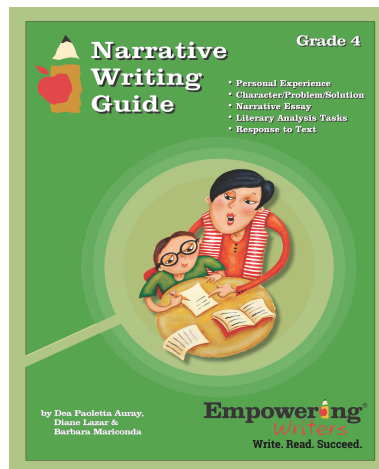




Grade 4 Narrative Writing Guide

Student Pages for Print or Projection

SECTION 3: Elaborative Detail



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Name _____

STORY CRITICAL CHARACTERS, SETTINGS, OBJECTS

In every story there are certain people, places and things that are especially important. These are called **story critical characters, settings and objects**. Authors highlight these story critical characters, settings and objects by stopping and taking time to **describe** them. Read each story plan below. Think about the characters, settings and objects that would be most interesting to the reader.

Underline story critical characters in RED, settings in BLUE, and objects in GREEN.

1. I head to an amusement park for the first time and ride the biggest roller coaster.

2. On a beautiful spring day, I take a bike ride through the woods. I am surprised when I see a bear on the trail.

3. This is a story about the time my family rode the rapids on a raft down the river.

4. I've wanted a new puppy for the longest time and finally there is a pet adoption day in my town where I get to choose my new puppy.

5. A cardinal is building a nest right on my windowsill.

6. Jesse unloads her beach bag and surf board from the car and heads towards the crashing waves.

Name _____

IRRELEVANT DETAILS

Remember, authors use elaborative detail to describe **story critical** characters, settings and objects. Read this story section below. This author has used description ineffectively. Cross out the describing words that do not add to the effectiveness of the writing. Underline the story critical characters, settings and/or objects that the author **should have** described in greater detail in an elaborative segment with vivid specific details.

I tied my old sneakers and grabbed my red backpack off the hook next to the kitchen door. The sky was gray and the clouds covered the yellow sun. I hiked through my neighborhood looking at the pretty houses. The grass was green on some lawns and dried out brown on others. I came to the famous hill! The hill was steep so I had to lean into it and I was breathing hard when I reached the top. I reached around to my backpack and grabbed my silver skateboard. It would be so cool if I could glide down this huge hill, I thought. I put on my blue plastic helmet, and black elbow guards. "Safety first," Mom always said. I stepped onto the skateboard and pushed off with my left foot. I started down the huge hill. I was going really fast and was a bit out of control but I made it safely down.

CHALLENGE: Find an elaborative detail segment in a book you are reading or have read. Discuss the segment with a partner. Use these questions to guide your discussion: What story critical element was described? How did the author describe it? Pick out the specific description. Did he/she use just color or size words? How does elaborative detail make a story entertaining to read?

Name _____

GENERAL OR SPECIFIC?

Read each pair of descriptions below. Circle the example in each pair that uses effective specific detail rather than overly general detail. Which description shows you more? Which is more entertaining?

1. She wore an old baseball cap.

A faded baseball cap with a big M in black letters covered her curly blonde hair.

2. The dog had golden fur.

The dog had long, shaggy golden fur matted with mud and dirt.

3. Piercing yellow eyes that glowed in the night made the owl appear wise.

The owl had cool eyes.

4. The kitchen was a mess.

There was red, green and purple paint splattered across the kitchen counter and up the walls. It looked like an art class gone crazy.

5. The whale made a strange sound.

The haunting sound of the whale's song coming through the misty fog was breath-taking.

6. The cactus stood tall like a soldier and was covered in prickly spikes.

The cactus was awesome.

7. I saw an old man.

The man was stooped over and had a long, white beard that almost dragged on the floor. His head was covered with wispy gray hair and his bushy eyebrows stuck out.

BONUS: Go back and read each GENERAL description. Underline the overly general adjectives that the author used ineffectively.

