A Creative Approach to the Classical Progymnasmata

Writing & Rhetoric

Book 9: Description & Impersonation

Teacher's Edition

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Teaching Description & Impersonation

In this ninth book of the Writing & Rhetoric series, your students will be crafting descriptions and expository essays with persuasive elements. In the first half of this book, students are asked to write a detailed portrait of a person, a description of nature, a descriptive short story, and a description of a process. The second half of this book focuses on impersonation and contains point-of-view exercises that teach students to think in categories of rhetorical persuasion: appeal to emotion (pathos), appeal to authority (ethos), and appeal to logic (logos).

These descriptive essays and impersonations are inspired by the ancient *progymnasmata*, a Roman manual of composition. As originally designed by the rhetorician Aphthonius, description (*ekphrasis*) was intended to "bring the subject clearly before the eyes." Nearly anything could be the subject of a description—a person, an animal, a building, a city, and even an event. Impersonation (*ethopoeia*) was designed to "imitate the character of the person depicted." These impersonating exercises were similar to modern monologues found in stage plays. Roman students would strive to write monologues for characters they knew well, as if Hercules were speaking to Eurystheus or as if Achilles were lamenting his fate in Hades.

The exercises in this book have been modified from those in the original *progym* to be more helpful to modern writers. First, in this book, description comes before impersonation, whereas Aphthonius originally put impersonation before description. This novel arrangement allows for the skills gained in descriptive writing—vivid wording, attention to detail, thoroughness of thinking—to be applied to the exercises in impersonation. (For the classical purists among us, it should be noted that the *progymnasmata* authored by different rhetoricians such as Hermogenes of Tarsus also arranged the exercises in a somewhat different order.) Second, the impersonation exercise itself is now descriptive and expository rather than simply an imitation of a character's ethos. The composition still contains a strong aspect of ethos, but the other modes of persuasion (pathos, logos) are also deliberately engaged. The student is thereby continuing to use her descriptive skills while, at the same time, preparing herself for the culmination of the *progymnasmata*, which is the persuasive exercise thesis.

Description & Impersonation is an excellent follow-up to the previous Writing & Rhetoric book, *Comparison*, as students move from comparing concrete things, such as people or events, to creating metaphorical comparisons in description and abstract comparisons of perspectives in impersonation. In the latter exercise, the student must "enter the head" of a historical person and seek to understand that person's outlook. This practice lends itself well to the student's progress toward argumentation with a particular audience in mind.

In writing these compositions, students take another step forward toward the goal of mastering rhetoric. The readings will continue to be a foundation of pleasure and instruction, but students will use the content of the readings to develop different types of descriptive and expository essays. They will continue working with topic sentences and expanding the meaning of those sentences through facts and details. In other words, all the basics are in place for creating an ethos and logos based on careful observation, which ultimately makes for rhetoric firmly planted in credible ideas and sources.

In addition, by looking more deeply into texts, students will extend their dialogic (conversational) relationship with reading. The kinds of questions asked in the exercises in this book will lead students to consider the readings in the context of their lives.

You will find nearly every lesson organized around the chapter readings. Narration, questions for discussion, and exercises in composition all emerge within the context of the readings. We find that contextualization helps to reinforce memory and the laddering of skills.

Unpacking *Description & Impersonation*

This book is divided into two major portions:

Lessons 1 to 5—The first portion introduces the concept and techniques of description and explains how to write various forms of descriptive prose, both nonfiction and fiction.

Lessons 6 to 10—The second portion introduces the idea of impersonation and the three modes of persuasion: pathos, ethos, and logos. It also includes several lessons that each feature a reading related to the life of a historic person, as well as the step-by-step prompts for writing a four-paragraph impersonation.

To stretch and strengthen the process of writing and speaking, both portions of this book contain Go Deeper, Writing Time, Speak It, and Revise It. These sections are explained in the following paragraphs.

The Lesson Reading

Every lesson contains narratives or excerpts from various descriptions and biographies. Part of the beauty of the Writing & Rhetoric series is the fact that it uses writings that are culturally significant. When children care about historical figures and events—when they get wrapped up in the language of the description or narrative—their delight helps them to write more enthusiastically. Well-told stories and vivid words also populate students' minds with rich content. They get to practice skills without also having to invent content. All of the readings in the book are recorded in a downloadable MP3 file so that your students can experience the pleasure of being read to.

Tell It Back—Narration

Every time students hear a substantial reading in this book, they will also practice narrating it back, either orally or in writing. Multiple intelligences—memory, sequence, main idea—are developed by this practice. In addition to exercising their executive functions, students will continue to internalize an outline of the material. They will review and extend the skill of outlining and rediscover that they are already equipped to complete the task. Some educational models have based their entire strategy on the important skill of narration.

As part of narration, students also are encouraged to annotate select texts for main idea, vocabulary words, questions, and points of interest. Annotation will help to make a text truly "sink into" a student's imagination.

Talk About It and Speak It

These two sections mirror our conviction that writing, speaking, and thinking are critical skills that work together. Some educators believe that difficulties with writing stem from a lack of deeper thought. These books use comprehension, reading aloud, discussion, and even oral performance as ways to help students become critical thinkers according to the way their bodies (and brains) are made. These three abilities—thinking, speaking, and writing—enlarge each other when practiced together.

