

ADVICE for PARENTS of YOUNG WRITERS by Jean MacLeod Word Choice

‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe...

~Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

Word Choice is the 6 + 1 trait that brings a writer’s voice to life. By choosing the right words, an author can make a reader laugh or cry, tell a powerful story, or like Lewis Carroll, create brilliant nonsense. A writer uses carefully chosen language to “paint” a picture for the reader, and with practice can produce a story masterpiece!

Parents can help children become aware of the palette of word possibilities, by understanding the four categories of language that relate to word choice. From *6 + 1 Traits of Writing* by Ruth Culham:

- 1) Descriptive Language (description and details)
- 2) Exact Language (lively verbs, precise nouns, accurate modifiers)
- 3) Natural Language (making it sound real)
- 4) Beautiful Language (colorful words and phrases)

At home, we can reinforce the vast possibilities of word choice and a student’s own creativity, by emphasizing the fun and games aspect of expanding vocabulary and word usage. One easy word choice game that helps children stretch to use words with precision and imagination, can be played at the dinner table or in the car:

I asked three members of my family to each give me another word for “hungry”-

Grandma said “famished”

My fourth-grader said “starving”

My kindergartner said “gurgle” (her empty stomach talking!)

The word “angry” then produced “irate”, “fire-breathing”, and “dinosaur mad”!

Even young children can participate in word choice activities. Listen to different types of music and take turns describing the images and feelings that the music evokes. An added twist: ask the participants to draw the image and describe their work.

Reading stories and poetry to children helps them to develop an ear for word choice, and an “eye” for the mental pictures that words can paint. Practice makes permanent: having confidence in the word-tools of the writing trade enables a student to tell an effective story that clearly shines with their own personality and vision.

*The 6 + 1 Traits are: Ideas, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency,
Conventions plus Presentation*