Name _____

STORY CRITICAL CHARACTERS, SETTINGS, OBJECTS

In every story there are certain people, places, and things that are especially important. These are called story critical characters, settings, objects. Authors highlight these **story critical characters, settings, and objects** by stopping and taking time to **describe** these. The author uses specific detail to describe a story critical character, setting, or object. Read the elaborative segments below and tell if the author is highlighting a **character, setting, or object**.

1. Back at the fire circle, Jinny opened the book, cradling its worn spine in one hand as she turned the soft, crumbling pages with the other. All the kids knew to be careful with the books. They were swollen, faded, eaten by the salt air and the grit of sand, not to mention so many grubby, grabbing fingers.

From Orphan Island by Laurel Snyder, 2017, Harper Collins Publishers, NY, NY 10007
(The author could have generalized by saying: "The book was old." Would that have been as effective?)

2. It hadn't been this way when Ole Golly lived there. That was one thing about Ole Golly, thought Harriet; even if she didn't say anything, you were aware of her. She made herself felt in the house. Harriet looked toward Ole Golly's room. It stood vacant, silent, its yellow door open. Harriet walked toward it. Standing on the threshold, she looked into the neat emptiness. It had been almost this neat when Ole Golly was in it, but there had been flowers. Ole Golly had always managed to have a sprig of something alive in the room. There had been the big flowered quilt too, that Harriet bounced in. Ole Golly took the quilt, Harriet thought to herself.

From Harriet the Spy by Louise Fitzhugh, 1964, Harper Collins Publishers, NY, NY, 10022
(The author could have generalized by saying: "The room looked the same." Would that have been as effective?)

3. Jonas nodded. The man was wrinkled, and his eyes, though piercing in their unusual lightness, seemed tired. The flesh around them was darkened into shadowed circles. The man smiled. He touched the sagging flesh on his own face with amusement.

From The Giver by Lois Lowry, 1993, Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc, NY, NY 10036
(The author could have generalized by saying: "The man was old." Would that have been as effective?)

Name _____

ELABORATIVE DETAIL (1)

Read the descriptive segment below. The author uses elaborative detail to bring this character to life and make it real. The sensory information allows the reader to see and experience this character right along with the main character.

- *“Although the prince was only two years older than I, he was much taller and he stood just like his father, feet apart, hands behind his back, as though the whole country were passing by on review. He looked like his father too, although the sharp angles of King Jerrold’s face were softened in his son. They each had tawny curls and swarthy skin. I had never been near enough to the king to know whether he also had a sprinkling of freckles across his nose, surprising on such a dark face.”*

From: Ella Enchanted by Gail Carson Levine, Harper Collins Children’s Books, 1997

Now, think about the questions the author must have asked herself in order to compose this descriptive passage. Write the questions on the lines below.

CHALLENGE: Think of a special person in your life. Describe this special person. Use the following questions to help you generate specific details:

- How big/small is this person?
- What kind/color eyes, hair?
- What kind of nose, ears, or other defining features?
- How does he/she move?
- How does he/she sound?
- What else is special about this person?

Name _____

ELABORATIVE DETAIL (2)

Read this descriptive segment below. The author uses elaborative detail to describe this story critical setting. The sensory information allows the reader to see, hear, and experience this character right along with the main character:

• *Meg knelt at her mother’s feet. The warmth and light of the kitchen had relaxed her so that her attic fears were gone. The cocoa steamed fragrantly in the saucepan; geraniums bloomed on the window sills and there was a bouquet of tiny yellow chrysanthemums in the center of the table. The curtains, red, with a blue and green geometrical pattern, were drawn, and seemed to reflect their cheerfulness throughout the room. The furnace purred like a great, sleepy animal; the lights glowed with steady radiance; outside, alone in the dark, the wind still battered against the house, but the angry power that had frightened Meg while she was alone in the attic was subdued by the familiar comfort of the kitchen. Underneath Mrs. Murry’s chair Fortinbras let out a contented sigh.*

• From: A Wrinkle in Time by Madelin L’Engle, Holzbrinck Publishers, 1962

Read the passage above line by line and think about the questions the author would have to ask himself/herself in order to generate this type of detail. On the lines below, write the questions.