Memoria

In this section students will memorize a quotation related in theme to the lesson and prepare to recite it during class. Quotes, and indeed all memory work, will help students in the process of invention (or prewriting) and may be useful for reference as they write their essays. We also encourage students to keep commonplace books, or journals of thoughts and quotes, for future reference. In classical rhetoric, memoria is one of five canons.

Go Deeper

This section, found in lesson 1 and lesson 6, seeks to develop comprehension of a skill taught in those particular lessons. Students will variously examine the use of vivid words and the three modes of persuasion: pathos, ethos, and logos.

Writing Time

This aspect of the book is the most obvious. Each Writing Time section features various kinds of writing practice, from sentence play (in which students imitate sentences) to copiousness (*copia*). Copiousness is a stretching exercise that teaches students to reach for new words to express variations of the same idea. That way they can experience the joy of the abundance of language as well as of finding precise words.

In this book students will also learn to write well-crafted descriptive essays of various lengths, some of which include an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. A short story is also required. The variety of assignments in this book will enable young writers to gain flexibility in their writing and help them to determine the lengths of their compositions based on their objectives. Practice in this section includes instruction on transitions and style. Each essay follows clear prewriting prompts, and the principle of imitation is always at work.

The four impersonation essays, which are tackled in the second portion of the book, are all told from the point of view of historical people: Nellie Bly, Henry Williamson, Jesse Owens, and Winston Churchill. Each essay consists of the following parts: The first paragraph opens the essay by giving a direct answer to a speculative question. The second paragraph incorporates biographical information about the historical person in an attempt to build ethos, the appeal to the author's credibility. The third paragraph answers the speculative question with vivid descriptive detail, and requires the student to describe a place, an incident, or an event from the author's perspective using pathos, the appeal to emotion. Finally, the fourth paragraph concludes the composition by using a figure of reasoning, or logos, the appeal to logic.

Revise It

In this book, students will continue to critically analyze their own writing. The Revise It section offers students the opportunity to improve their writing, and the writing of others, by strengthening phrasing, finding grammar errors, and proofreading.

Historical Note

The material covered in the Writing & Rhetoric series is loosely tied to periods in history. *Fable* and *Narrative I* borrow their stories from Greek and early Roman times. *Narrative II* picks up with the late Roman Empire, while *Chreia & Proverb* continues into the Middle Ages. *Refutation & Confirmation* moves into the experience of colonial America. In *Commonplace*, students read selected writings from late colonial America, the American Revolution, and the Federalist period. *Encomium & Vituperation* covers many colorful personalities from the Civil War era to that of the Wild West. *Comparison* covers the part of American history from the Gilded Age to the Great Depression.

The purpose of this progression is to provide rich content that helps timeline-based schools integrate history with the language arts. As one discipline reinforces the other, students will retain a powerful impression of the periods of history they study. This book, *Description & Impersonation*, dwells mainly on the twentieth century, but is fairly eclectic.

Important Notes

Flexibility is built into the program.

We have crafted this book to be useful to students at different levels with different needs. For instance, teachers can ask their students to complete some exercises verbally instead of in writing. If, on the other hand, teachers desire more written work, they can ask students to respond to Talk About It questions in writing. Teachers can also have students work together to tackle parts of lessons that are difficult. Education is personal, and one size does not fit all. Please use your judgment to determine what is best for your student(s) in terms of discipline and delight.

Review outlining instructions.

This icon guides students to a section of the book that provides a rationale and a model for outlining. In this book students will outline a short story and an impersonation from scratch.

Review summarization instructions.

This icon directs students to a section of the book with some pointers on how to summarize. Here, students will learn how to shorten a lengthy paragraph into a much more succinct form. To be brief is to use words wisely. It is a way to communicate important information to the audience while showing concern for its needs (and its attention span).

Review memoria instructions.

This icon guides students to a section of the book that provides full instructions for engaging in the memoria exercises. Additional suggestions for teachers are included for supporting the process of memorization.

Practice a rhetorical device.

Some new rhetorical devices are introduced in this book, and others are reviewed. The formal study of rhetoric collects and draws upon these devices throughout a student's life as a writer and a speaker. We wanted to make special note of these to help you track the growing number of "tools" in your students' rhetorical "toolbox."

Include elocution instruction.

This icon indicates that elocution instruction should be included with the exercise and guides you to a section of the book that provides full elocution instructions. We believe that speaking well makes students better writers and that writing well makes for better speakers. In this book, we focus on the various aspects of speaking well, which include recitations, speeches, dramatic presentation, and the sharing of student work. Your students should practice one aspect of elocution every time they do public speaking.

Use a recording device.

This icon indicates that, depending on the size of the class and the availability of technology, you may want to have your student(s) record their work from the "Speak It" and sometimes the "Revise It" sections and play it back. This is an excellent way for them to hear the words and the qualities of their performances. They will learn elocution faster if they hear themselves as well as each other.

Begin prewriting.

This icon indicates that students will be doing prewriting exercises, including creating theses, supports, and contraries.

Best wishes as you embark upon these new and fascinating exercises with your students!

The purpose of this lesson is to introduce the concept of description and to demonstrate its importance. In addition, this lesson discusses the use of vivid, sensory language in descriptions and the idea of showing versus telling.

