

## **Monster Wars**

Found on *The Council of Basic Writing Resource Share*

<http://cbwshare.wordpress.com/2012/07/>

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With inspiration from/credit to UIUC Academic Writing Program orientation

The goal of this activity is to show that context and specificity are crucial parts of an essay; without them, chances are the essay makes no sense. The activity is designed in two parts: first, you ask students to imagine a monster in their heads and to write the most careful physical description of the monster they can come up with. The next day you collect the descriptions and you distribute them to different students in the class (preferably those far away from where the description originated—no need for consulting in what follows). Bring paper and crayons and markers and ask the students to read the description in front of them and draw the monster according to it. When they are done, collect the descriptions/ drawings and return them to the student that wrote the description. Ask them to compare their imagined monster to the drawing and see if they look alike (for the most part, they never do). If the drawing looks nothing like the monster they imagined then their description was not specific enough. What was clear in their heads lost their context and specificity on the written description so another person could not understand it like they wanted. If the drawing looks like their monster, good job! They were actually specific enough. Generally speaking, when your students think they are being specific they are probably light years from being so: tell them to overdo it—it's easier to take specificity out of an essay than to add it in.

## **Writing Competitions**

Encourage Olympic level word smithing when you ask students to transform a boring, simplistic sentence like “The boy likes the pony.” Collect the best on the document camera and have students vote on their favorite. This is a great way to embed skills you've been teaching like using active verbs or creating complex sentences. This is also a fun way to practice creating thesis statements, topic sentences, or other high stakes moments.

## **100 Verb Challenge**

This activity was developed by Molly Michaud at North Idaho Community College.

Let students draw a letter for this activity (Molly puts her letter cards in a Bag of Destiny). Students are responsible for finding 100 verbs that start with that letter. Then have students use that list of verbs (and only that list) to create a poem. This is a great chance to emphasize the idea that some verbs by themselves can tell a story, such as *amble* and *dismantle*.