

A brilliant blend:
tactile and visual
imagery, elements of
diction, and tone in
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Memories, the good and the bad, shape the character of the people that we become, as Mark Jarman demonstrates in his 1997 poem, "Ground Swell." The author effectively recreates his chilly summer mornings of surfing for the reader, through use of visual and tactile imagery, vividly spoken with carefully selected expressions. Ideal use of informal diction and a contrasting tone reflects the author's emotions, and the emerging transcendent imagery engulfs the reader as a result. Imagery plays a key role in the reader's ability to empathize with Jarman and his recollection of a summer so vital to the intellectual individual that he becomes. Mark Jarman in his poem, "Ground Swell," recalls the summer that he turned sixteen, communicating his experiences to the reader through a superb blend of informal diction and a contrasting tone; supplementing tactile imagery subjects the reader to Jarman's physical and emotional consciousness. Mark Jarman impressively draws the reader directly into the mind of a fifteen year-old boy, employing distinct visual and tactile imagery, permitting the reader to the physical experiences of a young surfer. The author's vivid images allow the reader to feel the young boy's pain after a routine morning of surfing: knees bleeding through my usher's uniform behind the candy counter in the theater after a morning's surfing; paddling frantically to top the brisk outsiders coming to wreck me, trundle me gawkily along the beach's floor's gravel and sand; my knees ached with salt. (Jarman 4-9) The author speaks of his painfully bloody knees, leaving stains on his usher's pants at work after a morning surf, a battle against the hefty waves that toss him along the gravel and sand, abusing his knees, inflicting salt enflamed wounds. The reader feels the pain of the author's wounded knees, seeing them bleed through the pants, almost touching the throbbing flesh, along with the taste of salt in the reader's

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mouth. These images, evoking a deeper level of awareness, appeal to the senses of taste and touch, and when mixed with the visual, give the reader a realistic feel for the author's pain. Jarman sits the reader in the water, waiting for a wave to come along: "...that slow waiting / when, to invigorate yourself you peed / inside your bathing suit and felt the warmth/crawl all around your hips and thighs." (Jarman 18-21). The reader feels the relief of a recently emptied bladder, wrapped in a warm blanket of urine, a shield from the chilly ocean water, a sense of comfort. Jarman stimulates the reader's senses by creating the environment of the water with soothing images: "...return to those remembered chilly mornings, / the light spreading like a great skin on the water, /and the blue water scalloped with wind ridges..." (15-17). The briskness of the morning air that forges ridges on the calm, blue water, along with the morning sun, imposes a calming effect on the reader. Jarman's use of visual imagery fortified by the author's fitting choice of words and their placement to set the poem's contrasting tone, provokes the senses, allowing the reader to tap into the boy's physical consciousness. The poem "Ground Swell's" clear visual images are dependent upon Jarman's utility of informal diction and a contrasting tone. The diverse tone of the poem becomes quite evident after the author's acknowledgement by an older boy on the water: He had said my name without scorn, but just a bit surprised to notice me among those trying the big waves of the morning break. His name is carved now on the black wall in Washington, the frozen wave, that grievers cross to find a name or names. (40-45) After acknowledging the author by saying his name, the older boy ends up, just as quickly, simply a name on the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in Washington D. C., the large black wall, with an enormous "frozen wave" of sorrow. Jarman's <https://assignbuster.com/a-brilliant-blend-tactile-and-visual-imagery-elements-of-diction-and-tone-in-mark-jarmans-ground-swell/>

