

Word Choice Exemplar

Word Choice [Rubric Level 8]

Identifies words and phrases that impact the meaning and tone of the text; clearly and accurately explains the meaning of those words and phrases as they are used in the text (e.g., figurative, connotative, and technical meanings). **Analyses the impact of a pattern of word choices on meaning and tone and the relationship between word choice and context or medium.**

Prompt: Pick one of the key words or phrases from the story and in two well developed paragraphs, discuss its/their overall importance to it.

As you read the exemplar below, note if/how the writer:

- Introduces and contextualises the 'key word or phrase' (Who uses it? When? How often? Why is it used? etc.)
- Does the writer discuss the meaning of the word (connotation, denotation)?
- How is evidence selected, used, and integrated into the paragraphs?
- How is the significance of the word choice explored?
- How is the final paragraph concluded?

An important motif of Zadie Smith's short story 'The Dialectic', is the constant tension between the ideal and reality. This tension forms the core of the debate between the daughter and the mother about the mother's relationship to animals. However, the setting of the story also plays a complex and important role in deepening this tension beyond just disagreement of opinions. Though there are many examples of this, Smith's use of the word 'silt' in relation to the Sopot resort beach the characters find themselves on is particularly illustrative. The word itself is used by the narrator twice. The first time is to give some context to the daughter's statement that she "dislike[s] this place" (Smith 5). Silt is of course a loose soil – often lighter than sand - so whereas at an ideal sand would separate from the water and create the conditions for clear, blue water, silt on the Polish beach mixes in with the water, makes it dirty (the boys' chests are "grey with that strange silt" (5) – they are literally *soiled*), opaque, and – a bit like life – messy. The daughter thinks

that a supposedly ideal place (a resort) “makes no sense” being close to “such a filthy and unwelcoming sea.” (5)

That Smith wants this silt to take on a more complex symbolic meaning (*life being messy but...*) becomes clearer in the next paragraph, when the narrator – this time in examining the thoughts of the mother – writes “The silt was of course not filth, it was natural...she only knew to be sure to wash out all their costumes nightly in the hotel sink.” (5) In this usage, yes, the conditions of life may not be ideal – they may be second class and pose challenges to the characters – but on the other hand they need not prevent them from enjoying the good things in life. It is natural to get a bit soiled by our surroundings, but this, at the end of the day, it need not cancel out the good things that a beach, a vacation, family time, tradition, or a rest, can offer. That the silty waters can offer some sort of synthesis to these contradictions point us back to the title of the book – indeed what we are witnessing may very well be a ‘dialectic’ in action.