

Grade 6 Reading Mini-lessons:  
Interactive Read-Alouds

*Langston's Train Ride*  
By Robert Burleigh

*Structural Elements:*

**TONE and MOOD**

**Minnesota Standards:**

- Identify and analyze literary elements and devices in works of fiction including characterization, plot, tone and theme and the ways they convey meaning.
- Interpret literature by answering questions that ask for analysis and evaluation.
- Participate in and follow agreed-upon rules for conversation and formal discussions in large and small groups.
- Demonstrate active listening and comprehension.

**Note:** Tone and mood are two literary elements that are often confused. In order to clarify the distinctions between tone and mood, the teacher may want to create an anchor chart with the following definitions:

**Mood:** The overall atmosphere or emotional effect that the text creates for the reader. Mood is how the writer's words make us feel.

**Tone:** The author's attitude toward his or her subject. The author's language and word choices convey the tone in literature.

**Tone is in the author's voice. Mood is in the reader.**

Identifying tone and mood requires knowing the definitions of many descriptive vocabulary words. An extensive list of tone and mood words can be found at [http://s.spachman.tripod.com/SummerWork/tone\\_mood.doc](http://s.spachman.tripod.com/SummerWork/tone_mood.doc).

### **FOCUS THE LEARNING:**

I love to watch suspenseful movies! The overall atmosphere draws me in, often with dramatic lighting, interesting camera angles, and music that builds the excitement. That suspense is the mood of the movie. The mood of a piece of writing, just as in a movie, is the overall atmosphere. The mood of a movie or of a book is the emotional effect that the work has on me, the audience.

Another element of a text is the tone. The tone is the author's attitude toward his or her subject. The author's language and word choices convey the tone in literature. The tone could be happy, sad, angry or sentimental, for example.

It is our job as readers to examine details in the language that convey the mood and tone in a piece.

Today we are going to return to a book we read earlier this year, *Langston's Train Ride*, by Robert Burleigh. The last time we read this book, we were determining the author's purpose for writing it: whether Burleigh is writing to inform, persuade or entertain the reader – or some combination of purposes. Today, we'll reread sections of the book to focus on tone and mood.

### **READ THE FIRST FEW PAGES THROUGH “Yes, I am a poet!”**

Teacher think-aloud: I am feeling a clear mood in the opening of this book. To understand the mood, I ask myself, “How does this passage make me feel?” I am feeling exhilarated and upbeat as I read the description of this vibrant street scene. The overall atmosphere is energized and happy. That's the mood, happy and hopeful and exhilarated.

When I think about the tone of the author, I am trying to discover his attitude toward his subject. It is clear from his word choices that Robert Burleigh is using an informal, playful tone to let us know how much he likes this place and these people. He uses lively, joyful images such as “... swarming with people.” “Jumping and jiving!” “... a whirr vibrating in the air.” “I skit-scat a little half-dance on the sidewalk.”



Thinking partners/Turn-and-Talk: *Think and talk with your partner. Identify other details that support my description of the mood as happy and hopeful and the author's tone as playful and joyful. Also comment on how the illustrations do or don't support the mood and the tone.*

### **EITHER READ FROM THE STOPPING POINT ABOVE, OR SKIP AHEAD TO THE PAGE THAT BEGINS, “The train rolls on...” and READ THROUGH “... and learned to hate slavery.”**

Teacher think-aloud: The mood has shifted in this section. I ask myself, what does this passage make me feel? The description of the time of slavery changes my earlier playful mood to one that is more somber and serious.

The mood shifts because the author’s tone has shifted. I can see how the author’s tone affects the mood. Burleigh’s tone is more serious and thoughtful. His sentences shift from the short “jazzy” sentences of the opening to longer sentences such as, “Slaves worked here – on boats, in nearby fields, and alongside the banks, stacking sandbags to hold back floods.”



Thinking partners/Turn-and-Talk: *Talk together. What details in this short passage created a change of mood for you as you listened? What is the connection between the author’s tone and the mood created?*

**CONTINUE TO THE END.** Pause occasionally for partners to talk about the tone and mood. Have them identify details that signal these elements. Prompt students to think about whether the tone and mood change and to identify the changes. Consider the tone and mood of Hughes’ poem, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” and how it differs from the rest of the book.

### **END OF LESSON REFLECTION**

This book is rich with descriptive words and details. As the thinking of the main character changed throughout the book, the author’s tone shifted and the mood changed.

Not all tones and moods in texts are the same though. A letter to the editor would definitely have a different tone. A mystery story set in a creepy old castle would have a different mood. As readers we can think about the details in a text that create the mood and tone – and then adjust our reading behaviors to match.



Thinking partners/Turn-and-Talk: *Partners, think together. Why is it important for us as readers to identify mood as we read? What about tone?*

On these trips, the journey is the destination: Here are seven of the longest train rides in the world—across Russia, the U.S., Australia, Southeast Asia, and more. They're perfect for anyone not in a hurry. This gallery was originally published in 2014.