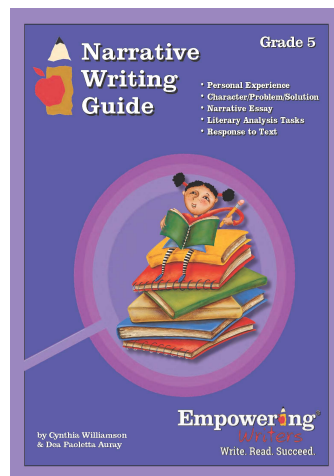




Grade 5 Narrative Writing Guide

Student Pages for Print or Projection

SECTION 3: Elaborative Detail



www.empoweringwriters.com
1-866-285-3516

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. Trembling from head to foot, Kate zipped up her lucky life jacket and began paddling her canoe across the deep dark lake.
2. On a hot summer day, I dove into the crowded community pool holding a colorful striped beach ball and hoping to get a game of volleyball started.
3. Will and I were skating on the frozen lake when we heard a sharp crack as the ice splintered beneath our feet. It was a good thing that Will had his hockey stick with him.
4. At the orchard, I saw a hungry bear pluck an apple from a tree and take a big bite.
5. The elves used their tiny hammers and saws to build a cozy cottage in the forest.

BONUS: Most of these story plans are for realistic personal experience narratives, but one is not. Circle the story plan for a purely imaginative narrative.

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.

What an exciting day! I was going to the animal shelter to adopt my first pet. I was twelve years old and finally old enough for a dog of my own. I loved all kinds of dogs. It took about 20 minutes to drive to the shelter in our old SUV. When we got there, we found it crowded with homeless dogs who needed to be adopted. Many of them barked to get my attention. Most of them were friendly and happy to see me but some were shy. There were so many of them, big dogs, small dogs, medium-sized dogs. Some had curly hair and floppy ears. A cute puppy was gnawing on a big rawhide bone. I brought along a clear plastic bag full of dog treats and offered one to each dog. It took me a long time to make a decision, but I finally chose a medium-sized black and white dog with soft brown eyes. I looped a red collar around his neck and hooked him onto a brown leather leash, but he wouldn't leave his enclosure. Instead, he pulled me over to the corner and took a ragged red rubber ball in his mouth. Only then would he let me lead him out of the shelter. I took him home and named him Max. We played countless games of catch with that gnawed up red rubber ball and Max became the best friend I ever had.

Discuss and Collaborate: On another sheet of paper or at the keyboard, write an elaborative segment for one of the story critical characters, the setting or the object you underlined. Discuss your work with a partner and work together to revise.

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. My hands were sweaty and my stomach felt like it was doing somersaults as I got dressed for my piano recital.
I was nervous about my piano recital.
2. The top of the mountain was covered with white snow.
Mounds of soft, melting snow blanketed the top of the steep mountain.
3. Bobbing her head and clucking softly, the mother hen pranced proudly around the yard with her tiny, fluffy chicks following close behind.
The cute chicks followed the mother hen.
4. From the top of the Ferris wheel, I could see our whole bustling town, the busy highway and the surrounding green countryside.
The view from the top of the Ferris wheel was great.
5. I bought a nice jacket at the mall.
At the mall, I bought a bright blue jacket with a fur-trimmed hood and two deep pockets that zipped closed.
6. Wearing a wig of long, scraggly gray hair and a torn, blood-stained shirt, Jamie looked just like a vengeful zombie in his Halloween costume.
Jamie's Halloween costume was scary.
7. I had a good picnic at the beach.
At the beach, I feasted on a picnic lunch of crisp carrot sticks, a sweet ripe banana and a tasty turkey sandwich with spicy mustard.

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. “The couch was brown and squat with a pile of cushions covered in graying lace at the far end. A matching brown chair with worn arms slumped at the opposite side of the room. Gray lace curtains hung at the single window between them, and beside the window was a black table supporting an old-time TV set with rabbit ears.” - From *The Great Gill Hopkins* by Katherine Paterson, ©1978 Harper Collins Publishers
(The author could have generalized by saying: “The room was dumpy.” Would that have been as effective?)
2. “Sitting behind a small table beneath a sign was a burly, ill-shaven man dressed in a wrinkled uniform of a ship’s low-ranked officer. His cap was perched high on his bald head. An unlit cigar dangled from his mouth.” - From *Beyond the Western Sea* by Avi, ©1996 Orchard Books, NY, NY 10016
(The author could have generalized by saying: “A sloppy man sat at a table.” Would that have been as effective?)
3. “But I did find one item from the basket that they’d overlooked and left behind: a small polished flute with three small holes toward one end and one toward the other. It looked to have been fashioned from a naturally hollow bone. Probably it was made from an eagle’s wingbone.” - From *Kokopelli’s Flute* by Will Hobbs ©1995 Avon Books by arrangement with Simon and Schuster
(The author could have generalized by saying: “I found a flute.” Would that have been as effective?)