CHALLENGE: Think about your kitchen. Notice all of the details. Write an elaborative detail segment of your kitchen. Make sure the reader will be able to visualize the whole room. Use the following questions to help generate specific detail:

- How large/small is your kitchen?
- What kinds/how many windows?
- What type of curtains?
- What color are the cabinets? Appliances?
- What kind/color walls? Decorations?
- What kind/color floor covering?
- What kind/color table and chairs?
- What other interesting elements are part of your kitchen?

Name _____

ELABORATIVE DETAIL (3)

Read this descriptive segment below. The author uses elaborative detail to describe this story critical object. The sensory information allows the reader to see, hear, and experience this character right along with the main character:

- *“It’s got a keyhole,” said their mother. “And I’ve got a whole boxful of keys. Why don’t you try all the smaller ones and see if any of them fit?”*

Most of the keys were much too big, but there were half a dozen that were about the right size. All but one of these were very ordinary. The unordinary one was the most interesting key in the whole collection, small with a complicated lock part and a fancy top. A narrow strip of red satin ribbon was looped through one of its curly openings. Omri saved that key to the last.

- From: The Indian in the Cupboard by Lynne Reid Banks, Random House, 1980

Read the passage above line by line and think about the questions the author would have to ask himself/herself in order to generate this type of detail. On the lines below, write the questions.

CHALLENGE: A key is an ordinary object however some of them are quite unusual. Think about some of the unusual keys you have seen. Describe an unusual key. Use the following questions to help you generate specific details:

- How big/small is the key?
- What kind of unusual markings does it have?
- What is it made of?
- What kind/color key ring or ribbon is attached?
- What does it open?
- What is the texture of the key?
- What does it remind you of?
- How old do you think it is?
- Who might have owned it?

Name _____

ELABORATIVE DETAIL - MAKE-IT-YOUR-OWN TEMPLATE

Read the descriptive segment below. The author uses elaborative detail to bring this ordinary character, setting or object to life and make it real. The sensory information allows the reader to see and experience this critical element right along with the main character.

Now, think about the questions the author must have asked himself in order to compose this descriptive passage. Write the questions on the lines below.

Name _____

FLIP THE SENTENCE SUBJECT! (1)

REMEMBER: In order for your writing to be interesting you must use good sentence variety. That means that each sentence should begin a bit differently. One way to break up a “broken record” of redundant sentence structure is by “flipping the sentence subject.”

DIRECTIONS: Look at the sample sentence revision. Then, try your hand at revising the other redundant sentences using this technique. Think of a better word than the helping verbs “was” or “were.”

EXAMPLE: *The cow was in the field.*
In the field, stood a cow.
In the field, stood a large brown and white cow.

Now it’s your turn. Revise this sentence by “flipping the sentence” and using a more interesting verb. **BONUS:** Add several describing words for more interesting sentence variety.

1. *There was a barn in the field.*

2. *There was some corn growing.*

3. *There was a goat nearby.*

4. *There was a pig in the mud.*

BONUS: Turn and talk with a partner and discuss what the sentences are describing. Then, discuss other items that would be found in the same setting. How would you include those items in the description and add sentence variety?

Name _____

FLIP THE SENTENCE SUBJECT! (2)

REMEMBER: In order for your writing to be interesting you must use good sentence variety. That means that each sentence should begin a bit differently. One way to break up a “broken record” of redundant sentence structure is by “flipping the sentence subject.”

DIRECTIONS: Look at the sample sentence revision. Then, try your hand at revising the other redundant sentences using this technique. Think of a better word than the helping verbs “was” or “were.”

EXAMPLE: *It had rice around the fish.*

Rice surrounded the fish.

A ring of white rice surrounded the salmon-colored fish.

Now it’s your turn. Revise this sentence by “flipping the sentence” and using a more interesting verb. **BONUS:** Add several describing words for more interesting sentence variety.

1. *It had seaweed around it.*

2. *It had some raw fish inside.*

3. *It had a spicy sauce on top.*

4. *It had some vegetables in it.*

BONUS: Turn and talk with a partner and discuss what the sentences are describing. Then, discuss your own preferences about the topic and add additional details to fully describe the item. How would you add sentence variety to each of your sentences?

