

## Analyzing Diction in Writing

**Directions:** Read the following poems and mark them up – summarize the plot in a sentence, identify patterns in wording, determine meaning of those word choice patterns, and write a concise analysis that relates word choice to theme/meaning of piece.

### Riddle

By JERICHO BROWN

We do not recognize the body  
Of Emmett Till. We do not know  
The boy's name nor the sound  
Of his mother wailing. We have  
Never heard a mother wailing.  
We do not know the history  
Of this nation in ourselves. We  
Do not know the history of our-  
Selves on this planet because  
We do not have to know what  
We believe we own. We believe  
We own your bodies but have no  
Use for your tears. We destroy  
The body that refuses use. We use  
Maps we did not draw. We see  
A sea so cross it. We see a moon  
So land there. We love land so  
Long as we can take it. Shhh. We  
Can't take that sound. What is  
A mother wailing? We do not  
Recognize music until we can  
Sell it. We sell what cannot be  
Bought. We buy silence. Let us  
Help you. How much does it cost  
To hold your breath underwater?  
Wait. Wait. What are we? What?  
What on Earth are we? What?

# my graduation speech

BY TATO LAVIERA

i think in spanish

i write in english

i want to go back to puerto rico,  
but i wonder if my kink could live  
in ponce, mayagüez and carolina

tengo las venas aculturadas

escribo en spanglish

abraham in español

abraham in english

tato in spanish

"taro" in english

tonto in both languages

how are you?

¿cómo estás?

i don't know if i'm coming

or si me fui ya

si me dicen barranquitas, yo reply,

"¿con qué se come eso?"

si me dicen caviar, i digo,

"a new pair of converse sneakers."

-stanza removed-

english or spanish

spanish or english

spanenglish

now, dig this:

hablo lo inglés matao

hablo lo español matao

no sé leer ninguno bien

so it is, spanglish to matao

what i digo

¡ay, virgen, yo no sé hablar!

# There's a certain Slant of light, (320)

BY EMILY DICKINSON

There's a certain Slant of light,

Winter Afternoons –

That oppresses, like the Heft

Of Cathedral Tunes –

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –

We can find no scar,

But internal difference –

Where the Meanings, are –

None may teach it – Any –

'Tis the seal Despair –

An imperial affliction

Sent us of the Air –

When it comes, the Landscape listens –

Shadows – hold their breath –

When it goes, 'tis like the Distance

On the look of Death –

# The Facts of Art

BY NATALIE DIAZ

*woven plaque basket with sunflower design, Hopi,  
Arizona, before 1935*

from an American Indian basketry exhibit in  
Portsmouth, Virginia

The Arizona highway sailed across the desert—  
a gray battleship drawing a black wake,  
halting at the foot of the orange mesa,  
unwilling to go around.

Hopi men and women—brown, and small, and claylike  
—peered down from their tabletops at yellow tractors, water trucks,  
and white men blistered with sun—red as fire ants—towing  
sunscreen-slathered wives in glinting Airstream trailers  
in caravans behind them.

Elders knew these BIA roads were bad medicine—knew too  
that young men listen less and less, and these young Hopi men  
needed work, hence set aside their tools, blocks of cottonwood root  
and half-finished Koshari the clown katsinas, then  
signed on with the Department of Transportation,

were hired to stab drills deep into the earth's thick red flesh  
on First Mesa, drive giant sparking blades across the mesas' faces,  
run the drill bits so deep they smoked, bearding all the Hopi men  
in white—*Bad spirits*, said the Elders—

The blades caught fire, burned out—*Ma'saw is angry*, the Elders said.  
New blades were flown in by helicopter. While Elders dreamed  
their arms and legs had been cleaved off and their torsos were flung  
over the edge of a dinner table, the young Hopi men went  
back to work cutting the land into large chunks of rust.

Nobody noticed at first—not the white workers,  
not the Indian workers—but in the mounds of dismantled mesa,  
among the clods and piles of sand,  
lay the small gray bowls of babies' skulls.

Not until they climbed to the bottom did they see  
the silvered bones glinting from the freshly sliced dirt-and-rock wall—

a mausoleum mosaic, a sick tapestry: the tiny remains  
roused from death's dusty cradle, cut in half, cracked,  
wrapped in time-tattered scraps of blankets.

*Let's call it a day*, the white foreman said.

That night, all the Indian workers got sad-drunk—got sick  
—while Elders sank to their kivas in prayer. Next morning,  
as dawn festered on the horizon, state workers scaled the mesas,  
knocked at the doors of pueblos that had them, hollered  
into those without them,

demanding the Hopi men come back to work—then begging them—  
then buying them whiskey—begging again—finally sending their white  
wives up the dangerous trail etched into the steep sides  
to buy baskets from Hopi wives and grandmothers  
as a sign of treaty.

When that didn't work, the state workers called the Indians lazy,  
sent their sunhat-wearing wives back up to buy more baskets—  
katsinas too—then called the Hopis *good-for-nothings*,  
before begging them back once more.

*We'll try again in the morning*, the foreman said.

But the Indian workers never returned—  
The BIAS and DOTS calls to work went unanswered,  
as the fevered Hopis stayed huddled inside.

The small bones half-buried in the crevices of mesa—  
in the once-holy darkness of silent earth and always-night—  
smiled or sighed beneath the moonlight, while white women  
in Airstream trailers wrote letters home

praising their husbands' patience, describing the lazy savages:  
such squalor in their stone and plaster homes—cobs of corn stacked  
floor to ceiling against crumbling walls—their devilish ceremonies  
and the barbaric way they buried their babies,  
oh, and those beautiful, beautiful baskets.