

***Grab-and-Go Writing Activity:  
Creating an Image***

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**Timeframe:** Approximately 20 minutes

**Materials needed (including preparation):** Handout of a descriptive passage (or transparency and overhead projector), whiteboard and dry erase marker.

**Objectives:** After this activity, students will be able to

- identify descriptive passages from plain sentences.
- move from images that “tell” to images that “show.”
- demonstrate how description energizes their writing.
- expand their descriptions of what they see, hear, and feel and be ready for a separate lesson on simile and metaphor.

**Introduction:** [2 minutes]

- Explain that this activity helps them illustrate specific ideas in any discipline.
- Point out that the three-part activity is designed to help them
  - refine their reading comprehension.
  - create an image from a lackluster sentence.
  - share with other students.

**Procedures:** [16 minutes]

**Step 1: Visualizing and dismantling a scene [5 minutes]**

- 1a. Distribute the descriptive passage and explain that here the author brings the scene to life so that the reader can envision it; he is “**showing**” what he saw. [1 minute]
- 1b. Read it aloud, and help students find and mark the modifiers. (Adjectives qualify nouns, as in “*clear* water”; adverbs describe verbs, as in “walks *slowly*.”) [2 minutes]

“This was the rainy season and the ground was soft, and his face had scored a trench a foot deep and a couple of yards long. He was lying on his belly with arms crucified and head sharply twisted to one side. His face was coated with mud, the eyes wide open, the teeth bared and grinning with an expression of unendurable agony. The friction of the great beast’s foot had stripped the skin from his back as neatly as one skins a rabbit.”

--George Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant”

- 1c. Tell them that if we were to strip it of its description, the passage would read something like “The dead body was lying on the ground.” That’s “**telling**.” [1 minute]
- 1d. Write on the board two more examples: “He is tall,” and “He stooped to enter the room.” Then explain that in the second sentence we visualize the man’s height; in the first one, we do not. [1 minute]

**Step 2: Before and after description activity [5 minutes]**

- 2a. Write on the board a plain sentence such as “He listens to music.” [1 minute]
- 2b. Ask students to transform the sentence above into an image by adding or replacing verbs, adverbs, nouns, and adjectives. [2 minutes]
- 2c. Have a few students read aloud the description of their image. [2 minutes]

**Step 3: Pair and share—directions for oral exercise [4 minutes]**

- 3a. Imagine that a blind person (readers are initially “blind”) asks you (the image-maker/the writer) to describe a single physical characteristic that depicts you.
- 3b. Find a partner to work with, and take turns playing the part of the one who sees and the one who is blind. Be sure that your answer is as specific as possible. For example: “I have a spider tattoo on my right toe,” or “I have a stubby beard.” [2 minutes]
- 3c. Ask a few volunteers to share their physical characteristic with the class. [2 minutes]

**Closure/Evaluation: [2 minutes]**

Write the following homework assignment on the board.

Review the sentences we analyzed in class and, using sensory language (sight, smell, taste), write a short description of your favorite food. A lesson on simile and metaphor will be the focus of the next activity.

**Activity Analysis:**

This activity is designed to help students see how to use descriptions in their own writing to illustrate a point. Analyzing a finely written passage that uses description to create a mental image and to convey a sense of person, place, and of a whole experience—ultimately, a model for their own writing—will enhance both their reading and critical skills. The writing exercise will nurture their ability to see themselves as image-makers. They will also learn from one another’s written and oral work. Some students may not be familiar with parts of speech, and it may take time to explain what they are.