

A Personal Definition

“Don’t use that tone of *voice* with me, young lady!”

“He has such a polite telephone *voice*.”

“With a *voice* like that, he could be a sports announcer.”

“When she uses that *voice*, you know you’re in trouble!”

There are many different voices. By listening to someone’s speaking voice, we can recognize a friend or know when someone is angry or happy. But what about when the words are on paper—for example, in an e-mail, a poem, or your own personal writing? Can we tell the same things about the person behind the words just by reading the words? To answer this question, we need to begin with a definition of *voice* as it relates to writing.

Voices Galore

Tuning your eyes and ears to the voices of other writers is one of the best ways to begin defining the term *voice*. Read each of the following passages carefully. Read them more than once (they’re short), each time concentrating on the writer’s voice. Use the scale after each passage to rate the amount of voice you heard. Then, write one or two words that describe that writer’s voice.



Eggs scare me. Chickens, too. And buddy, you can laugh at that all you want, but I'm being dead serious here.

It started in the sixth grade with eggs.

And a snake.

And the Baker brothers.

The Baker brothers' names are Matt and Mike, but even now I can't tell you which one's which. You never see one without the other. And even though they're not twins, they do look and *sound* pretty much the same, and they're both in Lynetta's class, so maybe one of them got held back.

Although I can't exactly see a teacher voluntarily having either of those maniacs two years in a row.

Wendelin Van Draanen, *Flipped* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), p. 44

BARELY ANY VOICE. **1 2 3 4 5 6** **STRONG, CLEAR VOICE!**

Words that describe this voice: _____



The morning sun inched over the horizon, streaked across the plains, peeked between two cottonwoods and tickled the tips of Melvin Fitchett's eyelashes. They were long lashes, darker than the nutmeg-brown hair on his head, and they parted to reveal pastel-blue eyes. He sat up and looked around. There was no sign of his new friend. All he saw was Mercy, watching him. If a horse can be said to smile, that is what she did. He greeted her with a nod and reached for his lucky hat, a ginger-colored, felt sombrero. He put on the hat, pulled on his socks and boots, stood and gave Mercy an affectionate slap on the rump. "Go graze for thirty or forty minutes, then come back here."

Mercy indicated with a snort that she understood before lumbering up the tree-lined bank and trotting onto the plain. After she went, Melvin sorted through his supply packs, taking out a tin pot, an iron skillet, a packet of bacon and a small

sack of coffee. He gathered some twigs and chips of bark, lay them on the ashes of the past night's fire and coached a flame into existence.

Sid Hite, *Stick & Whittle* (New York: Scholastic, 2000), p. 22.

BARELY ANY VOICE. 1 2 3 4 5 6 **STRONG, CLEAR VOICE!**

Words that describe this voice: _____



Every day at about the same time she would walk her dog. He was kind of medium sized and brown or black. It didn't matter if the rain was coming down pretty hard or if the sun was out. Her dog seemed almost to pull her along, but it seemed like she walked with kind of a limp or something. She always wore a scarf over her head or had the hood of her jacket on, and these really big sunglasses. And she always wore boots, even if she was wearing a dress. She didn't talk that much to people who walked past, but when she did, she always looked sort of nervous. She usually walked on the same side of the street, except once when there was some construction equipment blocking the sidewalk. Maybe she was some old-time movie star or something. She sure was mysterious.

BARELY ANY VOICE. 1 2 3 4 5 6 **STRONG, CLEAR VOICE!**

Words that describe this voice: _____

name: date:

Reflection

Think about the voices in the passages you read. Which voice do you particularly like? Which voice sounds closest to your own?

I like voice _____. A voice somewhat like my own voice is _____.

Personal Definition

It's time now for you to write your own definition of *voice*. This will be your personal definition to help you recognize and improve your voice as a writer. Before starting, take one more look at the three passages and your comments. Be sure to write your thoughts in complete sentences.

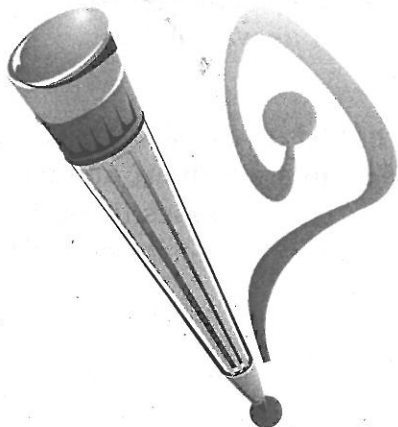
My Definition of Voice

Sharing Definitions

Form a group with at least two other students. Listen carefully as you take turns reading your definitions. How did the other writers in your group define voice? Are their definitions similar to yours? Did you hear something you liked from another student's definition that was different from yours?

A similarity I heard: _____

Something I wish I'd included: _____



A Writer's Question

"Voice isn't important. It's the ideas that really count." How would you respond to someone who made this statement?