

**Grammar for Writing: Teaching Activities**

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| **Writing Learning Focus:** | | * How Dickens’s initial description of Miss Havisham gives intriguing clues about her character and situation that invites reader speculation | | |
| **Grammar Learning Focus:** | | * How coordination of words, phrases and clauses is used to create rich description of character and suggest narrator’s perspective | | |
| **Context:** | The text extract here comes from the chapter when Pip first meets Miss Havisham: from Pip’s perspective, she is both alarming and fascinating; there is a sense of the young Pip being drawn into a world of adult emotions that he cannot fully understand, echoed in his reaction to both Miss Havisham and to Estella. | | | |
| **Let’s Talk!**   * In opening group activities: encourage re-reading of sentence ‘clues’, especially when deciding likely sequence. Focus group discussion by giving clear time limit for ‘detectives’ to report what they’ve concluded, and by using differentiated prompts to support, such as questions ranging from factual recall (eg ‘what colour is her hair?’ to those requiring synthesis/analysis/speculation eg ‘why are the trunks only half-packed?’). Prompt observations on language eg different length of sentences; variation in how they start; words that are repeated; striking use of punctuation. * In the whole class discussion of structure: prompt students to understand that we are seeing things from Pip’s perspective, and stress his age and inexperience. His confusion is mirrored by the lack of connections he is able to make between the different objects and details – ‘*all confusedly heaped*’ is an apt description. Note variation in sentence length: moments of certainty eg ‘*Her shoes were white*’ contrasted with uncertain confusion mirrored in chaining of phrases and clauses in final sentence. * In whole class discussion of co-ordination, remind students that co-ordinating conjunctions join single words in lists eg ‘satins, and lace, and silks’; ‘watch and chain’; phrases e.g. ‘and some flowers, and a prayer book’; and clauses eg ‘And she had a long veil’. Students may have been told they shouldn’t start a sentence with a co-ordinating conjunction but of course this is a rhetorical choice and, here, contributes to the child-like voice established for Pip.   Note that ‘but’ means ‘only’ in ‘but one shoe’ and ‘but half arranged’. ‘For’ is seldom used now but was more common in Dickens’s time, carrying the meaning ‘because’. | | | **Activity Outline:**  3s/4s : There are 6 sentences in this extract. Provide these on separate cut-up strips and ask group to read out one at a time. As ‘detectives’, what sense can they make of these clues? Encourage speculation about character’s situation.  Whole class: Brief feedback of initial impressions.  Same 3s/4s: Ask students to reconstruct paragraph by sequencing the sentences, noting the clues they might be using to decide the sequence. What do they notice about language as they do this?  Teacher: Brief feedback, then display and read the text extract, noting that this moment is both Pip’s first sight of Miss Havisham and ours as a reader.  Whole class: Discuss structure of paragraph and sequence of sentences: What details does Pip notice, and in what order? What does Pip find confusing about the character’s appearance and situation? Is he less – or more – confused as he notices more? Do we understand any more than Pip does?  Teacher: List the co-ordinating conjunctions used in the text: ‘and’, ‘but’, ‘for’. On displayed text, with students, highlight all the uses of ‘and’ to join words, phrases and clauses (13, shown on text extract) and the one use of ‘but’ and ‘for’.  Whole class: Discuss purposes and effects of this exaggerated  use of co-ordination, especially the dependency on ‘and’. How does this help create Pip’s sense of confusion and bewilderment? How does it reinforce the narrative voice and perspective at this moment in the text i.e. sense of the young Pip attempting to make sense of what he sees? Note the single use of ‘but’ which draws attention to the colour of Miss Havisham’s hair and hence her age – a detail that particularly puzzles Pip but which helps the reader infer her situation as a long-ago jilted bride.  Pairs/individual: As appropriate, link into oral and/or written preparation of analytical response or into own descriptive writing e.g. either:   * Prepare an oral/written answer to the question: How does Dickens use structure and language in his initial description of Miss Havisham? * Describe the room belonging to a character in a story and/or their physical appearance. Concentrate your description on details from which your reader can make inferences about the character. Experiment with use of listing of details, through co-ordination of words, phrases and clauses. | **Text example:**  from *Great Expectations*  She was dressed in rich materials – satins, and lace, and silks – all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white. Some bright jewels sparkled on her neck and on her hands, and some other jewels lay sparkling on the table. Dresses, less splendid than the dress she wore, and half-packed trunks, were scattered about. She had not quite finished dressing, for she had but one shoe on – the other was on the table near her hand – her veil was but half arranged, her watch and chain were not put on, and some lace for her bosom lay with those trinkets, and with her handkerchief, and gloves, and some flowers, and a prayer-book, all confusedly heaped about the looking-glass. | |