Food Critic for the Day

Grade Level: 8-10

Time Frame: Two class periods (ideally done over two days)

Objective: After watching a short clip from Ratatouille and reading two famous food critics’ restaurant reviews, students will develop their own list of “critic’s vocabulary” and write their own food critiques. The goal of this lesson is to not only practice creative writing skills, but to also learn how to engage and “convince” an audience.

Standards:

Desired Results:

• Students will understand that:
  o Certain adjectives and verbs are much more descriptive than others
  o Metaphors, similes, and other literary devices can be employed to:
    ▪ Describe intangible qualities of food
    ▪ Convey a particular emotion to the reader
  o It is important to consider the intended audience before writing, as that will affect how the piece is written
• Students will be able to:
  o Use fresh, descriptive verbs and adjectives
  o Write a well-organized, thoughtful essay
  o Convince an audience

Included Materials: One movie clip link, transcript of the clip, Links to two restaurant reviews, worksheet, example essay topic

Assessment: In-class participation, worksheet, (take-home or in-class) essay

Directions:

1. Briefly introduce the lesson before showing the following video clip
   a. In this clip (from the movie Ratatouille), Anton Ego gives a glowing review of Gusteau’s restaurant. Though it does not actually describe the meal, this monologue is a fantastic example of convincing, emotional writing.
      i. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPfN_zYKxNQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPfN_zYKxNQ)
      ii. (1:38:53 – 1:40:55)

2. Hand out NY Times/ Times-Picayune restaurant reviews and give students time to read them. After they have read the reviews, have students work alone or in groups of 2-3 to fill out the “literary devices” worksheet, which not only briefly describes the literary devices used, but also tests the students’ ability to identify them.
   a. TIMES-PICAYUNE, Brett Anderson on Walk On’s Bistreaux Bar:
   b. NY TIMES, Sam Sifton on Roberta’s:

3. Go over the worksheet and dive into a discussion of the articles/ transcript. Ensure that students see Anton Ego, Brett Anderson and Sam Sifton’s attempts to convey a particular emotion to their respective audiences. Focus on uncovering what emotion the author is attempting to express and how he is conveying it.

4. Assign students a take-home creative essay (example included below). Encourage them to re-read the restaurant reviews for inspiration, but to use their own language.

5. Next class, ask students to describe the meal they wrote about. How did they express contentment/discontentment with the food they ate (without actually saying “it was good” or “it was bad”). What are some other types of essays (besides restaurant-reviews) where we might want to employ literary devices instead of stating basic facts?
“In many ways, the work of a critic is easy. We risk very little, yet enjoy a position over those who offer up their work and their selves to our judgment. We thrive on negative criticism, which is fun to write and to read. But the bitter truth we critics must face, is that in the grand scheme of things, the average piece of junk is probably more meaningful than our criticism designating it so. But there are times when a critic truly risks something, and that is in the discovery and defense of the new. The world is often unkind to new talents, new creations. The new needs friends. Last night, I experienced something new; an extraordinary meal from a singularly unexpected source. To say that both the meal and its maker have challenged my preconceptions about fine cooking, is a gross understatement. They have rocked me to my core. In the past, I have made no secret of my disdain for Chef Gusteau's famous motto, ‘Anyone can cook’. But I realize - only now do I truly understand what he meant. Not everyone can become a great artist, but a great artist can come from anywhere. It is difficult to imagine more humble origins than those of the genius now cooking at Gusteau's, who is, in this critic's opinion, nothing less than the finest chef in France.” – Anton Ego, “Ratatouille”
Make 'Em Feel It: Literary Devices/ Elements for Creative, Emotional Writing