Name _____

PUMPKIN

REMEMBER: • When you elaborate, you STOP THE ACTION and observe.

- Use the five senses to describe!
- Your elaborative segment should make the reader feel as though he or she is right there with the main character.
- Use specific rather than general details.
- Remember that sentence variety is important!

Write an ELABORATIVE SEGMENT of the **object** below. Tell SPECIFICALLY what it looked like (color, features, size), what it reminded you of, and how it made you feel. Do NOT write a grocery list. Use interesting words and make it entertaining!

A pumpkin sat on the top step of the porch.

Name _____

UNDERWATER SCENE

- REMEMBER:** • When you elaborate, you STOP THE ACTION and observe.
- Use the five senses to describe!
 - Your elaborative segment should make the reader feel as though he or she is *right there* with the main character.
 - Use specific rather than general details.
 - Remember that sentence variety is important!

Write an ELABORATIVE SEGMENT of the **setting** below. Tell what she saw, smelled, felt, and heard. Do NOT write a grocery list. Use interesting words and make it entertaining! Decide if you want to create REALISTIC FICTION based on what she might actually see, or a FANTASY of something fanciful or magical.

Catherine dove under the water and was amazed at the scene beneath the ocean surface.

Name _____

OLD WOMAN

REMEMBER: • When you elaborate, you STOP THE ACTION and observe.

- Use the five senses!
- Your description should make the reader feel as though he or she is *right there* with the main character.
- Use specific rather than general details.
- Remember that sentence variety is important!

Write an ELABORATIVE SEGMENT of the **character** below. Tell what you saw, smelled, felt, and heard. Do NOT write a grocery list. Use interesting words and make it entertaining!

A very old woman appeared on the path.

Name _____

JUNGLE TREE

REMEMBER: • When you elaborate, you STOP THE ACTION and observe.

- Use the five senses to describe!
- Your elaborative segment should make the reader feel as though he or she is *right there* with the main character.
- Use specific rather than general details.
- Remember that sentence variety is important!

Write an ELABORATIVE SEGMENT of the **object** below. Tell about its color, size, and texture. Do NOT write a grocery list. Use interesting words and make it entertaining!

The huge exotic tree reached to the canopy of the rain forest.



Name _____

UNUSUAL COTTAGE

REMEMBER: • When you elaborate, you STOP THE ACTION and observe.

- Use the five senses!
- Your description should make the reader feel as though he or she is *right there* with the main character.
- Use specific rather than general details.
- Remember that sentence variety is important!

Write an ELABORATIVE SEGMENT of the **object** below. Tell specifically what the cottage looked like (color, material, size), its age and who might have owned it. Do NOT write a grocery list. Use interesting words and make it entertaining!

The unusual cottage sat in the forest clearing.

Name _____

A NEW PLANET

- REMEMBER:**
- When you elaborate, you STOP THE ACTION and observe.
 - Use the five senses!
 - Your description should make the reader feel as though he or she is *right there* with the main character.
 - Use specific rather than general details.
 - Remember that sentence variety is important!

Write an ELABORATIVE SEGMENT of the **setting** below. Tell what you saw, smelled, felt, and heard. Do NOT write a grocery list. Use interesting words and make it entertaining!

This newly discovered planet was very different from earth!

Name _____

**STORY CRITICAL CHARACTER, SETTING OR OBJECT -
MAKE-IT-YOUR-OWN**

REMEMBER: • When you elaborate, you STOP THE ACTION and observe.

- Use the five senses to describe!
- Your elaborative segment should make the reader feel as though he or she is *right there* with the main character.
- Use specific rather than general details.
- Remember that sentence variety is important!

Write an **ELABORATIVE SEGMENT** of the character, setting or object of your choice. Tell **SPECIFICALLY** what's it looks like (color, size, features, etc.) what it reminded you of and how it made you feel. Do **NOT** write a grocery list. Use interesting words and make it entertaining.