In this lesson, students will practice:

- oral narration
- critical thinking
- picture analysis
- reflection, memorization, and recitation
- using vivid language
- adding description to a passage
- identifying the purpose of a descriptive passage

Lesson 1

[A]Mark Twain was the most famous American novelist and humorist of the nineteenth century. In this story, an orphan boy—Huck Finn—has numerous adventures on the Mississippi River as he rafts downstream with his friend Jim, a runaway slave.

Description: The Fireworks of Writing

Off in the distance, I hear the low rumble of thunder. The curtains puff into my room, and the soft breeze freshens as it chases away the warm air. Lightning turns the sky milky white, and then everything goes black. Is a storm coming my way? You bet it is! It's coming my way across the pages of the book I'm reading—*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain.[A] You see, I'm caught up in a vivid[1] description of a lightning storm. Take a look:

> [The sky] darkened up, and begun to thunder and lighten. . . . Directly it begun to rain, and it rained like all fury, too, and I never see the wind blow so. It was one of these regular summer storms. It would get so dark that it looked all blue-black outside, and lovely; and the rain would thrash along by so thick that the trees off a little ways looked dim and spider-webby; and here would come a blast of wind that would bend the trees down and turn up the pale underside of the leaves; and then a perfect ripper of a gust would follow along and set the branches to tossing their arms as if they was just wild; and next, when it was just about the bluest and blackest—*FST*! it

1. The word "vivid" comes from the Latin *vividus*, which means "spirited," "animated," "lively," and "full of life." Vivid words are therefore more alive than general words—more colorful, more energetic, and more memorable!

was as bright as glory, and you'd have a little glimpse of tree-tops a-plunging about away off yonder in the storm, hundreds of yards further than you could see before; dark as sin again in a second, and now you'd hear the thunder let go with an awful crash, and then go rumbling, grumbling, tumbling, down the sky towards the underside of the world, like rolling empty barrels down stairs.

When I read this paragraph, I feel as if I'm right there in the middle of the hard rain and crashing thunder. Twain's descriptive writing helps readers to experience the story almost the same way we experience a movie—complete with moving pictures, colors, sounds, and other sensations.

A **description** is a picture made of words, and it is exactly the point of this new writing exercise. Its purpose is to grow your ability to capture the interest and imagination of your readers through descriptive writing. In the first half of this book you will practice writing descriptions. In the second part of the book, where you will learn another exercise called "impersonation," you will use your newfound descriptive skills to make your essays come alive.

The Importance of Description

When we encounter a story, a speech, or an essay, it's description that picks us up out of our seats and drops us—plunk!—right down in the middle of an experience. We aren't *actually* living through the experience, but good description can make events and people seem real all the same. Without description, speeches would be less inspiring, ideas would be harder to understand, and stories would fall flat.

For instance, without description we would never be able to experience a tale of terror properly. Without stormy nights and lightning, without vulture-like eyes and misty graveyards, without creepy old houses and slimy cellars, horror would be a walk in the park. The following excerpt is a spine-tingling moment from a story called *The Monkey's Paw*. It occurs right after an old man, Mr. White, wishes on a magic monkey's paw that his dead son would be alive again. Notice how description makes the ordinary sound of a knock on the door seem terrifying.

The candle end, which had burnt below the rim of the china candlestick, was throwing pulsating shadows on the ceiling and walls, until, with a flicker larger than the rest, it expired. . . . A stair creaked, and a squeaky mouse scurried noisily through the wall. The darkness was oppressive. . . . The husband took the box of matches, and striking one, went downstairs for a candle. At the foot of the stairs the match went out, and he paused to strike another; and at the same moment a knock, so quiet and stealthy as to be scarcely audible, sounded on the front door. The matches fell from his hand and spilled in the passage. He stood motionless, his breath suspended until the knock was repeated. Then he turned and fled swiftly back to his room, and closed the door behind him. A third knock sounded through the house. —from *The Monkey's Paw* by W.W. Jacobs

What if the author of this excerpt, W.W. Jacobs,[B] had avoided all description in this scene? The narrative plot would read like this:

> The candle went out. The match went out. Three knocks were heard at the door.

That's a big yawner, and I'm sure you don't find it scary at all. Unless you are writing a story or essay as dull as boiled fish, description is essential.

Here's another example of good descriptive writing. It's the first stanza of *The Highwayman*, a story poem that tells about a robber on the dark roads of England. Poet Alfred Noyes[C] uses vivid images to create a stormy, troubled mood.

> The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees,
> The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,
> The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,
> And the highwayman[2] came riding—
> Riding—riding—
> The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn-door.

Again, try removing description from the poem. What do you get?

> It was night. The wind blew the trees. A rider rode up to an inn.

Not very interesting, is it? You know what happened, but you don't really know what it was like to be there in the scene.

Description is important in almost any form of writing. For example, it can be used to make an essay or a speech more clear or interesting. Check out the way Martin Luther King Jr. employs the descriptive language of heat and storms to make his point about justice:

> This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. . . . Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. —from "I Have a Dream" by Martin Luther King Jr.[3] [D]

King's descriptions give his words more power and more feeling. A person's quest for freedom seems more heroic when he is "battered by storms of persecution."

Description also can help to explain an idea. King goes on to say, "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.'" What does he mean by living out "the true meaning of its creed"? Description supplies the answer. Take a look:

> I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table

[B] William Wymark Jacobs was a British author at the turn of the twentieth century. He is best remembered for *The Monkey's Paw*. This short story follows the plotline of three wishes that go badly because they interfere with the workings of fate.