• **Figurative language** Also known as the "ornaments of language," figurative language does not mean exactly what it says, but instead forces the reader to make an imaginative leap in order to comprehend an author's point. It usually involves a comparison between two things that may not, at first, seem to relate to one another. In a simile, for example, an author may compare a person to an animal: "He ran like a hare down the street" is the figurative way to describe the man running and "He ran very quickly down the street" is the literal way to describe him. Figurative language facilitates understanding because it relates something unfamiliar to something familiar.
  o Ex. of figurative language = metaphors and simile
• **Hyperbole**: Literary exaggeration.
  o Examples: I'll give you the moon and stars. By the end of the meal, my plate was so clean I could see my reflection.
• **Metaphor**: A type of figurative language in which a statement is made that says that one thing is something else but, literally, it is not. A metaphor is a comparison of two unlike things. It can uncover new and intriguing qualities of the original thing that we may not normally notice or even consider important.
• **Oxymoron**: This figure of speech includes words or ideas opposite in meaning placed one after the other. 'True lies', 'open secret', 'pretty ugly face', 'feeling alone in a crowd', are some forms of this literary device
• **Personification**: A figure of speech where animals, ideas or inorganic objects are given human characteristics
  o Ex. The rain dances across my windshield. The pasta slithers down my throat. The meat was drowning in a thick, brown gravy.
• **Setting** (setting): the time, place, physical details, and circumstances in which a situation occurs. Settings include the background, atmosphere or environment in which characters live and move, and usually include physical characteristics of the surroundings. Settings enables the reader to better envision how a story unfolds
• **Simile**: Compares two unlike things (like a metaphor) but uses like or as
  o "He’s a pig" is a metaphor. "He looks like a pig" and "He’s as fat as a pig" are similes.
• **Style**: The way the writer chooses to arrange his sentence structure (syntax) as well as the words (diction) he chooses. What is the overall effect of the way he writes? Simple, involved, poetic, colloquial, humorous, pedantic, child-like? How does it contribute to the author's message and the overall effect the author wishes to create?
• **Symbolism**: Using one object to stand for something else or to mean something else. Actions can also be symbolic, such as washing hands to indicate non-involvement. Some symbols are universal, with generally accepted meanings, such as a crown to mean superiority or the color red to mean danger. Some are specific to a particular work of literature, such as the white whale in Moby Dick. Symbols, especially specific ones, often mean more than one thing.

• **Tone**: The author's attitude towards what (s)he is writing that translates into your attitude: or, what is the feeling of the whole work and the writing/artist's craft? Joyful? Melancholy? Fatalistic? Angry? Peaceful? Scary? Sarcastic? Mysterious?

**Finding and Giving Examples of Literary Devices: Worksheet**

- First, can you think of any other literary devices/elements that an author might employ (like alliteration, for example)? If so, list them below.

After reading the restaurant reviews:

1. Can you find any examples of any of the following elements in the text? Please underline and label them.
   - a. Metaphors? Similes (like or as)? Setting descriptions (the room… the people… the chef…)? Symbolism? Personification? Hyperbole? Oxymoron (…jumbo shrimp, anyone?)

2. What is the tone of each piece? How do you think each critic felt about his meal? Would you want to go to the restaurant he describes? What kind of feeling is he trying to convey?

3. Clearly, the vocabulary an author uses affects the style and tone of his/her piece. Write down some descriptive adjectives and action verbs from the text that really helped you imagine the meal or the restaurant. Can you think of any other great verbs or adjectives that can help add emotion to a text and bring it to life?
Now it’s your turn to write a restaurant review. Though it does not necessarily need to be a review of a restaurant (it can be of a meal you have at home), the review you write must meet all of the following guidelines:

- Three paragraphs, one full page
- Non-fiction: Be sure to write about a meal you have experienced.
- **Before writing,**
  - Consider your audience. Who are you writing this for and why?
  - Consider the tone you wish to create. Your tone will affect how your readers feel about the meal you describe. Make sure it is consistent throughout the piece.

- Use descriptive words and at least three different types of literary devices to create an image. Try to paint a picture for your audience – help them see what you see, taste what you taste, and feel how you feel.

- **Share your feelings with your reader without saying “I felt...”** Use descriptive words, play with the tone, change your style up, etc.

- **Convince** me that your meal was great, disgusting, a pleasant experience, etc.

- Have fun! Don’t be afraid to exaggerate, be imaginative, use sarcasm, or criticize.