

First-Person Adolescent Storytellers and Virginia Tufte's *Artful Sentences: Syntax as Style*

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ABSTRACT:

In *Artful Sentences: Syntax as Style*, Virginia Tufte illustrates how grammar, word choice, and syntax strategies help to generate the perfect juxtaposition of words and punctuation that will make each sentence pop (Clark). Tufte's handbook includes examples from a variety of texts; for example, John Keats, Andy Warhol, Ernest Hemingway, Julia Child's *The Joy of Cooking*, and more. However, there is a noticeable lack of adolescent narrators in Tufte's smorgasbord of literature examples. This lack is significant, due to the popularity of first-person narrators in adolescent literature. Therefore, in order to analyze whether Tufte's syntax strategies can also be applied to first-person adolescent narrators, two contrasting teenage protagonists were examined: Matilda, in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Fever 1793*, and Saba, in Moira Young's *Blood Red Road*. The final analysis illustrates that Virginia Tufte's syntax strategies, in *Artful Sentences: Syntax as Style*, are equally effective when applied to first-person adolescent storytellers, particularly strategies that include verbs, fragments, and the creation of cohesiveness.

Keywords: adolescent fiction, grammar, first-person narration, Virginia Tufte, creative writing strategies, young adult fiction

INTRODUCTION

I first discovered Virginia Tufte's *Artful Sentences: Syntax as Style* while preparing for a fiction workshop with Breena Clarke at the University of Southern Maine's Stonecoast MFA creative writing program. Clarke mentioned Tufte's handbook in her welcome email, announcing that we would analyze our sentences to make "each comma account for itself while trying to discover the perfect juxtaposition of words and punctuation that will make our sentences pop." The idea of making each comma accountable intrigued me; without hesitation, I ordered the book from Amazon. I discovered that Clarke's directive perfectly explains the *raison d'être* of Tufte's *Artful Sentences: Syntax as Style*. In a little less than three-hundred pages, Virginia Tufte includes many useful strategies that enable writers to craft powerful and precise sentences that are alive with meaning. From Chapter One, "Short Sentences" to Chapter Fourteen, "Syntactic Symbolism," she presents a delicious sensory smorgasbord of grammar and syntax strategies, as well as great literature. In fact, it is easy to forget that Tufte's handbook is primarily a text that centers on form and syntax, for her examples pool from a variety of sources, such as Faulkner, Joyce, Warhol, Nabokov, Julia Child's *The Joy of Cooking*, *The King James Bible*, and the *9/11 Commission Report*. The brief passages illustrate – through a collection of styles, voices, and content – that Tufte's syntax strategies work. Still, the handbook lacks examples with first-person adolescent narrators. This is a significant lack, too, particularly since young adult literature is popular in today's culture, as Tunnell and Jacobs explain.¹ The genre of young adult literature often features stories told through the eyes of an adolescent, first-person narrator, since the first-person viewpoint places young readers "in the character's shoes" (McCoach par.3). Therefore, a closer analysis was necessary to determine whether Tufte's strategies would also apply to the first person adolescent storyteller.

Because the world view and experience of an adolescent is usually less-sophisticated than that of an adult, it is only logical that the narrating "voice" of an adolescent would be less likely to contain colorful appositives, multi-syllable adjectives, or most of the infinitive passages that Tufte highlights. However, the strategies in Tufte's handbook are more than syntax strategies for the learned, the literary, and the elite. They are well thought out strategies that align with real speech and storytellers. Furthermore, a close analysis of two first-person adolescent narrators, Matilda, in Laurie Halse Anderson's *Fever 1793*, and Saba, in Moira Young's *Blood Red Road*, illustrates Virginia Tufte's strategies, in *Artful Sentences: Syntax as Style*, as applying equally to all first-person narrators, including the first person adolescent storyteller.

NOVELS AND NARRATORS

Two contrasting young adult novels were examined, one historical fiction and one post-apocalyptic (fantasy) fiction. Both feature a first-person female storyteller, both are contemporary, and both have met with literary success. Laurie Halse Anderson's *Fever 1793*, narrated by fourteen-year-old Matilda Cook, takes place in 18th century Philadelphia during an outbreak of yellow fever. The second novel is Moira Young's *Blood Red Road*, the first book in her *Dust Lands Trilogy*. The story is narrated by eighteen-year-old Saba and takes place in a post-apocalyptic wasteland that appears to be Earth. The opening paragraph of each story was examined with the premise that each opening was specifically crafted to capture the reader's interest and curiosity, along with other passages that denote action and inspire strong emotions.

