

Literary Analysis: Imagery

We understand our world first through our **senses**; only later do we learn to intellectualize our intensely physical existence. **Imagery is language writers use to imaginatively create or represent any sensory experience – touch, taste, sight, scent, sound.** Imagery is the central component of almost all imaginative literature and it's often said to be the chief element in poetry.

Reprinted below is the opening paragraph of the novel *All the Pretty Horses* by Cormac McCarthy. Carefully read the passage, highlighting all of the examples of **imagery** you find.

The candleflame and the image of the candleflame caught in the pierglass twisted and righted when he entered the hall and again when he shut the door. He took off his hat and entered the hall again when he shut the door. He took off his hat and came slowly forward. The floorboards creaked under his boots. In his black suit he stood in the dark glass where the lilies leaned so palely from their waisted cutglass vase. Along the cold hallway behind him hung the portraits of forebears only dimly known to him all framed in glass and dimly lit above the narrow wainscoting. He looked down at the guttered candlestub. He pressed his thumbprint in the warm wax pooled on the oak veneer. Lastly he looked at the face so caved and drawn among the folds on the funeral cloth, the yellowed moustache, the eyelids paper thin. That was not sleeping. That was not sleeping.

It was dark outside and cold and no wind. In the distance a calf bawled. He stood with his hat in his hand. You never combed your hair that way in your life, he said.

Inside the house there was no sound save the ticking of the mantel clock in the front room. He went out and shut the door.

Dark and cold and no wind and a thin gray reef beginning along the eastern rim of the world. He walked out on the prairie and stood holding his hat like some supplicant to the darkness over them all and he stood there for a long time.

Look back at the words/phrases you have identified. Can you see if you can find ways of grouping the words into 3-5 categories? Once you have sorted your words into categories, it will help you to write a response to the prompt on the following page.

Sensory Words

Colors

colorless white ivory yellow gold orange green olive turquoise
azure pink crimson maroon lavender purple silver brown black mott
led red ruby blue spotted

Shape

round oval triangular rectangular square shapeless

Size

immense massive large tiny small tall short wide long narrow lean

Appearance

round flat curved wave/wavy ruffled angular hollow tapered wiry
lopsided freckled wrinkled striped bright clear glossy jeweled fiery
shimmering muddy drab dark grimy worn cluttered fresh flowery
transparent sheer opaque muscular handsome robust fragile pale
perky lacy shadowy

Hearing Words

crash squawk crackle chime ring thud whine buzz laugh silence
bump bark clink gurgle chuckle boom bleat hiss giggle cry
thunder bray snort guffaw bawled bang blare bellow sing
crow roar rumble growl hum chatter scream grate whimper
mutter mumble screech slam stammer murmur wail shout clap
snap whisper babble yell stomp rustle sigh cheer whistle jangle
whir hush storm

Taste Words

oily rich bland ripe buttery hearty tasteless medicinal salty mellow
sour fishy bitter sugary vinegary spicy bittersweet crisp fruity
hot sweet savory tangy burnt

Smell Words

sweet piney acrid sickly scented pungent burnt stagnant
fragrant spicy gaseous musty aromatic gamy putrid moldy perfumed
fishy spoiled dry fresh briny sour damp earthy sharp rancid
dank

Touch (feeling) Words

cool wet silky sand
cold slippery velvety gritty icy spongy smooth rough lukewarm
mushy soft sharp tepid oily woolly thick
warm waxy furry dry hot fleshy feathery dull
steamy rubbery fuzzy thin sticky bumpy hairy fragile damp crisp
leathery tender

Writing Prompt: The passage is from the opening of a novel. Read it carefully then write a well developed essay in which you analyze how McCarthy establishes the direction of his novel through his use of **imagery**.

Introduction & Thesis - respond specifically to prompt (focus on **imagery** and how it relates to other elements McCarthy is using in the opening passage):

Transition & First Topic Paragraph (with textual support):

Transition & Second Topic Paragraph (with textual support):
