**Diction**

Diction refers to the writer’s *choice of words*. Just as a painter uses colour and light or a musician uses sounds and rhythm, a writer uses words.

**Examine the following excerpts:**

1. He spend hours in front of the mirror trying to **herd** his teeth into place with his thumb. He asked his mother if he could have braces, like Frankie Molina, her godson, but he asked at the wrong time.

Gary Soto, “Broken China,” *Baseball in April and Other Stories*

1. What is Gary Soto implying about the narrator’s teeth when he uses the verb herd in the first sentence?
2. How would the meaning change if the sentence were written like this?

*He spent hours in front of the mirror trying to* ***push*** *his teeth into place with his thumb.*

**Now you try it:**

Fill in the blanks below with a strong verb that creates a clear picture in the reader’s mind like Soto’s does. Avoid such obvious verbs as brush, comb, or fix. Be creative!

She spent hours in front of the mirror trying to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ her hair in place for the party.

1. How well I recollect the kind of day it was! I smell the fog that hung about the place; I see the hoar frost, ghostly, through it; I feel my rimy hair fall clammy on my cheek; I look along the dim perspective of the schoolroom, with a **sputtering** candle here and there to light up the foggy morning, and the breath of the boys wreathing and smoking in the raw cold as they blow upon their fingers, and tap their feet upon the floor.

Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*

Vocabulary:

Hoar frost:

Rimy:

Clammy:

Sputtering:

Wreathing:

1. What words help you understand that the room was cold and dark?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Words that tell you the room is cold* | *Words that tell you the room is dark* |
|  |  |

1. What is a *sputtering candle*? How does describing the candle help you understand the feeling of the whole room?

**Now you try it:**

Describe a room that is unbearably hot. In your description, use words that are clear, concreate and exact as Dickens does. Remember, don’t simply state that it’s hot. Instead *create a picture* for the reader, capturing how the *heat affects the surroundings.*