Diction Lessons

Directions: Answer the questions below, considering the effect of particular word choice.

As I watched, the sun broke weakly through, brightened the rich red of the fawns, and **kindled** their white spots.

— E. B. White, “Twins,” *Poems and Sketches of E.B. White*

**Discuss:**

1. What kind of flame does *kindled* imply? How does this verb suit the purpose of the sentence?
2. Would the sentence be strengthened or weakened by changing *the sun broke weakly through* to *the sun burst through?* Explain the effect this change would have on the use of the verb *kindled*.

**Apply:**

Brainstorm a list of action verbs that demonstrate the effects of sunlight.

An aged man is but a paltry thing A **tattered** coat upon a stick....

— W. B. Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium”

**Discuss:**

1. What picture is created by the use of the word *tattered*?
2. By understanding the connotations of the word *tattered*, what do we understand about the persona’s attitude toward *an aged man*?

**Apply:**

List three adjectives that can be used to describe a pair of shoes. Each adjective should connote a different feeling about the shoes. Discuss your list with a partner.

The man sighed **hugely**.

— E. Annie Proulx, *The Shipping News*

**Discuss:**

1. What does it mean to sigh hugely?
2. How would the meaning of the sentence change if we rewrote it as: *The man sighed* ***loudly****.*

**Apply:**

Fill in the blank below with an adverb:

The man coughed \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Your adverb should make the cough express an attitude. For example, the cough could express contempt, desperation, or propriety. Do not state the attitude. Instead, let the adverb imply it.

    A rowan\* like a **lipsticked** girl.

— Seamus Heaney, “Song,” *Field Work*

\*a small deciduous tree native to Europe, having white flower clusters and orange berries.

**Discuss:**

1. Other than the color, what comes to mind when you think of a *lipsticked* girl?
2. How would it change the meaning and feeling of the line if, instead of *lipsticked girl*, the author wrote *girl with lipstick on*?

**Apply:**

Write a simile comparing a tree with a domesticated animal. In your simile, use a word that is normally used as a noun (like *lipstick*) as an adjective (like *lipsticked*).