**Tone and Mood in Literature - Moving Beyond Paragraphs**

I slammed my hand down on the desk.

"What are you doing?" I bellowed.

Frozen, terrified students stared at me, looked at their classmates and back to me.  Shock swallowed their breath and turned every fiber of attention to me, the psychotic teacher, standing in the middle of the room.

I stood up, waited another moment and then asked, "How did my tone affect your mood?"

A collective sigh lifted the tension, numerous hands went to chests and a few "Oh my Gods" slipped into the growing murmur of relief.

That's how we started talking about the concept of tone and mood.  The key idea being that an author's tone can affect your mood.  Often times students confuse the two ideas because they are so closely related so I wanted a concrete, shared experience that we could all refer to if there was any confusion between tone and mood.

That was about two weeks ago.  The students still talk about my tone that day.  They laugh about it now, though I still notice a hint of nervousness in their chuckles.

Students in sixth grade have to analyze pieces of literature for the tone the author used in a particular piece of writing.  It is a skill that is often tested on our state assessment, as I am sure it is in other states.  Also, in seventh grade, students have to be able to create well written responses to prompts using text evidence to support their viewpoint.

This has been a difficult concept for me to teach in the past.  This year I mashed together a continuum of lessons that builds towards those ideas.  So far I am very happy with the results.  Of course it all started with a very concrete understanding of the difference between tone and mood, as explained above.

**Analysis of Tone in Art**

So I want to invite students into the analysis of tone and mood.  A great way to get started is with this lesson idea from [byrdseed.com](http://www.byrdseed.com/differentiating-comprehension-skills-noting-details/) which introduces the students to the ideas of finding implicit and explicit details in art.

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| --- |
| <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1e/Portrait_of_Dr._Gachet.jpg> |
| http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1e/Portrait\_of\_Dr.\_Gachet.jpg |

Students look at the portrait and talk about how Dr. Gachet is feeling.  His feeling, or the tone of the piece, is an implicit detail, the evidence to support that thinking are the explicit details.  The students often say that Dr. Gachet is sad in the above portrait.  The tone of the portrait is sadness.  That is an implicit detail.  Then the students have to find the explicit evidence to prove that he is sad:  his frown, the dark colors, the hand on his face, his droopy eyes.

When students are finished they can begin to compose a short paragraph to describe the tone of the painting.  The implicit detail is the topic sentence.  The explicit details are the supporting sentences.  Very structured, well-thought out and meets the goals of our state learning objectives.  But with my students I wanted to continue to go deeper with the idea and to also show them that a well written paragraph is not always the end all be all of our class.

**Analysis of Tones in Videogames**

Motivating students often comes form tying into their interests.  Looking at outstanding art has its place, students need to be exposed to the work of the master artists.  But looking at still pictures can only hold their attention for so long.  (I wrote about keeping [students attention](http://www.creativity2point0.org/2011/07/may-i-have-your-attention-please.html) in this blog post last year) So the next level of tone analysis tapped into their love of videogames, it could also include movie trailers as well.

The lesson comes from [edutopia.com](http://www.edutopia.org/blog/video-games-in-english-classroom-terrell-heick?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+EdutopiaNewContent+%28Edutopia%29) and requires students to watch video game trailers and analyze the tone of the trailer.





Using what the students learned from analyzing art, they watch the videos two or three times, use their [tone word list](http://www.fallriverschools.org/Tone%20and%20Mood%20words%20%28unedited%29.pdf) to identify a suitable tone (implicit detail) and then find three explicit details from the video to support their thinking.

The Limbo preview leaves much more of an impact on them than Little Big Planet 2.  Some students will begin to put their hands over their ears when the musical dissonance increases towards the middle of the clip.

There is a high level of engagement when students are watching these previews and it is easy for them to remember their writing lessons from Dr. Gachet:  implicit is the topic sentence and explicit is the supporting sentences.

