Adding Details to Writing

Background Information
Children in Grade 2 are continuing to learn more about what makes writing effective. They learn about the elements, or traits, of writing. Six commonly identified traits of writing are: ideas or content, organization, word choice, voice, sentence fluency, and conventions. Ideas are the main ideas or topics and the details of writing. Organization is the structure of the writing. Children learn that different types of writing have different structures, for example, a story is structured differently compared to an information report. Word choice is about choosing words that help the reader to visualize the writer's ideas. Voice reflects the writer: it refers to a style or tone that brings life and personality to writing. Sentence fluency refers to using a variety of sentence lengths and types so that the writing flows well and is not choppy. Conventions include the mechanics of writing, such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling.
Purpose
This activity will focus on two of the elements or traits of writing: details (related to ideas) and word choice. Children will engage in descriptive writing. They will examine objects closely and look for details. They will use their senses to describe the objects. Children will be introduced to the concept of using comparison in their description (e.g., It is as blue as the sky. The shell looks like a fan.) After children have examined an object and described its details, they will transform their descriptions into a poem.

Activities
Get Ready to Add Details
1. Hide an object in a bag. Do not tell children what the object is. Select something that has a distinct texture, such as a pinecone, a rock, or a stuffed animal. Have the child place their hand in the bag. Without looking, they describe the object by feeling it. When they describe something about the object, prompt them to give more details. For example, if they say the object is soft, ask, Tell me something that is as soft as this object. (It is as soft as a cat's fur.) If they say the object is small, ask, How small is it? Tell me something that is as small as this object. (It is as small as my eraser.) Prompt them to describe features such as texture, size, shape, malleability (the extent to which an object can be squeezed), and so on. Then have them guess what the object is and remove it from the bag. Children can use their other senses as well to describe the object. Ask questions to prompt more details, such as, What colour is the object? (blue) What kind of blue? (as blue as my shirt) What does the object's shape make you think of? (It makes me think of the shape of a cucumber.) Does the object have a smell? What does it smell like? (It smells like lemony soap.)

2. Have children focus on the picture of the chestnuts shown here. You may need to provide some background information about chestnuts if children have not seen them before. Tell them that chestnuts grow on chestnut trees and that the nut is inside a shell just like a peanut is inside a shell. Some kinds of chestnuts are edible. They give off a delicious smell when they are roasted before being eaten.

3. Have children describe the chestnut shell. Prompt them to use comparisons to make their descriptions more explicit. For example, if they say the chestnut shell is prickly, use prompts such as: It is as prickly as a ... (a porcupine), or: It looks like ... (a porcupine). Then have them describe the nut inside the shell in a similar manner.

4. Now model how to write a poem using the words that children used to describe the chestnut. You might wish to fold a piece of paper into four or five accordion folds. Fold the piece of paper across the width so there is room on each panel to write one line of the poem. Here is a sample poem:

   The Chestnut
   Spiky shell
   Prickly like a porcupine
   Smooth nut inside
   Shiny brown
Write a Descriptive Poem

1. Select an object or have children select an object to describe. Choose something that has characteristics that will facilitate using the senses to provide details (e.g., an onion, an interesting stick or twig, a stuffed animal, a child’s toy or a dog toy that makes sounds, a bath scrunchy, a sponge, a bar of soap). Encourage them to provide details in their description by making comparisons. Use prompts such as:
   - It is as ________________________________ as a ________________________________.
   - It looks like a ____________________________________________________________.
   - What shade of [colour such as red] is it?

2. Have children write a poem describing their object. They can record their poem using an accordion-folded piece of paper, writing one detail on each panel of the accordion, as shown below. They can also add art to enhance their poem.

3. You might also choose your own object to write about. Share your poems with one another.

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The Chestnut

Spiky shell

Prickly like a porcupine

Smooth nut inside

Shiny brown