strong choice of words, allows the reader to appreciate the change in tone; the use of words like “black wall” or “frozen wave,” fitting words for a poem about surfing, shift the reader from a pleasant and light tone, to a more serious one. Jarman’s hand-picked words help to formulate the atmosphere of his poem; an exciting atmosphere gets the reader’s adrenaline pumping, focusing on the morning surf: “...paddling frantically / to top the brisk outsiders coming to wreck me, / trundle me gawkily along the beach floor’s gravel and sand...” (6-9). Jarman’s use of phrases like “paddling frantically,” put the reader in the moment; “brisk outsiders” dramatizes the image making the waves an enemy that must be outwitted; they help the reader visualize the surf. The awkwardness of “trundle me gawkily” allows the reader to visualize the coarse and cumbersome fashion in which waves abuse of the author. Jarman, as well, enables the reader to mentally picture his words, by using strong similes; during his surf, the author notices the older boy: “...grown a great blond mustache, like a walrus, / skimmed past me like a smooth machine on the water...” (30-31). The description of the “great blond mustache,” being like one of a walrus, creates a vivid image of the shape and texture of the mustache; the reader sees the boy’s role model, sees how the boy aspires to be. A “smooth machine,” powerfully demonstrates to the reader how much the author looks up to the older boy; this creates a perfect environment for the sharp shift in tone, lying only four lines ahead. Informal diction, coupled with a contrasting tone, creates a more than suitable environment for vivid images, supplying the reader with an opportunity to delve into the boy’s emotional sentiment. Realistic and energetic images play a large role in the reader’s understanding of the boy’s emotional mindset in “Ground Swell,” at the unstable age of fifteen. The boy

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has now lost his role model to the bloody hand of war, the powerful images explain how he feels: His name is carved now on the black wall in Washington, the frozen wave that grievers cross to find a name or names. I knew him as I say I knew him, then, which wasn't very well. My father preached his funeral. He came home in a bag that may have mixed in pieces of his squad. (Jarman 43-49). The older boy's name simply becomes just one of many names on the enormous Vietnam Veterans memorial in Washington, D. C., coming home dismembered in a body bag; the author's father preaches at the funeral. Jarman's black wall, a potent image of mourning, conveys to the reader the author's sadness; the reader feels the pain, the resemblance of a frozen wave, stricken with the realization of a sudden loss of a young life. A young man coming home from war in a bag with other pieces of his squad, a shocking and disgusting image, compels the reader to endure and understand the author's sadness, listening as his father preaches at the funeral. Jarman constructs a calming atmosphere, using images that strike the reader emotionally through multiple senses, describing a morning out on the water: "...return to those remembered chilly mornings, / the light spreading like a great skin on the water, / and the blue water scalloped with wind ridges..." (15-17). The reader envisions a morning surf in the water free of worry, seeing the sunshine coat the vast ocean like a "great skin," a protective blanket. The reader, in turn, relaxes into the story, because of the calm and secure atmosphere created by the image. Wind ridges deepen the serenity of the image, helping the reader to feel the chill in the morning air, plunging the reader further into a relaxed state. The reader enjoys the author's peaceful place, sinking deeper into the poem. The author's vivid images in "Ground Swell" create an emotional environment for the reader; <https://assignbuster.com/a-brilliant-blend-tactile-and-visual-imagery-elements-of-diction-and-tone-in-mark-jarmans-ground-swell/>

one the reader can sense and almost touch, a preparation for poem's ending in an emotional shortcoming. Mark Jarman reproduces for his reader, the summer of his sixteenth birthday in the poem, "Ground Swell," by utilizing components of visual and tactile imagery communicated through an array of informal diction and a converse tone, enabling the reader to enter his fifteen year-old mind. Jarman uses various vivid images that appeal to many of the reader's senses, putting the reader in the body of the boy; feeling, touching, seeing and tasting all that he does. To complement his convincing imagery, Jarman varies the tone throughout the poem, with the help of informal diction. The reader's mind becomes engulfed by the author's vivid images, generating an emotional dock between the reader and the author. The mind can be a powerful tool for enjoying poetry; Jarman harnesses its power in "Ground Swell," providing the reader's mind with a rich slice of literature to feast on. Works Cited Jarman, Mark. "Ground Swell." In *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*. Michael Meyer Ed, 7th Edition. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 2005. 808-809.