[C] Alfred Noyes was a British poet of the twentieth century. He is best remembered for his earliest works, which include *The Highwayman* (1906).

[D] This passage is derived from King's most-quoted speech, "I Have A Dream." It was delivered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to the crowds attending The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in August 1963.

2. highwayman: a mounted robber who preyed on travelers who used the high roads (or highways) of England
3. This speech can be found in its entirety at http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm.

of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

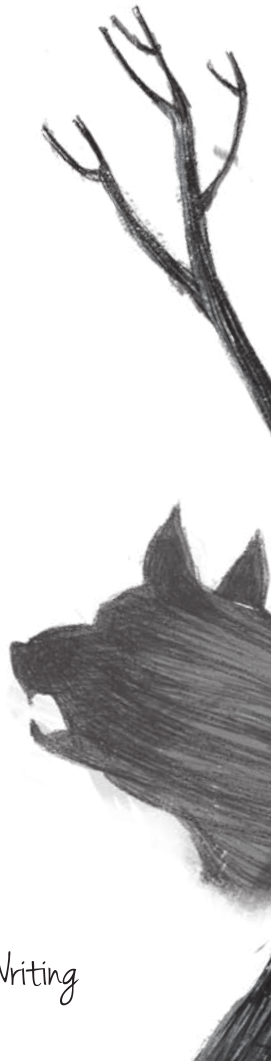
Do you see how effective description can be? The purpose of description is to help readers experience what they are reading, to capture their attention and give them details that will aid in their understanding.

Appeal to the Senses

Description appeals to the five senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. We experience the world with our senses, and writing that piques these senses will be the most vivid. In fiction writing, when you write cleverly for the senses, your readers forget where they are and find themselves in the middle of the adventure. For example, in his novel, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Arthur Conan Doyle expertly describes the approach of a fog bank over a swampy waste called Grimpen Mire. The fog conceals a monstrous dog that is swiftly approaching the story's heroes, Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson, as they stand in the dark outside an old house. Take a look:

TE E

> Every minute that white woolly plain which covered one-half of the moor was drifting closer and closer to the house. Already the first thin wisps of it were curling across the golden square of the lighted window. The farther wall of the orchard was already invisible, and the trees were standing out of a swirl of white vapor. As we watched it, the fog-wreaths came crawling round both corners of the house and rolled slowly into one dense bank on which the upper floor and the roof floated like a strange ship upon a shadowy sea. . . . We fell back before [the fog] until we were half a mile from the house, and still that dense white sea, with the moon silvering its upper edge, swept slowly and inexorably on.
>
> "Hist!" cried Holmes, and I heard the sharp click of a cocking pistol. "Look out! It's coming!"



TE

▶ To what sense does the author mainly appeal in this description?

TE F

In *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, Washington Irving appeals to a different sense to set an eerie stage for the arrival of the Headless Horseman.

> It was the very witching time of night that Ichabod, heavy-hearted and crestfallen, pursued his travel homewards. . . . In the dead hush of midnight, he could even hear the barking of the watchdog from the opposite shore of the Hudson; but it was so vague and faint as only to give an idea of his distance from this faithful companion of man. Now and then, too, the long-drawn crowing of a cock, accidentally awakened, would sound far, far off from some farmhouse away among the

hills—but it was like a dreaming sound in his ear. No signs of life occurred near him, but occasionally the melancholy chirp of a cricket, or perhaps the guttural twang of a bull-frog, from a neighboring marsh, as if sleeping uncomfortably, and turning suddenly in his bed.

TE ▶ To what sense is the author appealing in this description?

Writers are more sparing in their use of the senses of touch, smell, and taste, but their effect can be even more striking. This is because touch, smell, and taste are often more intimate and personal. Sight and hearing are senses experienced at a safe distance. With touch, an object must necessarily come into contact with the skin. Smell and taste must be taken internally.

TE In this next passage from *The Woman in White*, author Wilkie Collins **G** uses the sensation of a kiss to create surprise and attraction in the heart of an art teacher when he gives directions to a young woman who is lost in London. The woman is a total stranger, and yet her inexplicable kiss causes the man to want to call her back as she drives off.

My hand was on the cab door. She caught it in hers, kissed it, and pushed it away. The cab drove off at the same moment—I started into the road, with some vague idea of stopping it again, I hardly knew why—hesitated from dread of frightening and distressing her—called, at last, but not loudly enough to attract the driver's attention. The sound of the wheels grew fainter in the distance—the cab melted into the black shadows on the road—the woman in white was gone.

Tactile imagery, description that uses the sense of touch, is used effectively here. Collins starts with the touch of the cab door, the press of a kiss, and the push of a hand. He ends with the tactile idea of melting—melting is often linked with touching, as with the melting of butter or ice cream in the mouth.