Name _____

FLIP THE SENTENCE SUBJECT! (3)

REMEMBER: In order for your writing to be interesting you must use good sentence variety. That means that each sentence should begin a bit differently. One way to break up a “broken record” of redundant sentence structure is by “flipping the sentence subject.”

DIRECTIONS: Look at the sample sentence revision. Then, try your hand at revising the other redundant sentences using this technique. Think of a better word than the helping verbs “was” or “were.”

EXAMPLE: *There was a palace in the distance.*

In the distance stood a palace.

In the distance stood a palace made of dark gray stone.

Now it’s your turn. Revise this sentence by “flipping the sentence” and using a more interesting verb. **BONUS:** Add several describing words for more interesting sentence variety.

1. *There was a moat around the palace.*

2. *There was a knight on the balcony.*

3. *There was a tall stone tower at the corner.*

4. *There were alligators in the moat.*

BONUS: Turn and talk with a partner and discuss other things you would find in the setting. How would you include those items in your description and add sentence variety?



Name _____

SHOWING RATHER THAN TELLING HOW CHARACTERS FEEL

Showing how a story character feels allows the reader to get to know that character better and to empathize with and relate to the character. Sometimes authors will simply tell how the character feels. This is not as entertaining or as powerful as “showing” those feelings. Read each pair of story segments below. Circle the example that SHOWS rather than TELLS.

1. Philip felt furious.

or....

Philip stood with his arms crossed. He was breathing heavily, trying to stay calm. His teeth were clenched and he could feel his face turning red. He thought his heart might pound right out of his chest.

2. Ann’s face felt hot. She looked down, hoping no one would see her. The other kids’ eyes seemed to bore into her. She turned around and walked quickly in the other direction. Every second that they stared at her felt like an hour.

or...

Ann was embarrassed.

3. Maria was shocked.

or...

Maria was speechless. She gasped and her mouth hung open. Her eyes nearly popped out of her head.

4. Zion was hot.

or...

Zion’s face was bright red and sweat dripped down his forehead. His shirt clung to him as he leaned over gasping for air and signaling for water.

CHALLENGE: Turn and Talk: Discuss with a partner each example of how the author “SHOWS” the emotion. Why is this more powerful than simply telling?

Name _____

SHOWING OR TELLING?

Read each story segment below. If the author SHOWS the character's feelings, write an "S" in the blank. If the author just TELLS the character's feelings, write a "T" in the blank.

1. ____ It was time to go to bed and Juan was mad because he wanted to stay up late to watch a new show.
2. ____ Mom answered her phone and her face lit up at the news.
3. ____ All of a sudden Cam let out a whoop of joy and ran towards the crowd.
4. ____ Mari looked around her new classroom and was sad when she couldn't find her best friend Max.
5. ____ Dallas looked down, his face became a bright shade of red as he tapped his toe in the dirt.
6. ____ Emerson shivered as she tucked her head into her coat and pulled the scarf around her neck tighter.
7. ____ The amusement park was huge and I was so excited to explore every one of the rides.
8. ____ Mateo caught the ball and did a fist pump in the air.
9. ____ I jumped back, my eyes widened, and I gasped as I entered the room.
10. ____ Alex was next in line to jump from the diving board and it was scary.

BONUS: Go back to each "S" example. Write the feeling after the sentence. Go back to each "T" example. Show the feeling rather than telling.

Name _____

**BEFORE AND AFTER REVISION ACTIVITY (1) -
ELABORATIVE DETAIL**

Read this description of how the character in a novel is feeling. It tells rather than shows. It is BORING!

Jon was looking worried over there on the porch steps.

Revise this by SHOWING rather than TELLING. Be sure to describe his facial expression, body language, and even any sounds he made.

Name _____

**BEFORE AND AFTER REVISION ACTIVITY (2) -
ELABORATIVE DETAIL**

Read this description of how the character in a novel is feeling. It tells rather than shows. It is BORING!

Marco was very excited about the upcoming soccer game!

Revise this by SHOWING rather than TELLING. Be sure to describe his facial expression, body language, and even any sounds he made.