1 Tunnell & Jacobs explain the factors that contribute to the rise of young adult novels, including a rise in retail sales of books for children and young adults, a rise in school purchases to satisfy literature-based reading philosophies, sales from school paperback book clubs (e.g., Trumpet Club, Scholastic, Troll, Weekly Reader), and ALA established book prizes for young adult literature, such as the (2000) Michael L. Printz Award for young adult literature and the (2001) Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Award (85)

LITERATURE REVIEW: SYNTAX, STYLE, AND VOICE

The perfect juxtaposition of words and punctuation that allows a sentence to “pop,” as Clarke explains, is the often-elusive quality of “real voice” in fiction. Comprised of words on a page, and the arrangement of words, punctuation, and phrases known as “syntax,” the voice of a storyteller should be real, honest, and believable. The quality of real-ness is best explained by Ernest Hemingway, who asserts that it is the writer’s duty to create “living people” (qtd.in Bell 77). James Hilton adds to Hemingway’s insight, suggesting that “a genuine creation (of fiction) should have character as well as be one” (qtd.in Bell 77). Peter Elbow, in *Writing with Power: Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process*, asserts that real voice is often defined as authentic and sincere, for it “captures the sound of an individual on the page” (287). Moreover, “real voice” has the power to make readers sit up and pay attention because the words of the storyteller “go deep” (Elbow 300). To illustrate his point, Elbow includes the words of Stanford University Professor Ellen Nodd, who asserts that an effective voice is loud because it speaks directly to the reader’s ear. In other words, an authentic narrator has the power to reach out and grab their reader, pulling them out of the passive sidelines and into the action of the story.

To create an authentic literary voice, the fundamentals of sentence composition should not be underestimated. After all, it is the writer’s choice of words, syntax, and overall style that enable readers to experience a story first-hand, by eliciting powerful emotions within them. As fiction editor Beth Hill asserts, word choice, verb tense, and sentence structure can greatly influence reader emotions. According to Hill, some words are “triggers in themselves and can be used to set off the reader (emotionally)” (par. 23).

To illustrate her point, Hill includes two examples of fictional narration. In the first example, the word choice and verb tense “tell” the reader what is happening in the scene. For example, “Delores was afraid to open the door to the basement steps. She stood at the far side of the kitchen, debating what to do” (Hill par.6).

The fear experienced by Delores is described with three verb phrases: “Delores was afraid,” “she stood,” and “debating what to do.” Hill narrates what is happening in the scene, but that is all. Any sensory details that might be taking place are left to the reader to imagine.

In contrast, the second example inspires the reader to experience fear, along with Delores. Virginia Tufte would identify these sentences as “artful sentences,” for they inject movement into the sentence, triggering the reader’s emotions.

For example,

Delores’s hand trembled as she reached for the locked doorknob. Tom had warned her not to open the basement door when he wasn’t around. She bit her lip and tightened her fingers around the cold knob. (Hill par.6)

In Hill’s revised example, a feeling of anxiety, hesitation, and overall movement is created with the vivid verbs “trembled” and “reached.” Like adjectives, verbs have the ability to create rich descriptions, alive with motion. As Tufte explains, the verb phrase is the part of the sentence, that “does much of the saying” (63).

To illustrate how a verb can serve many different functions within a sentence, like Hill, Tufte includes an example that contains the verb “trembles,” written by William Keats. He writes, “The hare limped trembling through the frozen grass.” (qtd. in Tufte 64). Keat’s use of the verb “trembling” to add a feeling of movement to the description. Like Hill’s example of Delores, Keat’s hare trembles to life with the help of strong, expressive verbs,

Although the essence of what is communicated in a sentence is dependent on the verb phrase, what is “said” must also be clear and cohesive to be effective. The arrangement (syntax) of verbs, nouns, adverbs, and other intricacies of form, such as punctuation and sentence length, must blend into a cohesive whole in order to create a logical, authentic story. For example, in the sentence, “Delores’s hand trembled as she

reached for the locked doorknob,” the writer (Hill) establishes a cohesiveness of time and order with the use of the adverbial connector “as”. By connecting the two verb phrases with an adverb, the reader knows the action is taking place simultaneously. In this way, the adverbial connector gives the sentence a sense of logical relation and temporal order, contributing to the cohesiveness of the passage (Tufte 241). The reader is placed in a moment in time, amidst action that feels very real. In other words, the reader experiences the feeling of “trembling” and the motion of “reaching”, and even after the sentence is over, the feeling of movement lingers.

