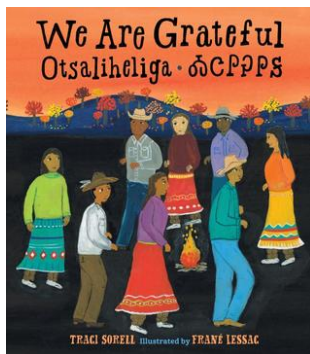


Rich Language in Nonfiction Writing

From alliteration to zeugma, there are dozens of different kinds of language devices, and all of them can enrich nonfiction writing. Authors carefully select each and every word to craft text bursting with rich, powerful language that engages their young audience.

When used skillfully, figurative language infuses prose with combinations of sounds and syllables that are especially pleasing to the human ear. As a result, they can help to give a piece a

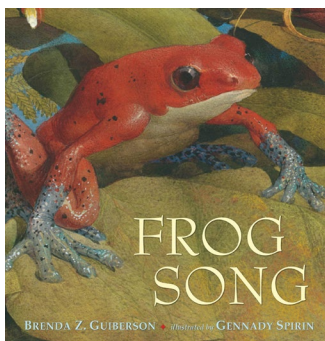


lyrical voice. Consider this passage from *We Are Grateful: Otsaliheliga* by Traci Sorell:

When cool breezes blow and leaves fall,
we say otsaliheliga . . .
. . . as shell shakers dance all night around the fire,
burnt cedar's scent drifts upward during the
Great New Moon Ceremony.

Notice how the author employs alliteration, sensory details, and imagery to transport young readers to the Cherokee Nation's autumn Great New Moon Ceremony and show them how special it is.

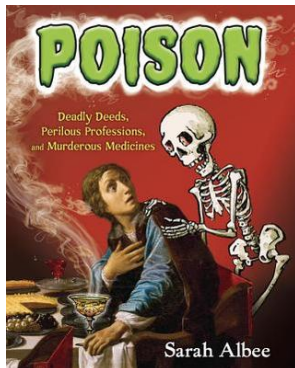
In *Frog Song*, Brenda Z. Guiberson uses vibrant verbs, similes, alliteration, repetition, and onomatopoeia to enliven her text and highlight the incredible diversity of frogs and their mating calls. Here's an excerpt:



In Spain, the song of the male midwife toad clangs like a bell. **TINK TINK TINK TINK!**
He carries a string of sticky eggs and crouches under a wet log to keep them moist. **SQUIZZLE-SQUIZ.** When he feels the tadpoles squirming, he hops, hops, hops to find a pool where they can hatch.

During the revision process, Guiberson sometimes uses a thesaurus to help her find the perfect word. She also reads her work aloud, listening to every syllable and sound, and asks other people to read it to her. "I pay close attention," she says. "Where do they hesitate or stumble? Where does the writing seem flat or quiet? What could be stronger? I go through this process several times."

Combining language devices like puns, rhyme, alliteration, and surprising phrasing can make writing more humorous and playful, which is perfect for authors interested in crafting a lively voice. Consider these amusing headings from *Poison: Deadly Deeds, Perilous Professions, and Murderous Medicines* by Sarah Albee:



Murderous Medicines by Sarah Albee:

Toxic Plots, Poison Pots, and Shipboard Shots

I Came, I Saw, I Poisoned

Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow

Finger-licking Bad

Albee includes this kind of language to help middle-grade readers see just how “amazing and exciting and interesting history actually is.”

Albee notes that while her early drafts often include some lively writing, enriching her prose with “humor and energy is something I usually do at a late stage of revision. I carefully examine each sentence and think: How can I make this funnier, or more vivid, for my reader?”

To get her creative juices flowing, Albee often makes lists of words that relate to her topic. Then she tries to think of alliterative adjectives, rhymes, and synonyms that might be pertinent. She also looks for ways to turn clichés or familiar phrases on their heads, such as I Came, I Saw, I Poisoned and Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow. “It can take a lot of mental energy to come up with a good turn of phrase,” says Albee, “but it’s so satisfying when I do!”

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