Learning Targets
- Identify and evaluate the use of sensory details and figurative language.
- Use clauses to add variety to writing as well as convey meaning.

Preview
In this activity, you will read an essay and evaluate the author’s use of sensory details and figurative language.

Setting a Purpose for Reading
- In the following excerpt from “If You Are What You Eat, Then What Am I?” author Geeta Kothari creates an image of a can of tuna with vivid language and telling details. As you read the passage for sensory details, highlight the descriptions that speak to your senses.
- Circle unknown words and phrases. Try to determine the meaning of the words by using context clues, word parts, or a dictionary.

Essay
from If You Are What You Eat, Then What Am I?
by Geeta Kothari

1 “To belong is to understand the tacit codes of the people you live with.”—Michael Ignatieff

2 The first time my mother and I open a can of tuna, I am nine years old. We stand in the doorway of the kitchen, in semi-darkness, the can tilted toward daylight. I want to eat what the kids at school eat: bologna, hot dogs, salami—foods my parents find repugnant because they contain pork and meat by-products, crushed bone and hair glued together by chemicals and fat. Although she has never been able to tolerate the smell of fish, my mother buys the tuna, hoping to satisfy my longing for American food.

3 Indians, of course, do not eat such things.

4 The tuna smells fishy, which surprises me because I can’t remember anyone’s tuna sandwich actually smelling like fish. And the tuna in those sandwiches doesn’t look like this, pink and shiny, like an internal organ. In fact, this looks similar to the bad foods my mother doesn’t want me to eat. She is silent, holding her face away from the can while peering into it like a half-blind bird.

5 “What’s wrong with it?” I ask.

6 She has no idea. My mother does not know that the tuna everyone else’s mothers made for them was tuna salad.

7 “Do you think it’s botulism?”

1 Botulism is a serious illness caused by eating improperly preserved food.
8 I have never seen botulism, but I have read about it, just as I have read about but never eaten steak and kidney pie.

9 There is so much my parents don't know. They are not like other parents, and they disappoint me and my sister. They are supposed to help us negotiate the world outside, teach us the signs, the clues to proper behavior: what to eat and how to eat it.

10 We have expectations, and my parents fail to meet them, especially my mother, who works full time. I don’t understand what it means, to have a mother who works outside and inside the home; I notice only the ways in which she disappoints me. She doesn’t show up for school plays. She doesn’t make chocolate-frosted cupcakes for my class. At night, if I want her attention, I have to sit in the kitchen and talk to her while she cooks the evening meal, attentive to every third or fourth word I say.

11 We throw the tuna away. This time my mother is disappointed. I go to school with tuna eaters. I see their sandwiches, yet cannot explain the discrepancy between them and the stinking, oily fish in my mother’s hand. We do not understand so many things, my mother and I.

Second Read

• Reread the essay to answer these text-dependent questions.

• Write any additional questions you have about the text in your Reader/Writer Notebook.

1. **Key Ideas and Details**: Use evidence from the essay to explain why Kothari says her mother disappoints her.

2. **Craft and Structure**: What senses does Kothari appeal to in her descriptions of the can of tuna? Give examples for each. Then explain how these descriptions help to support Kothari’s conclusion, “We do not understand so many things, my mother and I.”
Working from the Text

3. How does this writer share elements of her culture through her descriptive details? Give examples.

4. Use the table below to record and evaluate the writer’s use of sensory details. Write at least four examples of sensory details in the table. Then analyze each example to understand the effect the writer is trying to create. Finally, evaluate each detail’s effectiveness in conveying the writer’s experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sensory Detail</th>
<th>Analyze the Effect</th>
<th>Evaluate How Effective It Is</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Language and Writer’s Craft: Clauses

Clauses add variety to writing as well as help to convey meaning. Writers use a variety of clauses to enhance their writing.

**Adverbial clauses** (often beginning with after, as far as, before, even though, if, no matter how, that, while, or where) describe a verb in the sentence’s main clause. An adverbial clause answers questions such as when?, why?, how?, or to what degree?

*Example:* At night, if I want her attention, I have to sit in the kitchen and talk to her while she cooks the evening meal, attentive to every third or fourth word I say.

**Noun clauses** perform the same functions in a sentence as nouns. A noun clause answers such questions as who?, whom?, or what?

*Example:* I don’t understand what it means, to have a mother who works outside and inside the home; I notice only the ways in which she disappoints me.

**Adjectival clauses** (often beginning with that, which, who, whom, or whose) describe a noun in the sentence’s main clause. An adjectival clause answers questions such as which one? or what kind?

*Example:* I don’t understand what it means, to have a mother who works outside and inside the home; I notice only the ways in which she disappoints me.

**Practice** Think about the purpose of each of the above underlined clauses on the narrative, and note these purposes in the space provided.

---

Writing to Sources: Explanatory Text

Write an essay that explains the author’s use of a can of tuna as a symbol of a cultural difference. Discuss the author’s use of specific words and figurative language to describe the characters’ ideas about the tuna. How does this narrative technique engage readers and help them to interact with the story? Be sure to:

- Begin with a clear thesis statement that introduces the topic of the symbol and your view on how the writer uses it to engage readers.
- Include direct quotations and specific examples and details from the text to support your thesis statement. Introduce and punctuate all quotations correctly.
- Use a coherent organizational structure that shows how your ideas are connected and provide a concluding statement that follows from and supports the information.