

Tone

Consider:

It's true. If you want to buy a spring suit, the choice selection occurs in February: a bathing suit, March: back-to-school clothes, July: a fur coat, August. Did I tell you about the week I gave in to a mad-Mitty desire to buy a bathing suit in August?

The clerk, swathed in a long-sleeved woolen dress which made her look for the world like Teddy Snowcrop, was aghast. "Surely, you are putting me on," she said. "A bathing suit! In August!"

"That's right," I said firmly, "and I am not leaving this store until you show me one."

She shrugged helplessly. "But surely you are aware of the fact that we haven't had a bathing suit in stock since the first of June. Our – no offense – White Elephant sale was June third and we unload – rather, disposed of all of our suits at that time."

— Erma Bombeck, *At Wit's End*

Discuss:

1. What is the attitude of the writer toward the subject matter?
2. What diction and details does Bombeck use to express this attitude? In other words, what diction and details create the tone of the passage?

Apply:

Write down two words that describe the tone of this passage. Begin a class chart of tone descriptors, listing the tone vocabulary you and your fellow students have collected. Add to the chart as you discover new tone words throughout these exercises.