The Great Object/Genre Draft of 2025!

1. **Where in the scaffolding for the unit does this activity appear?**

This activity appears during the second week of Unit 1 (1/31 on the annotated syllabus) as students are working on their object descriptions. The assignment aims to assist students in practicing writing detailed descriptions by demonstrating how description is a critical act while showing them how to adapt their descriptions to different audiences/genres. By fulfilling these goals, this assignment prepares students for the description part of the object essay and prompts them to begin thinking about how to adjust their writing to particular audiences.

1. **What approach will you take to the activity and why did you choose this approach?**

This activity largely follows the first approach in that it is a completely new activity, though it does keep the scaffolding present in the annotated syllabus of having the students first read and discuss Kimmerer’s description of strawberries to give them a chance to consider description as a critical act. I chose to do a new activity because I wanted students to practice writing detailed descriptions themselves, which ruled out the Option 2 for the day (“Group discussion about finding meaning in videos about objects”). I really liked the Option 1 (“Activity about asking an object unusual Questions”), but that activity was more about asking questions than practicing doing a detailed description. Moreover, I wanted to emphasize ideas of genre and audience for the students prior to them describing their own objects, so a new activity that addressed these topics made the most sense to me.

1. **Detailed description of the activity:**

I begin by reexplaining to students that, as part of the object essay, they will be writing detailed descriptions of their objects. I then ask the students why this is important for the paper and what we should hope to accomplish through description. Following this, we read Robin Wall Kimmerer’s description of strawberries, and I ask the students what they found meaningful about that description and what the description is doing in terms of conveying larger meanings about the relationships between humans and nature. Afterwards, I restate how description is a critical act and that what is meaningful for one person may not be meaningful for another.

I then sort the class into groups of 3-4 students to collaborate on this activity. I inform the students that we will be conducting an activity that will give them a chance to practice description as a critical act similar to what Kimerer did.

I then tell the students that we will be conducting a draft of objects and genres for the activity. I pull up a slide with ten genres of writing on it (this can be adjusted depending on the size of the class; I’d advise having more genres than needed to make sure no group is ‘stuck’ with anything).

When I taught this project, these were the genres I presented to my students:

* A Children’s Book
* A Newspaper Article
* An Academic Essay
* An Unboxing Vlog
* A Scientific Description
* An Online Review (Amazon, for example)
* An Email to a Professor (perhaps detailing why you were late to class)
* A Nature Documentary
* A Fantasy Epic
* Text Messages to a Friend

I then select a random order in which the groups will choose their objects. I conduct this as a snake draft to create more parity (For example, if there are groups 1-4, the order would go 1,2,3,4,4,3,2,1). Each group selects two genres of writing.

Following the genre draft, we conduct the object draft. I bring out several objects, and the students draft one they would like to write about. I then go in a different order than the initial draft so that the same group does not have the first overall pick. When I taught this activity, the objects I brought included:

* A koala stuffed animal
* A DVD of *The Time Machine* (1960)
* A model globe as the world was envisioned in 1650
* A watch from the Soviet Union
* A Godzilla figurine.

Once the genres and object have been selected, I ask students (without consulting their groupmates) to create a brief description (1-2 paragraphs) about their objects for each of the genres they selected over the next fifteen minutes.

I subsequently ask the students to share their writing within their groups and reflect briefly on what aspects of the object they emphasized via their descriptions, why they thought these aspects were the most meaningful for their genre/audience, what they did not talk about and why, and how they changed what they wrote based on the genre.

Once the groups are finished discussing, I ask each group to read one of their descriptions. I follow up by asking how they adjusted the description to fit the genre, what meanings they attempted to emphasize through their descriptions, and what challenges they faced.

I end by reiterating that this is the kind of work they will be doing for their object essay and assign them the “Creating a Detailed Description of Your Object” assignment.

1. **Detailed description of what you observed as the students completed the activity:**

The students responded very nicely to the assignment. There was a lot of excitement during the drafting process as students got really into getting their preferred genres/objects, making exasperated noises when an object they wanted got drafted away from them. Some of the groups were more talkative than others when working on the group discussion component, but all of the groups stayed focused around the task.

There was a certain amount of hesitation from the students in sharing what they wrote with the class as I think some felt a bit embarrassed by reading their work aloud, but those that did share came up with some very creative and fun ideas that went in some very unexpected directions. One student shared a Godzilla unboxing video that talked about the challenges of receiving Godzilla in the mail, and another student read a nature documentary about the Koala, where it had a scary encounter with an anaconda. All that to say, the students really seemed to enjoy the activity and created some excellent writing in response to it.

1. **Reflection on the activity:**

I did a somewhat similar activity in 101, where I asked students to create a brief public awareness campaign pitch based on a topic and two assigned genres. I thought that this structure would lend itself well to creating detailed descriptions for 102.

In that 101 assignment, one of the challenges was students having to write about topics or genres that they weren’t particularly interested in or familiar with (as I assigned each group their topic and genres). As such, my innovation for this version of the assignment was to include the draft component. This change meant that the students gained a certain level of control in what they picked while still having a select number of options so that they didn’t spend too much time debating what to write about.

In terms of the difference it makes to student learning, I think the activity helps bring to life the readings the students do on description and emphasizes why description matters. The activity allows them to practice description while seeing how there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to description, that they can radically alter their readers perception of the object based on what they choose to describe.

As such, I would teach this activity again as it did seem effective for the students. I don’t think I would make too many changes to the overall assignment; I would ask the students to submit their paragraphs to Canvas simply because I found the ones that were shared very entertaining, and I would have liked to read the rest of them. I might also switch out some of the genres or objects that were less popular (For instance, no one in either class drafted the academic paper), but I found the assignment overall to be effective.

1. **Advice to a teacher who is considering adapting your activity for their class.**

I believe this assignment fulfills serious pedagogical goals and helps students practice detailed description before working on the actual assignment. At the same time, it also gives students the chance to be creative and even a bit goofy, so I would advise the teacher to reflect that with their presentation to the students. A good amount of flair in mimicking major drafts can especially add to this atmosphere and make the students more engaged. Additionally, I would advise selecting fun or interesting objects that will appeal to the students as they draft and describe.

One version of this activity would be to have the students collaboratively write their descriptions from the start. In that case, I would try to ensure that there is at least one strong writer in the group who could potentially take the lead on drafting the descriptions (while making sure the other students are giving input). A teacher might even talk to the groups about assigning roles to the different members, where one person can be in charge of doing the actual writing, one could be in charge of collecting the thoughts of the rest of the group, and one could present the descriptions to the class.

I would also recommend lots of affirmation when the students are reading their descriptions and asking them follow-up questions about why they made certain choices in their descriptions, what meanings they were trying to convey, and how they shaped their description to the genre. Highlighting the ways the writing matches the genre and what it conveys about description helps frame the students’ writings into texts that the whole class can study and learn from, centering their roles as co-creators of meaning along with the teacher. Additionally, these follow-ups help to show the students that the teacher takes their work seriously and affirms them as knowledge makers in the class.