Here again is Wilkie Collins, this time giving a weather forecast with the sense of smell:

It was dark and quiet. Neither moon nor stars were visible. I smelled rain in the still, heavy air, and I put my hand out of the window. No. The rain was only threatening, it had not come yet. —adapted from *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins

And let's not leave out taste. **Gustatory imagery**, as descriptions of taste are called, appear **TE** only rarely in writing, and are often paired with the sense of smell. Herman Melville **H** really whets his reader's appetite with this tasty scene adapted from his otherwise unearthly book, *Moby-Dick*:

The smoking chowder came in. It was made of small juicy clams, scarcely bigger than hazel nuts, mixed with pounded biscuit, and salted pork cut up into little flakes; the whole enriched with butter, and plentifully seasoned with pepper and salt. Our appetites being sharpened by the frosty voyage, we devoured it quickly. This inn was the fishiest of all fishy places. Chowder for breakfast, and chowder for dinner, and chowder for supper. The area before the house was paved with clamshells. The milk tasted fish-flavored, too, which I could not at all account for.

Notice how all of these examples use **vivid language** to create a mental picture. The words are chosen precisely. The nouns are specific, not general. The verbs are strong and energetic. The adjectives are bright and colorful.

- A knock sounded on the front door.
- The fog-wreaths crawled around the corner of the house.
- The cab melted into the black shadows.
- I smelled rain in the still, heavy air.
- The milk tasted fish-flavored, too.

TE When you write your own descriptive essays and stories, you will also be asked to use vivid and specific language. It works just as well in a description of a famous person or an explanation of the process of metamorphosis as it does in a scary story. *Show* rather than *tell* is the name of the game. By appealing to the five senses of your readers, you will help bring your subject clearly to their eyes, ears, noses, mouths, and hands.

Tell It Back—Narration

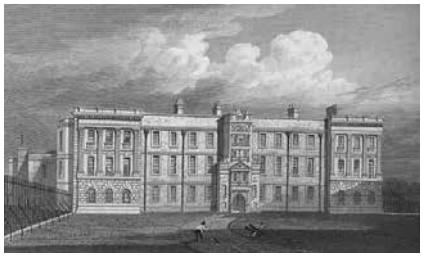
TE Why is description essential to a story, essay, or speech? In other words, what are some purposes for using description?

Talk About It—

TE

1. Look at the images of the Maypole Inn from Charles Dickens's novel *Barnaby Rudge* and the Lyme Park estate in Cheshire, England. Which building would make a better haunted house and why? How do artists make some houses look creepier than others?

▲ The Maypole Inn, 1841



▲ Lyme Park Estate, 1819

2. The following descriptive passage comes from *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, an adventure novel by John Buchan. How does the writer engage the senses in his description? In other words, how does Buchan create the impression of a carefree, happy day by saying more than simply "It was a gorgeous evening"?

> It was a gorgeous spring evening, with every hill showing as clear as a cut amethyst. The air had the queer, rooty smell of bogs, but it was as fresh as mid-ocean, and it had the strangest effect on my spirits. I actually felt light-hearted. I might have been a boy out for a spring holiday tramp, instead of a man of thirty-seven very much wanted by the police. I felt just as I used to feel when I was starting for a big trek on a frosty

morning on the high veld. If you believe me, I swung along that road whistling. There was no plan of campaign in my head, only just to go on and on in this blessed, honest-smelling hill country, for every mile put me in better humor with myself.

In a roadside planting I cut a walking-stick of hazel, and presently struck off the highway up a bypath which followed the glen of a brawling stream. . . . It was some hours since I had tasted food, and I was getting very hungry when I came to a herd's cottage set in a nook beside a waterfall. A brown-faced woman was standing by the door, and greeted me with the kindly shyness of moorland places. When I asked for a night's lodging she said I was welcome to the "bed in the loft," and very soon she set before me a hearty meal of ham and eggs, scones, and thick sweet milk.

3. The following descriptive passage comes from *The Conquest*, an autobiographical novel by Oscar Micheaux. Based on the passage, in which the author describes the process of building a house, try to define what a sod mason and a contractor are.

> At Hedrick I hired a sod mason at three dollars a day and we soon put up . . . a sod house sixteen by fourteen with a hip roof made of two by fours for rafters, and plain boards with tar paper and sod with the grass turned downward and laid side by side, the cracks being filled with sand. The house had two small windows and one door, that was a little short on account of my getting tired carrying sod. I ordered the "contractor" to put the roof on as soon as I felt it was high enough to be comfortable inside. The fifth day I moved in. There was no floor, but the thick, short buffalo grass made a neat carpet.

Memoria—

This icon points to more tips on memorization at the back of the book.

TE

> There are three schoolmasters for everybody that will employ them—the senses, intelligent companions, and books. —Henry Ward Beecher

1. After reading this quotation by Henry Ward Beecher, a famous abolitionist, define any words you may not know. Then discuss the meaning of the quotation.

TE

2. How can books make use of the senses to teach us like a schoolmaster? Give an example of how this might work.
3. Memorize this quotation and be prepared to recite it during your next class.
4. Write this quotation in your commonplace book, along with any thoughts you have about it.

Go Deeper—

1. **SPECIFIC VERSUS GENERAL WORDS:** Label each of the following words with a part of speech (noun, verb, or adjective) and then write a more vivid or specific word that could be used in its place. Keep in mind that some words may be used as more than one part of speech.