THE ADOLESCENT NARRATOR

Still, not every story can be authentically narrated by merging sophisticated nouns, verbs, and adverbial connectors. For example, an adolescent storyteller narrating an event might not use Keats’ description (“The hare limped trembling through the frozen grass”). In fact, an authentic teenage narrator would probably do the opposite by explaining events using verb phrases that are simple, if not ordinary. More believable would be sentences such as “The rabbit went over there” or “The bunny took off”. In order to analyze whether Tufte’s syntax strategies can be applied to an adolescent narrator, it is helpful to return to Ellen Nodd, who posits that “voice” in prose should speak to the ear of the reader (qtd. in Elbow 286).

Without a doubt, this strategy also applies when the reader is an adolescent. Katie McCoach, in “5 Key Ingredients All Young Adult Novels Must Have” posits that a well-crafted fictional voice, especially that of an adolescent, should be “strong and unique” (par 4). She asserts that “voice” in a young adult novel should be so well-defined that readers feel as if they immediately know the character (par.6). In “Know Your Young Audience: How to Write for Middle Grade and Young Adult Readers”, Mary Kole agrees, explaining that adolescents are often self-absorbed and possess an un-fixed identity. Distinct from adult narrators, the “real” voice of an adolescent storyteller should expose the angst and intensity of puberty. To illustrate the intensity of adolescence, Kole includes an example from her personal past: the experience of driving around as a teenager in her wizard-purple Ford Taurus, when the perfect song came on the radio and all parts of the universe finally clicked into place. To recreate the feeling of the universe “clicking” into place, and the emotional intensity of puberty, word choice and syntax should be carefully constructed to breathe life and experience into the written words.

Consider, once more, Beth Hill’s second sentence, “Delores’s hand trembled as she reached for the locked doorknob.” Imagine how the word choice and arrangement might change if Delores was a first-person adolescent narrator. Would she really describe her hand – in a moment of intense fear - as “trembling”? The answer is complicated, if not story-specific. Depending on the adolescent storyteller’s education, upbringing, story circumstances, and even the novel’s setting and time period, an adolescent narrator *might* use the verb “tremble”. Yet if Delores was a first-person adolescent narrator in a novel set in 2018, a simpler approach might be more effective; for example, her hand might “shake,” or she might “grab” the doorknob. After all, an effective first-person literary “voice” does not require complicated, lengthy sentences. The end-goal of creating real characters still applies, and the task of the writer remains the same: to “capture the sound of an individual on the page” (Elbow 287).

A FICTIONAL ADOLESCENT NARRATOR: MATILDA IN LAURIE HALSE ANDERSON’S *FEVER 1793*

Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Fever 1793* is a coming-of-age, young adult novel that accurately recounts a time in American history when a yellow fever epidemic broke out in Philadelphia. The story is told through the narration of fourteen-year-old Matilda Cook, and the syntax strategies explained by Tufte — particularly those of cohesiveness, fragments, and active verbs — help to create the first-person voice of Matilda, effectively bringing her story to life.

From the very first sentence, Anderson's choice of verbs and cohesive strategies help to establish the tone and setting of the story, as well as Matilda's relationship with her mother. An undertone of immediacy is also established. It is a tension that will continue to build as the story progresses, and the yellow fever epidemic becomes more rampant. In the opening paragraph of the novel, Matilda explains,

I woke to the sound of a mosquito whining in my left ear and my mother screeching
in the night

“Rouse yourself this instant!”

Mother snapped open the shutters and heat poured into our bedchamber. (Anderson 1)

Vivid verbs create a sense of movement in Matilda's narration. The back-to-back verb phrases, “whining in my left ear” and “screeching in the right,” allow the reader to experience Matilda's morning first hand. The reader can almost hear the buzz of the mosquito, followed by her mother's yelling. The choice of verbs — “whining” and “screeching” — also evoke a pressing tone, establishing an immediacy that will build as the plot unfolds.

Word choice and syntax also help to establish Matilda's eighteenth-century story. The verbal command of Matilda's mother, “Rouse”, provides a distinct taste of early American speech in 1793, for this is her mother's way of waking Matilda up to get her chores done. The use of “rouse” reveals that Matilda's story takes place when spoken language was more formal. Furthermore, the finite verbs that follow — “snapped” and “poured” — advance the feeling of time, action, and movement that Matilda introduced in the sentence before, when readers first heard the “whine” of the mosquito and the “screech” of Matilda's mother.

