Name: ______________________
English 6 – Resources

Diction (Word Choice) and Tone

Before we begin discussing diction and tone, we need to remind ourselves about the narrator of a story. The narrator is the one who tells the story. This can be an omniscient narrator, also known as “eye in the sky,” or a character who tells the story from his or her own perspective, with his or her own voice. This is similar to Percy narrating his story in The Lightning Thief.

Who is the narrator of this story? ___________ Bud ___________.

Having a character, like Bud, as narrator means we, as readers, hear the story in the particular way that character talks. In this story, we hear the voice of a ten-year-old boy in a particular time period and in a particular region of the country. His age, his experiences, his personality, and his setting all affect the way he speaks, the way he tells a story, and the words he chooses.

Because Bud is the narrator, we need to consider his word choice (diction) and the impact it has on the story.

One impact that a narrator’s word choice has on a novel is that it creates the tone. ___________.

Where have you heard the word tone?”

The use of the word tone when discussing literature is more like “tone of voice” because, like our voices, tone in writing conveys feelings. In the absence of an actual voice, authors use words to create a tone in order to convey a feeling about the subject they are writing about.

tone - the feelings or attitude an author has toward a character or subject in a work
Practice:
Open your books to page 4 and consider the information we just discussed. Follow along as I read aloud the passage from “It’s at six that grown folk don’t think you’re cute” to “The first foster home I was in taught me that real quick.”

What is Bud explaining in this excerpt?

Bud is explaining how things change when you turn six.

Let’s zoom in on the word choices that are used in the part of the sentence that reads, “… ’cause it’s around six that grown folks stop giving you little swats and taps and jump clean up to giving you slugs that’ll knock you right down.”

What do swat and tap mean? What is the meaning of the word slug?

Swat and tap imply light hits, without malicious or bad intent.

Slug implies a hard hit with the intent to hurt.

The use of these specific words was a deliberate choice. on the part of the author, and they create a certain effect.

What effect does Curtis create by using these three words - swat, tap, and slug?

The effect is to create a more Serious and malicious feeling with the word slug. The effect changes because the force and severity of the hit changes. Taps are softer than slugs.

What does this show about Curtis’s attitude towards adults?

If we, as the readers, take a step back and look at the story in more general terms, we can see that Curtis feels that some adults can be cruel to children. Curtis is expressing this "attitude" (tone) towards adults though the diction he chooses.