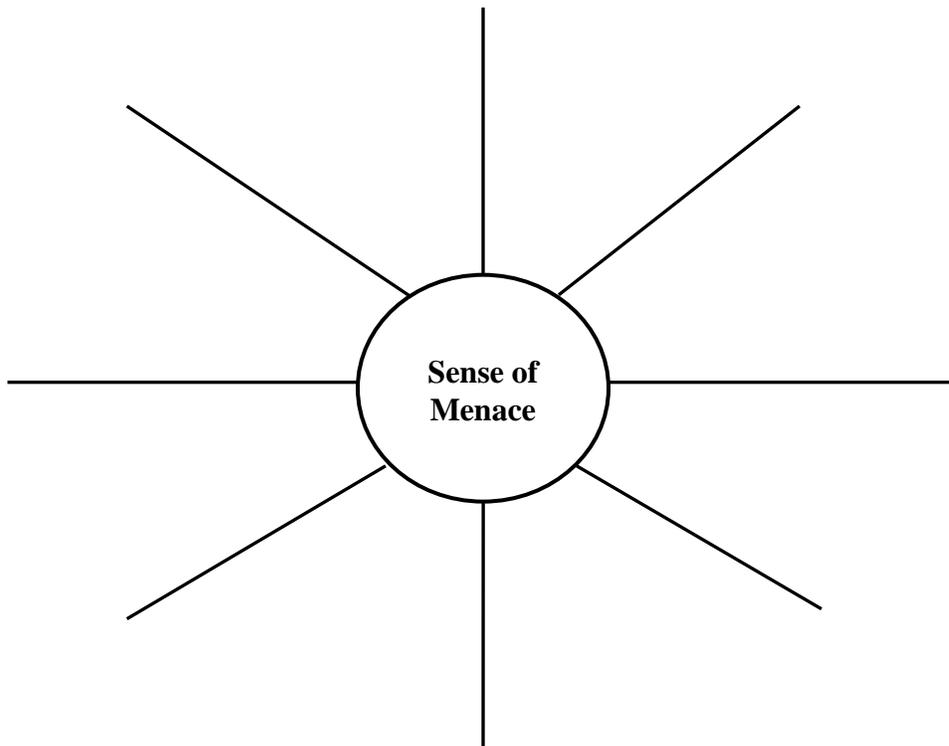
The tone of a passage is the writer’s or speaker’s attitude toward a subject, character, or audience. It is conveyed primarily through the author’s choice of diction, imagery, details, figures of speech, and syntax.

One word to describe the tone of this passage is “menacing.”

Something *menacing* is a possible source of danger or has a threatening quality.

5. How does the narrator’s *persona* contribute to the tone of the passage?

6. Look at the graphic below. Fill in the lines with words that might contribute to a sense of menace.



7. Reread the passage and circle the nouns in the passage that seem particularly vivid and that help establish the tone.

8. Put a box around the verbs that create a sense of menace.

9. Underline examples of imagery and detail that help create the tone.

Note: Your teacher will lead you through an activity that focuses on Poe’s use of diction, imagery, and detail.

Levels of Thinking: Understand, Analyze

After completing the activity, answer the following questions.

10. What pattern do you see in Poe’s use of vivid verbs (can you categorize these verbs)? How does this pattern create a sense of menace?

11. What pattern do you see in Poe’s use of specific nouns (can you categorize these nouns)? How does this pattern create a sense of menace?

12. What pattern do you see in Poe’s use of auditory imagery (can you categorize these sounds)? How does this pattern create a sense of menace?

Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze

Read the sentences below. Identify the literary devices and techniques the author uses. Then fill in the blanks to discuss the effect of the use of the device.

13. *“All in vain; because Death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim” (ll. 16–17).*

- What kind of figurative language (figure of speech) does the author use? _____
- The author compares death to a _____ in order to increase the feeling of menace by suggesting that death _____.

14. *“I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart” (ll. 10–11).*

- What is contrasted in this sentence? _____
- What literary technique is used to highlight this contrast? _____
- The author reveals that the narrator feels both _____ and _____. This portrays the narrator as _____ which increases the feeling of menace because _____.

15. *“Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it [a groan similar to that uttered by the old man] has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with it dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me” (ll. 8–10).*

**well*—to rise or flow to the surface from inside the ground or the body

- What other things might be described as “welling”?
- The author uses the verb “welled” in order to compare the way the groan comes out of the man to _____.
- This type of comparison is called a _____ because it is not direct, but implied.
- The comparison contributes to the sense of menace because _____.

Levels of Thinking: Create

16. Review your close reading analysis from above and then fill in the blanks below to describe how the author’s technique creates the tone of the passage.

Poe’s use of _____ diction, _____ imagery, and figurative language create the tone of menace in the passage because these words and images remind readers of _____

 _____.

GRAMMAR

Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Apply

A pronoun is a part of speech that replaces (or stands in for) nouns. An antecedent is the word or group of words to which a pronoun refers. We use pronouns to avoid being repetitive.

17. In the chart below supply a noun that identifies the person or thing to which the italicized pronouns refers in the following excerpts from the passage.