Laurie Halse Anderson also creates a sense of cohesiveness by linking the verb phrases with a conjunction connector. A subtle rhythmic tension is created when the two phrases, “I woke to the sound of a mosquito whining in my left ear” and “my mother screeching in the right”, are joined with “and”. Left to stand alone, without the conjunction, the narrated events would lose the sense of urgency that results from the strong, repeating gerunds (the “ing” verbals, “whining” and “screeching”).

As Matilda continues her narration, she uses a second sequence of verb phrases connected by another conjunction to move her story forward. For example, “Mother snapped open the shutters *and* heat poured into our bedchamber” (Anderson 1). In this way, active verbs and conjunction connectors create a cohesion that establishes an underlying rhythm in the story. And because tension is the source of fourteen-year-old Matilda's inner and outer conflict, the feeling of rhythm is critical, for it helps to establish the mood, setting, and conflict in *Fever 1793*.

Just as Virginia Tufte demonstrates with Keat's trembling hare that limped, verbs bring a sense of movement to a description. Anderson also uses this technique to describe a poignant moment when Matilda is about to collapse with exhaustion. After the yellow fever has claimed many victims, Matilda assists with three small children who are on the brink of death. Here, Halse Anderson uses a verb-turned-noun — “whisper —” together with a predicate-verb — “passed” — and two short sentences that rely on strong, past-tense verbs — “lifted,” “rattled,” and “shivered” — to create the important moment in the story when Matilda realizes the children would probably be dead when she returned from the well. In Matilda's words, “A whisper of wind passed by from the north. It lifted the hair off my face and rattled the squash vines. I shivered.” (Anderson 208)

Although she is only fourteen, Matilda's description evokes real and sensual feelings. There is nothing child-like about her observation. Instead, the reader can “hear” the wind, “feel” the lift of the air, and “see” the rattling of the vines. A cohesiveness in time and sequence is also established through the use of the conjunction “and”. Regardless of her youth, Matilda's first-person voice is authentic and effective, particularly the last paragraph of the chapter which possesses a duality in meaning. Her last sentence, “I shivered”, not only

explains her actions and inner feelings, for she is both cold and worried, her two word subject-verb statement leaves her reader with a strong sense of dread and foreboding. It is obvious that the young children she has cared for might very well be the next victims tossed into the wagon of cadavers. It is also obvious that Matilda might be next.

A FICTIONAL ADOLESCENT NARRATOR: SABA IN MOIRA YOUNG'S *BLOOD RED ROAD*

Blood Red Road is a young adult novel written by Moira Young. It is the story of Saba, who lives in an alternate post-apocalyptic society and discovers, on the eve of her eighteenth birthday, that her home has been destroyed and her twin brother has been kidnapped. The story is told through the grammatically unpredictable first-person narration of Saba. Like Laurie Halse Anderson, Young uses a variety of syntax strategies and verbs to create the first-person "voice" of Saba, particularly strategies that promote cohesiveness.

To establish the tone of the story, as well as the authentic adolescent voice for Saba, Moira Young uses a stylistic, syntactic arrangement of simple words, particularly verbs, crafted into small, fragmented chunks. These convey a sense of energy and pulse which, like other verbs, invigorates other parts of the sentence by creating "sustained patterns and levels of activity" (Tufte 64). As Saba explains in the opening paragraph,

Lugh got born first. On Midwinter Day when the Sun hangs low in the sky.

Then me. Two hours later.

That pretty much says it all. (Young 1)

In an interview discussing *Blood Red Road*, Young explains her choice of first-person perspective and voice for Saba as a "bricolage." Because Saba's fictional dystopian world is "cobbled-together", it is only appropriate her speech "is cobbled together from words and phrases and expressions of different eras and cultures" (Young par.3). Furthermore, this bricolage is dependent on the syntax strategies explained by Tufte, particularly those of verbs and fragments.

Saba's lack of concern with verb-tense and sentence structure establishes her rough, illiterate character, as well as the dry, dystopian setting. Her first sentences, "Lugh got born" and "On Midwinter Day when the Sun hangs low in the sky," generates curiosity and excitement. This continues with the back-to-back fragments: "Then me" and "Two hours later." The change in verb tense, from past-tense to present-tense, also generates clues to Saba's character while at the same time foreshadows her upcoming quest to follow her brother's kidnappers.