Example:

dance noun, ballet

a. young Sample answer: adjective, teenaged

b. queen Sample answer: noun, Marie Antoinette

c. walk Sample answer: noun or verb, march/stroll

d. game Sample answer: noun, hide-and-seek

e. big Sample answer: adjective, colossal

f. tea Sample answer: noun, vanilla chai

g. desert Sample answer: noun, the Sahara

h. toss Sample answer: verb, fling

i. laugh Sample answer: noun or verb, giggle

j. write Sample answer: verb, scribble

k. blue Sample answer: adjective, navy

l. illness Sample answer: noun, bronchitis

m. good Sample answer: adjective, terrific

n. murder Sample answer: noun or verb, strangle

o. dark Sample answer: adjective, pitch-black

2. **VIVID WORDS:** Descriptive writing requires vivid language. In each of the following sentences, change the general words into more colorful or specific words that help the reader picture the scene more intensely. Write your new sentence in the space provided.

Examples:

The dog ate a bone.

Change to: The Rottweiler puppy gnawed on a leg of lamb.

Try as she might, the girl could not fit her foot into the shoe.

Change to: Breaking into a sweat, the stepsister could not squeeze her foot into the glass slipper.

a. A person sat under a tree reading a book.

Sample answer: A girl reclined against a willow tree reading a novel.

b. The food smelled good but tasted bad.

Sample answer: The ravioli smelled savory but tasted like rotten cheese.

c. Our cat likes to be petted.

Sample answer: Our tabby enjoys having her tummy scratched vigorously.

d. When the person next door plays the piano, it sounds nice.

Sample answer: When the neighborhood virtuoso plays her Steinway, she fills the air with cheerful melodies.

e. The sky is very pretty as the sun goes down.

Sample answer: The sunset sky turns orange and red streaked with purples and deep blues.

3. **THE SENSES:** Using the prompts after each section, add to the following story sentences[1] that appeal to the senses. Use your imagination! After you're finished, read the whole story aloud—including your changes—and see if you've amplified the description to make it more vivid.

a. Long, long ago, there lived in Daneland a king called Hrothgar. The old men of his country loved him and bowed the knee to him gladly, and the young men obeyed him and joyfully did battle for him. For he was a king mighty in war, and valiant. No foe could stand against him, but he overcame them all, and took from them much spoil.

So this king wrought peace in his land and his riches grew great. In his palace there were heaped gold in rings and in chains, armor finely welded, rich jewels which glowed as soft sunlight.

Add a sentence that appeals to the sense of sight.

Example: And the amber—yes! glorious, yellow amber—bloomed like a flower on every drinking horn and pewter cup.

[1] The paragraphs in this exercise are adapted from *Stories of Beowulf Told to Children* by Henrietta Marshall.

Sample answer: The rubies gleamed like pools of blood, and a winding river of diamonds snaked around the huge, golden throne.

b. Then King Hrothgar looked upon this great treasure and brooded thereon. At last he said, "I will build a great hall. It shall be vast and wide, adorned within and without with gold and ivory, with gems and carved work. The fame of it shall spread over all the earth, and men shall sing of it for all time. And when it is built, therein shall I call all my warriors, young and old and divide to them the treasure that I have. It shall be a hall of joy and feasting."

Then King Hrothgar called his workmen and commanded them to build the hall. So they set to work, and day by day it rose quickly, becoming each day more and more fair, until at length it was finished.

It stood upon a height, vast and stately, and as it was adorned with the horns of deer, King Hrothgar named it Hart Hall.

In the Hall there was laughter and song and great merriment.

Add a sentence that appeals to the sense of hearing.

Sample answer: The hearty cheers of Danish warriors and the clinking of goblets reverberated under the vaulted roof.

c. Every evening when the shadows fell, and the land grew dark without, the knights and warriors gathered in the Hall to feast.

Add a sentence that appeals to the sense of taste.

Sample answer: They wolfed down greasy hunks of wild boar and gobbled fistfuls of tangy blackberries.

d. And when the feast was over, and the wine-cup passed around the board, and the great fire roared upon the hearth, and the dancing flames gleamed and flickered, making strange shadows among the gold and carved work of the walls, the minstrel took his harp and sang.

Within the Hall was light and gladness, but without there was wrath and hate. For far on the moor there lived a wicked giant named Grendel. Hating all joy and brightness, he haunted the fastness and the fen, prowling at night to see what evil he might do.

Add a sentence that appeals to smell.

Sample answer: He reeked of the things he ate—rotten flesh and filthy vermin—and his breath alone could stun a man.

e. And now when night by night he heard the minstrel's song, and saw the lighted windows gleam through the darkness, it was pain and grief to him.

Very terrible was this ogre Grendel to look upon. Thick black hair hung about his face, and his teeth were long and sharp, like the tusks of an animal. His huge body and great hairy arms had the strength of ten men.

Add a sentence that appeals to touch.

Sample answer: His belly was as scaly as a snake and covered with spikes, while tufts of fluffy fur sprouted from his forehead.