Name _____

**BEFORE AND AFTER REVISION ACTIVITY (3) -
ELABORATIVE DETAIL**

Read this description of how the character in a novel is feeling. It tells rather than shows. It is BORING!

Gianna was exhausted from her track meet.

Revise this by SHOWING rather than TELLING. Be sure to describe her facial expression, body language, and even any sounds she made.

Name _____

**BEFORE AND AFTER REVISION ACTIVITY (4) -
ELABORATIVE DETAIL**

Read this description of how the character in a novel is feeling. It tells rather than shows. It is BORING!

Amari felt lonely at school as the new kid.

Revise this by **SHOWING** rather than **TELLING**. Be sure to describe his facial expression, body language, and even any sounds he made.

Name _____

The Desert Climb

Rachel grabbed the edge of her white tee shirt and swiped it across her face. Sweat glistened across her brow and she could feel the effects of the sun baking her skin despite the sunscreen. She squinted across the desert horizon and sighed. Camp in New Mexico had been her dad’s idea. “Camping, exploring, hiking, and climbing!” he’d exclaimed. “When I was a kid I went there and it changed my life!” Rachel grimaced, remembering the conversation. “But I don’t want to change my life,” she’d replied, thinking of how much she hated sweating, how she disliked all the outdoorsy things her dad loved.

So, here she was, covered in sunscreen and bug spray, a pack strapped to her back, a mesh belt attached to her waist with a thick clip called a carabiner attached. Today was the day they would climb to the top of the flat-topped mesa in the distance. As the other campers chatted excitedly Rachel fell silent and peered across the desert landscape. The cracked and parched ground was the color of dull rust. Here and there sharp spiky green tufts of grass and cacti with sharp long needles threatened. There was nothing you could touch or lean over and smell without getting poked. Small slithery lizards scurried to any tiny spot of shade they could find, flicking their tiny tongues, their throats throbbing. Despite the heat, watching the miniature scaly beasts dart here and there sent a shiver down Rachel’s spine. A layer of reddish brown dust coated her sneakers and legs. She sighed. Brown, dry, dusty, and hot...with small skittering creatures underfoot, not to mention the beating sun in the piercing blue cloudless sky...all of it gave her a headache. It was all too much. And now she had to hike and climb... “Thanks Dad,” she muttered, under her breath.

Cara, one of their guides, arranged the campers in a single file line, and assigned each of them a number. “Rachel,” she called, “Come on up here behind me. You’re number one!” Rachel’s shoulders slumped and she hesitated. “Come on,” Cara said, smiling, waving her closer. She leaned in and whispered in

(continued)

Rachel's ear, "Smile – you've got the best spot of all. You'll see!" Reluctantly Rachel stepped forward and the other campers fell into place behind her. Being in front meant the others would see that she wasn't a hiker or a climber. In fact, she was clumsy and prone to stumbling. She'd prefer lounging inside with the air conditioner humming and a book in her hands.

They started across the desert, Cara pointing out this plant, that bird, this lizard, that rock. Rachel trudged along, her eyes fixed on the mesa. How would they ever manage to climb up to the top of that gigantic flat-topped mountain? With every step she took her stomach wrapped itself in knots. Her knees began to feel like rubber. The rest of the campers and their guides spread out into friendly groups, talking, laughing, and pointing to the sights. Little by little the ground became rockier and they began a gradual ascent. Rachel lowered her eyes and kept them glued to her feet, concentrating on each step, willing herself not to slip. Soon it took every bit of attention, looking for hand and footholds, making her way like a timid mountain goat. "Careful," Rachel whispered to herself. "One step at a time." Glancing up, Rachel spied a wall of solid rock. She looked at Cara, eyebrows raised in a question. Her heart pounded.

Here," Cara said, attaching a line between them, hooked to each of their carabiners. "I'll go first, then I'll talk you up." Cara scaled the wall like a super hero, then looked down at Rachel. "Right foot, left hand, pull." Rachel did as she was told. "Right hand, left foot, pull." Rachel kept climbing, following Cara's instructions. Sweat soaked her tee shirt. Rachel didn't think. She didn't look down. Up and up she climbed.