<i>Pronouns</i>	<i>Antecedent</i>
“I had <i>my</i> head in . . . when <i>my</i> thumb slipped upon the tin fastening . . .” (l. 1).	
“For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear <i>him</i> lie down” (ll. 3–4).	
“Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, <i>it</i> has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with <i>its</i> dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me” (ll. 8–10).	
“He had been trying to fancy <i>them</i> causeless; but could not” (ll. 12–13).	
“He had been saying to himself— <i>It</i> is nothing but the wind in the chimney— <i>it</i> is only a mouse crossing the floor . . .” (ll. 13–14).	
“All in vain; because Death, in approaching him, had stalked with <i>his</i> black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim” (ll. 16–17).	

18. How does the author’s use of pronouns instead of specific nouns help reinforce the tone of the passage?

Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Evaluate, Create**What is a Dependent (Subordinate) Clause?**

A dependent or subordinate clause is a group of words that has both a subject and a verb but does not express a complete thought. Simply put, a dependent clause is an independent clause that is preceded by a subordinating conjunction (such as because, when, after, since, unless, until, before, although, as, if). The addition of the subordinating conjunction creates questions in the mind of the reader that cannot be answered without the addition of the independent clause.

The bell rang. (independent clause)
 Until the bell rang. . . (dependent clause)
 After the bell rang. . . (dependent clause)
 Because the bell rang. . . (dependent clause)

19. The sentence in line 8 (“Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me”) contains two dependent clauses, one of which is a “when” clause.

- Why is this clause a dependent one?
- There is a second dependent clause in this sentence. Rewrite “that distracted me” as an independent clause. Be sure it makes sense following the first part of the sentence.
- Which version do you like better, yours or Poe’s? Why?

Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Evaluate**Is it a prepositional phrase or an infinitive phrase?**

A prepositional phrase is a preposition plus its object and any modifiers—the word “to” is a preposition. An infinitive phrase is the word “to” plus a verb and any modifiers. The easy way to tell the difference between a prepositional phrase and an infinitive is to determine if the phrase contains a noun or a verb. If the word is a noun, then “to” is acting as a preposition; if the word is a verb, then “to” creates an infinitive.

20. Read the sentences from the passage. Determine if the underline phrases are prepositional or infinitive.

- I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening, and the old man sprang up in the bed, crying out—“Who’s there?”

- He was still sitting upon the bed, listening;—just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches in the wall.
- He had been saying to himself—“it is nothing but the wind in the chimney—it is only a mouse crossing the floor,” or “it is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp.”
- Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions: but he had found all in vain.
- And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel—although he neither saw nor heard—to feel the presence of my head within the room.

21. What do the infinitive phrases add to the sentences? What do the prepositional phrases add?

22. Which of the two kinds of phrases contributes most to the tone of the passage?

Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Analyze

What is Syntax?

Syntax is the arrangement of words and the order of grammatical components in a sentence. Effective syntax draws attention to elements that the writer wants to emphasize.

Repetition, one of the most often used and most effective syntactical devices, involves using words, sounds, or ideas more than once.

Anaphora is a specific type of repetition in which words, phrases, or clauses are repeated at the beginning of successive grammatical units.

Read the following sentences from the passage. Then answer the questions and fill in the blanks to analyze the effect of the syntax on the tone of the passage.

23. *“I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed” (ll. 10–12).*

- What is repeated in these sentences? _____
- What is this kind of repetition called? _____
- What is being emphasized through this repetition? _____

•
 By repeating _____, the author emphasizes _____
 _____, increasing the menacing quality of the
 narrator because _____

24. *“And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel— although he neither saw nor heard—to feel the presence of my head within the room” (ll. 17–19).*

- What is repeated in these sentences? _____
- What is being emphasized through this repetition? _____

By repeating _____, the author emphasizes _____
 _____, enhancing the sense of menace because _____

COMPOSITION

Levels of Thinking: Remember, Understand, Create

Writing Workshop Prompts

- What enables you to overcome your fears?
- Can an insane person also be brilliant?
- Are there times when fear could be a good thing?
- Agree or disagree with this statement: All rational people feel fear at some point in their lives.

Writing Assignment 1

Review questions 10–15, thinking about how Poe creates a sense of menace in the story without ever using the word menace.

The following is a selection of tone words. If you don’t know the definition of a word, look it up.

fearful	solemn	grim	mournful	sad
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Think about a time when you experienced one of these emotions, then write a paragraph about that time. Do not use the word in the paragraph. Express this tone through your selection of diction, imagery, details, and figurative language.

Writing Assignment 2

Read carefully the passage from Poe’s short story “The Tell-Tale Heart.” Then write an essay in which you analyze how the author’s techniques create a menacing tone. You might consider elements such as diction, imagery, point-of-view, and figurative language.

Revision Workshop—Peer Editing and Revising

1. Mark all of the verbs in your essay. If any of them are linking verbs, help your partner to restructure the sentences so that action verbs replace the linking verbs in most cases. Choose exciting, vivid, specific action verbs.
2. Read the essay carefully to determine whether the writer tends to use many short, simple sentences. If your partner does this, help him or her to combine some sentences. You can use coordinating or subordinating conjunctions to help you do this.
3. Help your partner add one sentence containing imagery that emphasizes the tone of his or her essay.
4. Help your partner to practice using repetition for emphasis. Try to include one example of anaphora.