4. **PURPOSE:** Descriptive writing can serve a number of different purposes. It can help the reader *experience* a narrative more fully and intensely by engaging his senses. It can *explain*, helping a reader better understand a complicated idea. As you will see in lesson 5, it also can illustrate the steps and stages in a *process*. Choosing from these three purposes, identify the purpose of each of the following short descriptions. Write "experience," "explain," or "process" in the space provided.

a. experience _____ Night closed in on the sloop[4] before it reached the land, leaving her feeling the way in pitchy darkness. I saw breakers[5] ahead before long. At this I turned the ship away from the wind and stood offshore, but was immediately startled by the tremendous roaring of breakers again ahead and on the lee[6] bow.[7] This puzzled me, for there should have been no broken water where I supposed myself to be. I kept off a good bit, then turned round, but I found broken water there also, and I was forced to throw her head again offshore. In this way, among dangers, I spent the rest of the night. Hail and sleet in the fierce squalls cut my flesh till the blood trickled over my face; but what of that? It was soon daylight, and the sloop was in the midst of the Milky Way of the sea, and it was the white breakers of a huge sea over sunken rocks which threatened to engulf her!

—adapted from *Sailing Alone Around the World* by Joshua Slocum

b. explain _____ Both the booby and the noddy are birds of a tame and stupid disposition. They are so unaccustomed to visitors, that I could have killed any number of them with my geological hammer. The booby lays her eggs on the bare rock; but the noddy makes a very simple nest with seaweed.

—adapted from *The Voyage of the Beagle* by Charles Darwin

c. process _____ There is no reason why you should not make your own bow and arrows. Take a perfectly sound, straight, well-seasoned stick five or six feet long (your bow should be about as long as yourself); mark off a five-inch space

4. sloop: a sailboat with one mast
5. breaker: water that "breaks" or crashes against rocks
6. lee: the side of the boat away from the wind
7. bow: the front of a ship

. —adapted from *Boy Scouts Handbook: The First Edition, 1911*

in the middle for the handle; leave this round and a full inch thick; shave down the rest, flat on one side for the front and round on the other for the back, until it is about one inch wide and three fourths of an inch thick next the handle, tapering to about one half that at the ends, which are then "nocked," nicked, or notched. These notches are for the string, which is to be put on early.

d. _ process _____ To make chocolate sauce, heat one pint of milk almost to a boil. Shave two ounces of chocolate, and put the shavings in a small pan with four tablespoons of sugar and two of boiling water. Stir over the stove until smooth and glossy, and add to the hot milk. Beat together for eight minutes the yolks of four eggs, three tablespoonfuls of sugar, and a scant spoon of salt, and then add one quarter cup of cold milk.

—adapted from *Chocolate and Cocoa Recipes and Home Made Candy Recipes* by Miss Parloa and Janet McKenzie Hill

e. _ experience _____ One day, as I was running through the grass, pursuing a bird, I got entangled in a spider web, by far the biggest web built by any spider. The threads of the web are sticky and yellow, the same color as part of the spider. Some of these spiders grow to be of immense size; I have frequently seen them with a body as large as a sparrow's egg. Happily, the bite of this spider is not dangerous. I looked round to see and get out of the spider's way, but before I was aware I got a bite which was almost as painful as the sting of a scorpion.

—adapted from *Lost in the Jungle* by Paul du Chaillu

f. _ explain _____ Wingsuit gliding will never be a safe sport. Jumping from a helicopter or a mountain ledge and gliding through the air in a suit that makes the flyer look like a flying squirrel may seem like fun, but too often the stunt ends in tragedy. The flyer may misjudge the terrain or his parachute may fail to open, and a crash landing is the result.

Lesson 1: Description: The Fireworks of Writing

Appeal to the Senses

[E]Although most of the Sherlock Holmes detective tales are short stories, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is a full-length novel. Arthur Conan Doyle, a Scottish writer of the late Victorian period, firmly established the popularity of the detective genre. He gave us our first super sleuth, Sherlock Holmes.

▶ From page 4:
In this passage the author mainly appeals to the sense of sight. The reader "sees" the progress of the fog as it wisps its way across the moor. Words such as "white," "woolly," "fog-wreath," "shadowy," "swirl," and "golden square" are vivid words for the eye.

[F]Along with *Rip Van Winkle* (1819), *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1820) is one of Washington Irving's most famous short stories. These were the first tales by an American author to receive wide circulation overseas.

▶ From page 5:
This paragraph is loaded with words that appeal to the sense of hearing: "dead hush," "barking of the watchdog," "crowing of a cock far, far off," "chirp of a cricket," and "guttural twang of a bull-frog."

[G]Wilkie Collins (1824–1889) was an extremely popular Victorian novelist. He wrote sensation novels, which always revolved around some type of mystery or crime, and he popularized the idea of a detective searching for clues.

[H]Herman Melville (1819–1891) did not sell many copies of *Moby-Dick* in his lifetime. It wasn't until the twentieth century that scholars saw it as a remarkable and original work of American literature.

(from page 6)

If you feel it would benefit your students, you can point out that while most of the examples given in this lesson are taken from the fiction genre, it is easy to find quality description in other types of writing as well. For instance, description plays an important part in the following account of the process of tattooing, found in the ship's log of Captain James Cook.

> Their method of tattooing I shall now describe. The color they use is lamp black, prepared from the smoke of a kind of oily nut, used by them instead of candles. The instrument for pricking it under the skin is made of very thin flat pieces of bone or Shell . . . and about an inch and a half long. One end is cut into sharp teeth, and the other fastened to a handle. The teeth are dipped into black liquor, and then drove, by quick, sharp blows struck upon the handle with a stick for that purpose, into the skin so deep that every stroke is followed with a small quantity of blood.[1]

1. from *Captain Cook's Journal During His First Voyage Round the World* by James Cook

The purpose of Captain Cook's description is to help readers understand the Tahitians'[2] method of tattooing. Cook finds description necessary to detail the steps of the process. Students will have some practice describing a process in lesson 5.