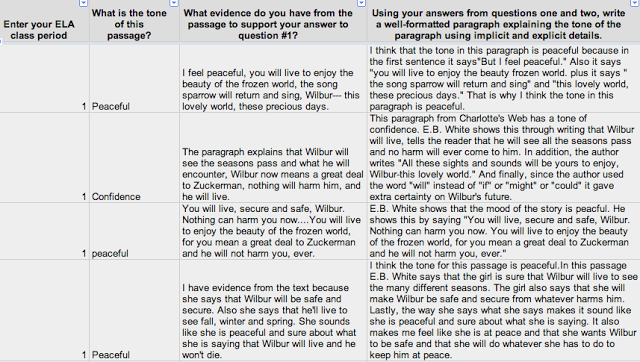
**Analysis of Tone in Literature**

The next piece was to take the concepts of tone and analyze written work; at least that is what the state wants us to do.

Until now the students had been practicing in their notebooks with me walking around, spot checking their work.  I wanted a  quick way to gather data on their writing without taking home 140 sheets of paper.

Thank you [Google Forms](http://www.google.com/google-d-s/forms/).  I created a form and embedded it on my [class website](http://www.mrsebek.com/readers-response.html).  The form begins with a quick review of the concept of tone.  Then students read a short paragraph and write a well-formatted paragraph explaining their perspective on the tone of the paragraph.

When the students submit their form I get a spreadsheet that looks like this:

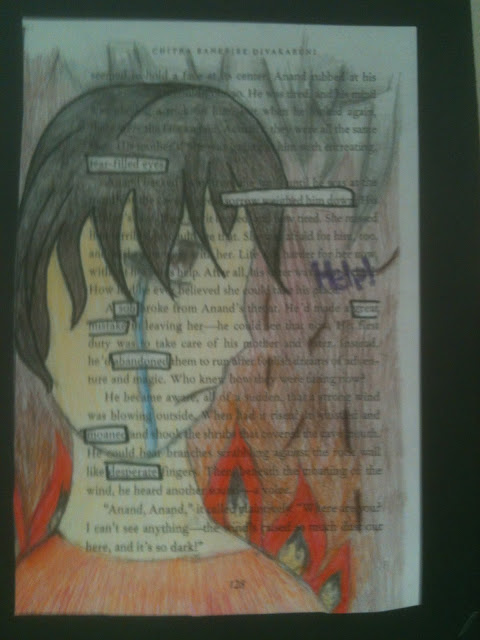
[](http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-IDFlzleTvtg/UG9573Rw_mI/AAAAAAAAAUo/Mh68QSxNPTg/s1600/Screen+shot+2012-10-05+at+7.22.00+PM.png)

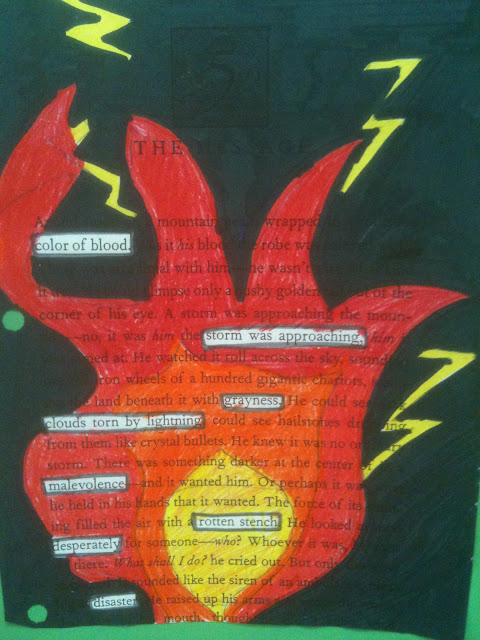
Now I can quickly assess how my students are doing with the concepts of tone and explicit and implicit details.

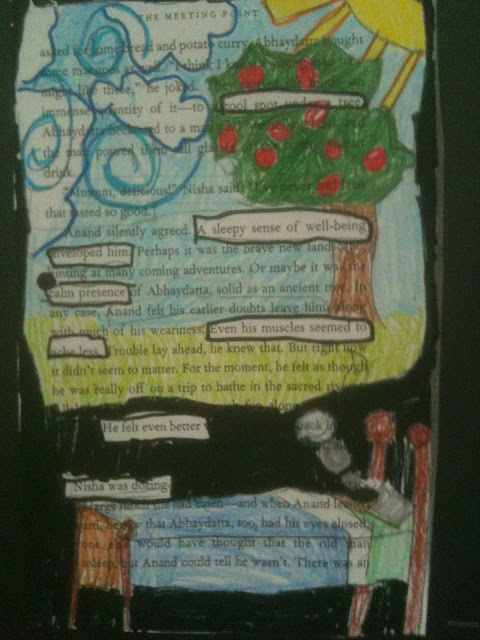
But like I said earlier, I do not want well structured paragraph writing to be the highest pinnacle of academic achievement in my room.  So enter one last piece to the puzzle:  [humumet](http://humument.com/gallery/tetrad/0/001010/index.html).  A concept I discovered while reading a post from [classroots.org](http://classroots.org/2010/10/08/from-the-warrens/)