Because Saba's verb tenses are always a little "off", the reader is all too aware of Saba's lack of education and her harsh childhood on post-apocalyptic Earth. The arrangement of the verb phrases "got born" followed by "hangs low" reminds her reader that literacy was probably not a priority in her life. After all, Saba is a product of a dying world. Young's choice of words and syntax help create an authentic "real" voice for an adolescent just struggling to make the most of her circumstances.

Saba narrates her story using a unique combination of contractions, mismatching verbs, and fragments. The end result is a curious combination of almost-southern, old English, and uneducated prairie — a patchwork of "says", "ain't's", "yer's" and "fer's," to name a few. Young also uses a laconic no-nonsense combination of sensual verbs, adjectives, and nouns. This is best illustrated half-way through the novel when Saba explains her nightmare.

For example:

I wake, mutterin to myself. I'm soaked with sweat, my blanket twisted around my legs, my heart poundin in my chest. That was a new one. I ain't dreamed of fire before. An it

warn't Lugh I was searchin fer so frantic. I dunno who it was. (Young 194)

In Saba's description, the experience of waking up from a nightmare is vividly created through the use of strong effective verbs, such as "mutterin", "twisted", and "poundin'". These reveal Saba's unique speech, which also happens to be grammatically incorrect. In the words that follow, Saba explains the feeling of her heart pounding in her chest, being soaked with sweat, and twisting in her blankets. Saba's verbs allow her readers to experience the emotions as she does, creating a sense of "being there."

In contrast to Saba's "just woke up" narration ("I wake," and "mutterin to myself") Saba's dream narration is even more fragmented. Through a successive pattern of short sentences and numerous fragments, the reader experiences the nightmare along with Saba. For example,

Where are you? I shout. Where are you?

Another voice now. Whisperin. Mercy's voice.

The heartstone lets you know... the heartstone... heartstone... hurry, Sada...

Bright sun. Excerisize yard. Epona smiles. We're gonna burn Hopetown to the ground, she says.

I gotta find him. Before it's too late.

Too late... too late... too late... (Young 194)

Typical of her direct bare-bones approach to life, Saba uses back-to-back fragments and effective verbs sprinkled throughout the passage to explain what she is experiencing in her dream. In the passage, "Another voice now. Whisperin", the effect is a dream-image that feels real to the reader through Saba's choice of verbs, fragments, and syntax. Likewise, Saba's simple statement, "We're gonna burn Hopetown to the ground, she says," provides her reader with just enough details to foreshadow Saba's future. Like Anderson, Young makes use of back-to-back short sentences which builds tension in the story, for example, "I gotta find him. Before it's too late. Too late.... Too late...." It is also important to note that Saba's short sentences stand alone, without a connecting conjunction or adverb. In this manner, Saba's narration (and "voice") reflects her personality: she is a tough, no-nonsense little sister who does not waste time with details.

DISCUSSION: UNCOVERING FIRST-PERSON ADOLESCENT NARRATORS

Although Matilda, in *Fever 1793*, and Saba, in *Blood Red Road*, are both first-person adolescent narrators, they are quite different from one another. In fact, in many ways, they are completely contrastive in education, background, and life experiences. Still, both are adolescent protagonists in novels written for young adults, and both share similarities that promote their appeal to their respective readers. Foremost is the adolescent voice, which Katie McCoach explains is so "clearly defined" that "a reader immediately feels like they know the character" (par.4). To achieve the effect of a real voice in the narration of Saba and Matilda, both authors utilize the grammar and syntax strategies explained by Virginia Tufte.

Moira Young uses short sentences and sentence fragments to create Saba's voice. The narration is not fancy, for this is not Saba's style. Saba does not bother with proper, predictable grammar, or the interjection of well-placed commas or semicolons in her speech like Matilda does. Instead, Young's heroine stays true to her determined, surviving nature. She has neither the temperament, nor education, nor the time. She recounts the bare facts of her story, in a first-person "call-it-like-you-see-it approach", but she manages to capture her reader's imagination through the use of causal verbs and contractions, such as "says", "mutterin", and "aint".

Her narration is fragmented and clipped. It possesses a running-out-of-breath quality, almost as if she is holding back details. For example,

Lugh goes first, always first, an I follow on behind.

An that's fine.

That's right.