Description is also necessary in explaining ideas. It helps readers to form pictures in their heads so that they can clearly "see" what the author means. In his book *Secrets of the Woods*, naturalist William J. Long illustrates the lack of food available to animals in the month of March by describing a fallen sparrow.

> March is a weary month for the wood folk. One sees that life is a struggle,—a keen, hard, hunger-driven struggle to find enough to keep a-going and sleep warm. . . . It is then that the sparrow falleth. You find him on the snow, a wind-blown feather guiding your eye to the open where he fell in mid-flight; or under the tree, which shows that he lost his grip in the night. His empty crop[3] tells the whole pitiful story, and why you find him there cold and dead, his toes curled up and his body feather-light.

Finally, description is used to develop the ethos, or credibility, of a speaker or writer. In the preface to his book *An Anatomical Study on the Motion of the Heart and the Blood in Animals*, William Harvey describes himself as an expert to his fellow scientists. He is advancing the new idea that the heart circulates blood throughout the body, and he hopes that by detailing his past experience, he can persuade his peers to take his idea seriously.

> I have already and repeatedly presented you, my learned friends, with my new views of the motion and function of the heart, in my anatomical lectures. I have now for nine years and more confirmed these views by multiplied demonstrations in your presence, illustrated them by arguments, and freed them from the objections of the most learned and skillful anatomists.[4]

Students will use description to establish ethos in the second half of this book.

Tell It Back—Narration

From page 6:

Description is essential because without it, a story, essay, or speech would be boring and lifeless, or might even be hard to understand. One purpose of description is to help readers experience what they are reading. Scenes come alive when they are described with vivid words. Description can also be used to catch a reader's attention, to explain a difficult idea, or to make a speech more interesting.

Talk About It—

1. The first building would make a better house for a scary story because it looks creepier. In the image, there are birds or bats flying overhead and vines growing on the walls, which makes the building look like it's falling apart. Also, the artist uses freer, choppier pen strokes, making the house look shakier and less stable. People seem to connect a tumble-

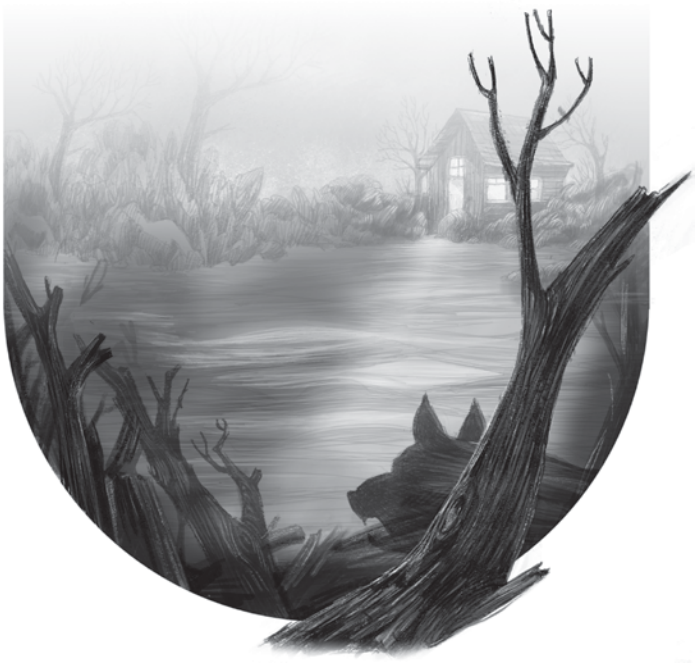
2. Tahitians: native people of the island of Tahiti in the Pacific Ocean
3. crop: an organ in a bird that stores food
4. anatomist: a scientist who dissects the body to understand its structures and workings

down house to death and decay—the perfect setting for ghosts. The second house seems less creepy. The weather appears to be beautiful and fair, and so the house is seen in its best light. It is symmetrical, free of vines or signs of decay, and it has a well-kept fence and yard. Artists make some houses look creepier than others by giving them the appearance of deterioration and disrepair.

2. Buchan engages every sense from sight ("every hill showing as clear as a cut amethyst") to sound ("swung along that road whistling," "brawling stream") to touch ("frosty morning") to smell ("queer, rooty smell of bogs") to taste ("thick sweet milk"). By using rich sensory language, rather than simple adjectives, Buchan is showing rather than telling. The reader experiences the scene along with the main character.
3. Based on the passage, it seems that a sod mason is like a bricklayer. He constructs walls with pieces of turf rather than bricks. The text says that the author "orders" the contractor to put the roof on as soon as the walls are high enough, so it seems that a contractor is a hired builder.

Memoria—

1. This quote claims that the senses, intelligent friends, and books can all be valuable teachers. We learn about the world as we experience it through our senses, we learn from the people with whom we surround ourselves, and we also learn from the books we read.
2. It is through our senses that we learn about the world, so books can teach like a schoolmaster by giving readers sensory experiences through descriptive writing. Furthermore, they can give us experiences in our minds that we might not get to experience in reality. If, for example, an author writes a vivid description of the Sahara Desert, his readers don't actually have to visit the Sahara to have some knowledge of it.



Notes