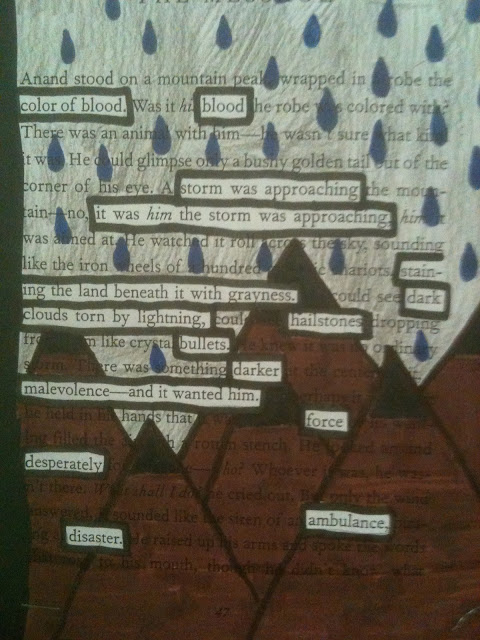
Students skim [*The Conch Bearer*](http://www.chitradivakaruni.com/books/the_conch_bearer) for passages that display obvious tones. Students identify the tone (implicit detail), and then identify words (explicit details) on the page that could be used to create a the tone. They circle these words and then use art to edit out all the other words on the page with a picture that matches the new tone and/or narrative.

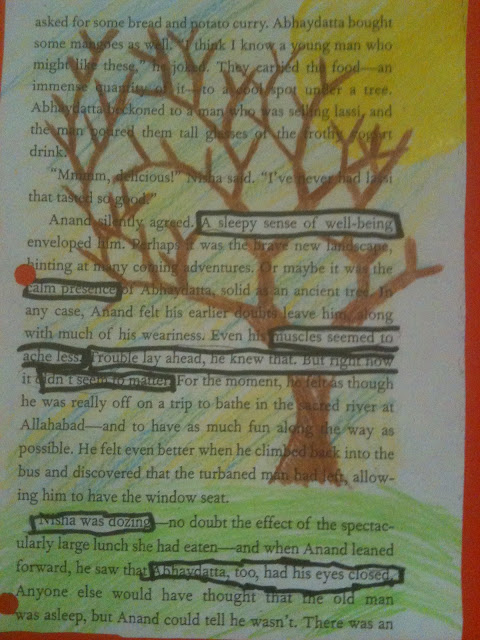
Below are examples of some of the work done in my class. I think you should be able to infer the tone based on their art and the words they chose.