Suddenly, she was looking up at Cara, who reached for her hand and pulled Rachel the rest of the way up. Scrambling to her feet, Rachel gasped. The vista that stretched before her was like nothing she'd ever seen before. Eyes

(continued)

open wide, she scanned the red, gold, and tawny valley below, the land dotted with soft smatterings of sage and olive green vegetation. The cliff walls were swirled with layers of color, some of it glistening like gold. All of the brilliant desert hues blended into what looked like a spectacular oil painting. The turquoise sky topped it off, the contrast between the warm colors of the valley and the brilliant blue of the heavens nearly took Rachel's breath away. She gazed from left to right, as far as the eye could see, and the glorious panorama seemed to go on forever. "Oh wow," she whispered.

Cara grinned. "Not only did you get the first glimpse of this view..." she began.

"But, I became a hiker and a climber! Rachel interrupted. "And I was good at it!" Rachel's heart swelled. As the campers sat down on the mesa Rachel joined them. She was one of them now. She had earned her place. She would never forget this afternoon. With a smile, she realized that her dad had been right after all.



Name _____

LITERARY ANALYSIS TASK: ELABORATIVE DETAIL

You've read the story, The Desert Climb. The author uses elaboration to set the mood of the story and provide the reader with a sense of Rachel's point of view about her experience in the desert. Rachel's point of view changed once she reached the top of the mesa. Write an essay explaining how the author's choice of descriptive words reflected Rachel's point of view at the beginning of the story, compared to the point of view at the end of the story when she is atop the mesa. Provide evidence from the text to support your ideas.

THINK ABOUT IT: Is this a narrative or informational assignment?

Your teacher will walk you through the following STEPS:

1. Read, annotate, analyze, and summarize the story.
2. Fill in the following:
 - Who is the main **point of view character**? _____
 - What is the **setting**? _____

 - What is the main character's **motivation**? (What does she/he **want**?) _____

 - What is the **conflict**? (Who or what stands in the way of the main character's motivation?) _____
 - Fill in the summarizing framework that outlines the **plot**.

This story is about _____ .
The problem / adventure / experience _____ .
The problem was solved, experience or adventure concluded when _____ .

- What is the **theme**? _____

3. Consider the task: What do you need to include in your response? Fill in the summarizing framework as your pre-writing plan.

TOPIC: _____

MAIN IDEA #1: _____

MAIN IDEA #2: _____

4. Your teacher will MODEL the main idea paragraphs with you. You may use the sentence starters to help you cite examples in the source text.

SENTENCE STARTERS:

- At the beginning of the story _____.
- The author makes it clear that _____.
- For example _____.
- She also _____.
- The author writes _____.
- Rachel observes that, “_____.”
- The reader continues to see _____.
- Paragraph 1 ends with _____.
- All of this changes when _____.
- In this story _____.
- The reader understands this when _____.
- In paragraph 6 _____.
- Instead of seeing _____ she sees _____.
- Certainly, _____.
- This changes when _____.
- We see this when _____.

Name _____

NARRATIVE EXTENSION TASK: ELABORATIVE DETAIL

In the story, The Desert Climb, Rachel comes back down from the mesa and looks around at the landscape once again. She has a new appreciation for the setting based on her experience climbing the mesa. Write an elaborative detail segment of the desert landscape from Rachel’s new point of view.

THINK AND DISCUSS: How does a particular setting affect your mood and point of view?

REMEMBER: The answers to productive questions provide powerful elaborative detail!

- What was the weather like?
- What kinds of trees grew there?
- What was the ground like?
- What kind of creatures lived there?
- What did you smell?
- What was the temperature?
- What kinds of plants and flowers grew there?
- What sounds did you hear?
- What did you feel?

SENTENCE STARTERS:

- The temperature ____.
- The sound of ____.
- It felt ____.
- Rachel detected ____.
- The air was alive with ____.
- ____ grew ____.
- Breathing in I noticed ____.
- In the distance I spied ____.
- She was surprised by ____.
- Rachel laughed as she ____.
- The air smelled of ____.
- I noticed ____.
- Glancing about I spotted ____.
- There were ____.
- This amazing day ____.
