Tips for Discussing Diction

First things first: tone and mood

For your projects, you are going to be asked to focus on diction and the way it contributes to our understanding of characters, setting, and the ways the author's word choice contributes to our understanding of tone and mood.

Both tone and mood deal with the emotions brought forth by a particular passage. Again, **tone** refers to author's (sometimes the narrator's) stance towards a topic while **mood** refers to the emotions brought up in the reader.   Because these literary terms are very similar, we can use similar words to describe them (refer to the link on the back of your project handout and/or the resource that was posted on the website).

And now to diction

When we engage in analysis, we are essentially making a claim about a given text. When you analyze the way diction contributes to tone or mood, you are making a claim about the type of mood or tone (e.g. "the author develops a melancholy tone…"). In order to adequately support this claim, you must incorporate evidence.

Many of you are typically used to including lengthy quotes in your analysis. While this is appropriate for many tasks, when you are writing an analysis on an author's diction your focus should be more specific. Remember, **diction** focuses on the *words* the writer chooses to convey a particular meaning. When analyzing diction, look for _specific words_ or short phrases that seem stronger than the others. Diction is NEVER the entire sentence!

Some helpful things to consider for diction: patterns and/or repetition. Is there a pattern or similarity in the words the writer chooses (ex. Do the words imply sadness, happiness, anger, etc?). These patterns help you to identify the type of diction the author is using which will, in turn, develop a particular mood or tone. Additionally, a writer might use the **repetition** of the same words or phrases. Repeating the same word or phrase helps the reader emphasize a point, feeling, etc.

Effective diction is shaped by words that are clear, concrete, and exact. Good writers avoid words like *pretty*, *nice*, and *bad* because they are not specific enough. Instead, they rely on words that invoke a specific effect in order to bring the reader into the event being described. When you think about each of the chapters we have read so far, think about the words and phrases that Fitzgerald uses to pull you in and to give you an understanding of what is going on in *The Great Gatsby*.

And now on to incorporating diction in an analysis

In case you missed it in your reading up to this point, let me emphasize this again: the words an author uses create the tone/mood. Review the following examples to help you identify ways to properly incorporate and integrate evidence about diction into your analysis.

Consider using the following chart to help you organize your ideas:

Say	Mean	Matter
Write your quotation, or the actual words of the author from the text.	*Paraphrase the text. What is the meaning of the quotation?*	*What effect do the words have on you, the reader? What do these words reveal about the tone or mood of the chapter?*
Example:	Example:	Example:
"It was a matter of chance that I should have rented a house in one of the strangest communities in North America. It was on that slender riotous island which extends itself due east of New York—and where there are, among the other natural curiosities, two unusual formations of land" (Fitzgerald 4).	The setting for *The Great Gatsby* is an unusual place, quite unlike any other. The island of West Egg and East Egg are near New York.	In describing East and West Egg, the narrator adopts a taunting tone. Words like "unusual" and "curiosit[ies]" are used to describe the Eggs, resulting in a description that simultaneously informs the reader that these places are unusual and unlike any other and highlights their oddities (Fitzgerald 4). Additionally, West Egg, where the narrator lives, is described as "riotous," which hints to the abundance, excess, and chaos that characterize the island and its inhabitants.

**Friendly Reminder: The above example is for a particular passage. As you work on your projects, focus on the mood/tone of either an entire chapter or section of the chapter. Your analysis of diction and tone will most certainly be longer than that in the example.

Good luck as you work on your soundtracks! Let me know if you have any additional questions.