

Step-by-step, whiteboard-ready

SCHOLASTIC
SCOPE
 DIGITAL LESSON

The Power of Descriptive Writing



Approximate time to complete lesson: three to four class periods

FEATURED SKILL

Descriptive Writing:

What descriptive-writing tools do authors use to make their writing come to life?

SUMMARY

Students will view a *Scope* video about the science of tsunamis as well as footage of the March 2011 tsunami in Japan. They will then read a *Scope* nonfiction article about a group of amazing students who survived the tsunami, and an excerpt from Pearl S. Buck's *The Big Wave*. After students complete a worksheet and write a reflective essay on descriptive writing, you can give them the opportunity to write their own descriptive paragraphs.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

- to identify elements of strong descriptive writing
- to gather information and ideas from multiple texts and media types
- to participate in class discussion
- to write a reflective essay

MATERIALS

Click the links below.

- *Scope* video [The Making of a Tsunami](#)
- [Weather Wiz Kids](#), a Web page about earthquakes, which includes a CNN video clip
- [BBC News](#) video clip of the 2011 tsunami in Japan
- student copies of the article “Surviving the Tsunami” from the January 30, 2012, issue of *Scope*
- *Scope* worksheet [“Critical-Thinking Questions”](#)
- *Scope* worksheet [“How Do They Do That?”](#)
- [answers](#) to worksheets

1 CLASS DISCUSSION AND VIDEOS

Duration: 20 minutes

Introduce the article by showing the class the *Scope* video “The Making of a Tsunami.” Afterward, ask: What is a tectonic plate? (*a large slab of Earth’s crust that floats on molten rock*) What role do plates play in earthquakes? (*Earthquakes occur when plates rub against or crash into each other or pull apart.*) What was the relationship between the earthquake and the tsunami in Japan? (*An earthquake beneath the sea triggered the tsunami.*)

Go to the “Earthquakes” page of the Web site Weather Wiz Kids. If time and interest allow, explore more about the causes of earthquakes and tsunamis. Show the CNN video clip (halfway down the page). Then show the BBC News video clip. Ask students how they would describe the tsunami they saw in the clips if they were writing about it. What adjectives would they use to describe how the water looks and sounds? What verbs would they use to write about the movement of the water and boats? Can they think of a simile to describe the cars and trucks in the water? Write their ideas on the board.

2 CLASS READING: NONFICTION

Duration: 30 minutes, or one class period

Have students open their magazines to the article “Surviving the Tsunami” and have a volunteer read aloud the “As You Read” box on page 5. Then have students read the article as a class or independently, including the excerpt from *The Big Wave* on page 9.

3 CRITICAL-THINKING QUESTIONS

Duration: 15 minutes

Project the critical-thinking worksheet and moderate a class discussion of the questions.

4 “HOW DO THEY DO THAT?” WORKSHEET

Duration: 25 minutes

Project or distribute the worksheet “How Do They Do That?” Preview each section. Then have students work individually or in pairs to complete it. Review the answers as a class. You can then project the article on your interactive whiteboard and have students highlight the various elements of descriptive writing that they find. How do the authors’ techniques compare to the students’ ideas from Step 1?

5 WRITE A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

Duration: 30 minutes

Ask students to write an essay in response to the writing prompt on page 9: *How do Lauren Tarshis and Pearl S. Buck use descriptive language to tell their tsunami stories?*

6 WRITE A DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH (OPTIONAL)

Duration: 20 minutes

Invite students to demonstrate mastery of descriptive writing. Have them compose their own descriptive paragraphs about a thunderstorm, a heavy snowfall, or a more serious natural event that they witnessed. Students should use at least five vivid verbs, five graphic adjectives, two similes, and one example of personification. Readers should be able to see, hear, feel—and possibly taste or smell—the event described.