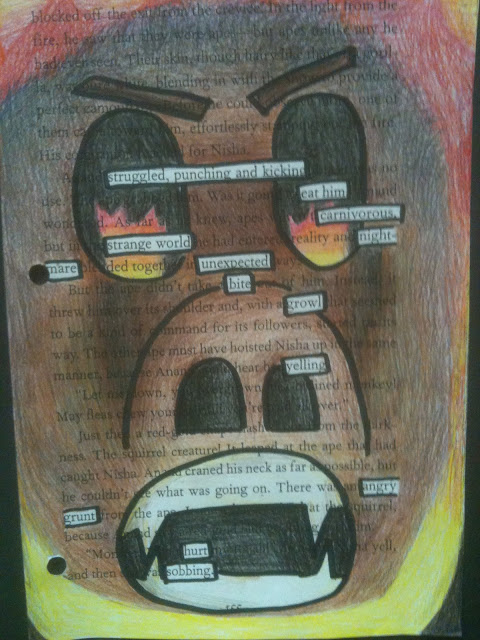
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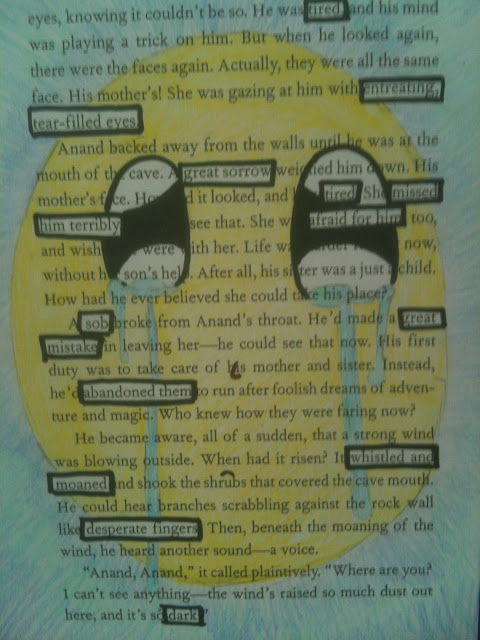
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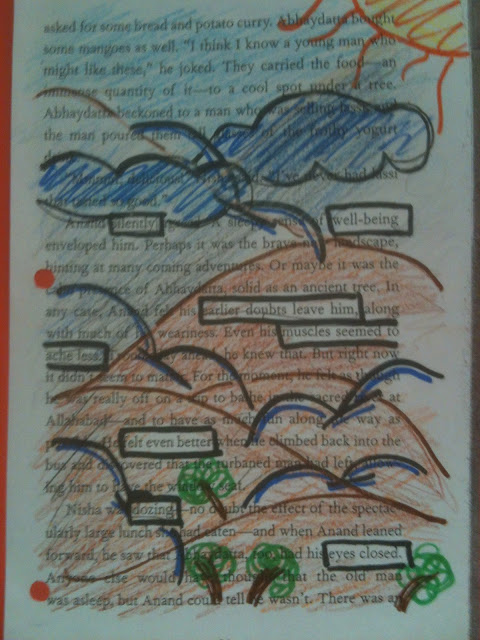
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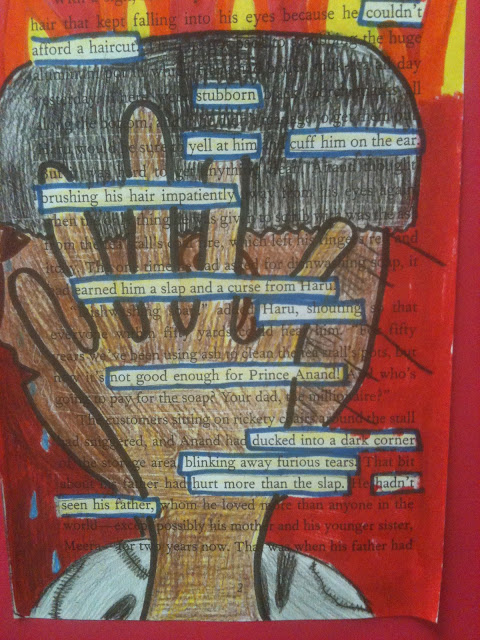
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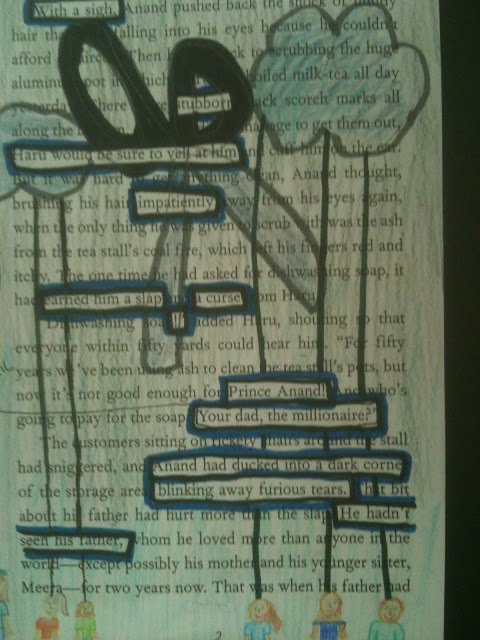
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My students still need more practice with writing well structured paragraphs based on analysis of an author's tone.  But I can honestly say that my students this year have a much better grasp of the difference between tone and mood and how explicit details work to explain implicit details.

I hope you give some of these ideas a try.  It's the best way to honor the people who created them in the first place.