That's how it's meant to be. (Young 1)

Young uses three back-to-back clauses, "An that's fine", "That's right", and "That's how it's meant to be" to introduce Saba's story and also frame her inner reflections about her life. Although Saba ends her triplet with an affirmative ("That's how it's meant to be"), the reader can sense the uncertainty of the statement, especially since it rests at the end of a repetitive sequence ("That's fine," "That's right,") The end effect is actually the opposite: Maybe her world is *not* meant to be this way.

Saba's word choice and syntax also add a dose of authentic casualness to her narration; for example, "Lugh goes first" and "I follow on behind". Even though Saba is a fictional teenager in a post-apocalyptic society, her narration feels real and believable, similar to Matilda's page one waking up moment in *Fever 1793*. For example:

"Get out of bed, Matilda," she continued. "You're sleeping the day away." She shook my shoulder. "Polly's late and there's work to be done." The noisy mosquito darted between us. I started to sweat under the thin blanket. It was going to be another hot August day. Another long, hot August day. Another long, hot, boring, wretched August day. (Anderson 1).

Like Young, Laurie Halse Anderson uses simple sentences to mirror the language of a real teenager. However, Matilda's voice is very different from Saba's, for she is an educated fourteen-year-old living in Philadelphia in 1793. In contrast to Saba's voice, Matilda's narration is usually set aside in complete sentences, following the conventions of grammatical style and form. Yet both fictional teenagers make effective use of syntax strategies, including the use of active verbs that establish the essence of the sentence. For example, Matilda's statement, "She shook my shoulder", not only breaks up the dialogue (and words) of her mother but also evokes an urgency through the use of Matilda's past-tense verb, "shook."

The next sentences, "The noisy mosquito darted between us" and "I started to sweat under the thin blanket" also contain expressive verbs that provide a rich sensual description of Matilda's morning. Both sentences move the events of the morning forward and culminate in a final climax of two back-to-back fragments, "It was going to be another hot August day. Another long, hot August day. Another long, hot, boring, wretched August day" (Anderson 1).

Saba also makes use of sentence fragments, and her fragments, like her verb phrases, do more than just narrate. They reveal Saba's inner workings and her "cobbled-together world" (Young). Similar to Matilda's consecutive fragments ("Another long, hot, boring, wretched day"), Saba uses fragments to impart the sensory feeling of emotion. For example, "The sound of a heartbeat. My heartbeat. Over an Over. So loud. It fills my brain, my head. I cover my ears with my hands. Panic grips me. I turn in circles, blind" (Young 194).

After the consecutive fragments, Saba incorporates active verbs to effectively narrate her nightmare. In fact, Saba's description of her heart beating places the reader right there alongside her, in that moment, "It fills my brain, my head." The description inspires readers to imagine a sound so loud it overtakes all other sounds in the surrounding environment. The sentences that follow include more vivid verb phrases that describe the

panic Saba experiences, for example, “covering” Saba’s ears and “turning in circles.” Like Matilda, who is forced to deal with a mosquito that “darts”, the reader is not just *reading* about Saba’s story, they are experiencing the sequence of events as they unfold, and hearing and dreaming and spinning and panicking.

CONCLUSION: ARTFUL SENTENCES AND FIRST-PERSON NARRATORS

At first glance, it may appear doubtful that the strategies explained by Virginia Tufte, in *Artful Sentences: Syntax as Style* can be used to craft an authentic first-person adolescent voice. Adolescent narrators typically lack the sophisticated vocabulary and sentence structure of adult narrators, and if the writer were to sprinkle in a more colorful adjective or verb here or there, the authenticity of the adolescent voice could be compromised. Still, the difference between an effective and an ineffective voice often comes down to the author’s textual decisions. As Virginia Tufte illustrates, well-constructed fragments, phrases, and sentences provide the perfect arrangement of words and punctuation to re-create a real first-person voice, even an adolescent one. Moreover, word choice and syntax have the power to elicit emotions, transporting readers into a world of imagination constructed out of intriguing infinitives, languid adjectives, and a finite verb or two.

Two contrasting adolescent protagonists, Matilda Cook, in *Fever 1793*, and Saba, in *Blood Red Road*, offer proof that Tufte’s syntax strategies can also apply to first-person adolescent narrators. After all, Tufte’s strategies enable writers to craft real stories narrated by storytellers who speak to each reader’s ear. In other words, as Breena Clarke explained so well, the strategies in Virginia Tufte’s *Artful Sentences: Structures as Style* help to generate the perfect juxtaposition of words and punctuation that make each sentence pop (Clarke). And for the conscientious writer that seeks to create an effective, “real” adolescent storyteller, this is good.

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MLA

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