

## “Looking for The Gulf Motel”—Exploring Sensory Details

### Lesson Overview

How do you describe something to make people feel like they’re right there in the moment with you, whether or not they share your experiences?

### Part I: Making Observations

Watch the video and then share your ideas.

1. Who is the speaker in the poem?
2. What is going on in the poem?

Follow along as your teacher reads the rest of “Looking for The Gulf Motel” (lines 20–55).

Think about the following questions and share your responses in the class discussion.

3. What is something that really stands out to you about *this* family?
4. What is something that seems very connected to your family, or a place you remember?

### Part II: Enjoying Language

Sensory details: details of sight, sound, touch, smell, and/or taste that evoke a vivid image for the reader.

1. Have each group member select one of the five senses:
  - Taste
  - Touch
  - Hearing
  - Smell
  - Sight
2. Highlight every example you find of your assigned sense in the poem. Be imaginative—even if your sense isn’t specifically noted in a particular moment, can you make an argument for why you have to use your assigned sense for that moment to “work”?
3. Share what you found with your group.
  - Discuss two places where your sense is best represented.
  - Then decide if the images are clearly matched with one sense, or if there are images where the senses overlap.
  - What are the overlapping images—images that end up in more than one list of senses?

## “Looking for The Gulf Motel”—*Exploring Sensory Details*

List the overlapping images your group discussed most.

	<b>Overlapping Images</b> (quote, line numbers)	<b>Senses in Each Image</b> (list all that apply)
A.	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
B.	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
C.	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

4. What do you think Blanco wants the reader to see and feel through the imagery he chose?

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**Extension Question:** Do the sensory details and the feelings they convey change at the end of the poem or stay the same? Identify and explain one example.

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### PART III: Try it On

Watch the video and listen as Blanco describes sensory details and emotions.

1. Choose two of the moments below that have multiple sensory details and convey emotions. Replace Blanco’s imagery with imagery from your own memory of a place or person.

What do you want the reader to see and feel through *your* imagery?

**Example:**

embarrassing us  
as they roll the luggage cart past the front desk  
loaded with our scruffy suitcases

Could become...

embarrassing us  
as they **take too many pictures on the first day of school**  
**with our matching lunch boxes**

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### Blanco’s moments

- A. My brother should still be thirteen, sneaking rum in the bathroom, sculpting naked women from sand. (42–44)
- B. My mother should still be in the kitchenette of The Gulf Motel, her daisy sandals from Kmart squeaking across the linoleum, (20–22)
- C. I should still be eight years old dazzled by seashells and how many seconds I hold my breath underwater (44–46)
- D. my father should still be alive, slow dancing with my mother on the sliding-glass balcony of The Gulf Motel. No music, only the waves (33–35)

### My moments

Moment 1:

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Moment 2:

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### Part IV: Understanding Form and Structure

1. Is Blanco listing sensory details together or is there an order to how he put them together? Discuss with your partner:
  - Does he organize his details to communicate one feeling or idea?
  - What form did he use to build the poem? How did he arrange the words and phrases?

#### **Form: the physical structure of a poem**

2. Look at the repeated refrain, “*There should be nothing here I don’t remember...*” Discuss with your partner:
  - What is another sentence where you expect to use “should”? When do people use that verb tense “should”?
  - Why do you think Blanco chose this verb tense in so much of the poem as opposed to writing, for example, “There is a lot I can remember...”?

### Wrap-Up

1. Choose one sensory detail from the poem and explain how it connects to the refrain, “*There should be nothing here, I don’t remember...*”