Name _____

ELABORATIVE DETAIL (1)

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

- *“I suppose hobbits need some description nowadays, since they have become rare and shy of Big People, as they call us. They are (or were) a little people, about half our height, and smaller than bearded Dwarves. Hobbits have no beards. There is little or no magic about them, except the ordinary everyday sort which helps them to disappear quietly and quickly when large stupid folk like you and me come blundering along, making a noise like elephants which they can hear a mile off. They are inclined to be fat in the stomach; they dress in bright colours (chiefly green and yellow); wear no shoes, because their feet grow natural leathery soles and thick brown hair like the stuff on their heads (which is curly); have long clever brown fingers, good natured faces, and laugh deep fruity laughs.*
- From: The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien, Ballantine Books, New York, New York, 1965

Read the passage above and think about the kinds of detail-generating questions the author would have to ask himself or herself in order to generate this type of detail. On the lines below, write your questions.

CHALLENGE: Imagine a wild place, a magical kingdom where a variety of unusual beings live. Next, imagine one of these beings and write an elaborative segment describing this unique character. Use the following questions to help generate specific detail:

- How short or tall is the character?
- How heavy or thin is the character?
- What is the character wearing?
- What kind/color hair does the character have?
- What kind/color eyes does the character have?
- What is the character’s facial expression?
- What is the character carrying?

Name _____

ELABORATIVE DETAIL (2)

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

- *He was just about to turn into the drainpipe when he heard a very strange sound. Now Tucker Mouse had heard almost all the sounds that can be heard in New York City. He had heard the rumble of subway trains and the shriek their iron wheels make when they go around a corner. From above, through the iron grills that open onto the streets, he had heard the thrumming of the rubber tires of automobiles, and the hooting of their horns, and the howling of their brakes. And he had heard the babble of voices when the station was full of human beings, and the barking of the dogs that some them had on leashes. Birds, pigeons of New York and cats, and even the high purring of airplanes above the city Tucker had heard. But in all his days, and on all his journeys through the greatest city in the world, Tucker had never heard a sound quite like this one.*
- From The Cricket in Times Square by George Selden, Bantam Doubleday, New York, New York, 1960

Now, think about the questions the author must have asked himself in order to compose this descriptive passage. Go sentence by sentence and write the question on the lines below.

CHALLENGE: The above description is all about the city. Think about the sounds, sights and smells of the country. Write a descriptive segment all about a country setting. The questions below will help you.

- What did you see?
- How big/small were the buildings?
- In what condition were they?
- What did you smell?
- What kind of plants or animals did you see?
- What did you hear?
- Did it remind you of anything?



Name _____

ELABORATIVE DETAIL (3)

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

- *All the Yellows are wearing gold medals around their necks. The medals are really made of plastic, but they look exactly like Olympic gold medals and they hang from their necks on red, white and blue ribbons.*
 - From: Loser by Jerry Spinelli, Scholastic, New York, New York, 2002

Now, think about the questions the author must have asked himself in order to compose this descriptive passage. Go sentence by sentence and write the question on the lines below.

CHALLENGE: The object in the description was a gold medal for winning a competition. Think about a time when you won a competition and describe the trophy, medal or certificate you won for your accomplishment. The questions below will help you.

- What color and shape was the trophy, medal or certificate?
- How big/small?
- What kind of markings did it have?
- What kind of words or pictures?
- How did it make you feel?

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 more powerful word than the helping verb “has.”

Ex. The owl has sharp talons.
Sharp talons, extend from its feet.

Now it’s your turn. Revise this sentence by “flipping the sentence” and using a more interesting verb.

1. It has large, round eyes.

2. It has asymmetrical ears.

3. It has soft thick feathers.

4. It has a strong beak.



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 more powerful word than the helping verb “had.”

Ex. He had small, blue eyes.

Small, blue eyes peered out the window.

Now it's your turn. Revise this sentence by “flipping the sentence” and using a more interesting verb.

1. He had curly brown hair.

2. He had a blue backpack.

3. He had a baseball cap.

4. He had black running shoes.

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. I was terrified.

or....

Wide and wary, my eyes darted from side to side. I felt my heart pounding. My hands were trembling and my knees knocking. I caught my breath and mustered the last of my courage.

2. Emily kicked up her heels and did a little twirl. Her smile was as bright as a ray of sunshine and her laugh was music to my ears.

or...

Emily was happy.

Revise each of these examples.

3. David was angry.

4. I felt ashamed of myself.

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.

_____ I gasped. A tingle raced down my spine and my heart started pounding when I realized that something was following me.

_____ Sara was so excited about her birthday party.

_____ With a broad smile on his face, Max leapt into the air, pumped his fist and shouted "yeeeeesssss."

_____ I was overjoyed when I received the party invitation.

_____ Emma wiggled her fingers and stomped her feet in an effort to warm her fingers and toes. Her nose and cheeks felt numb. Her teeth chattered.

_____ Jack felt outraged!

_____ Ava bit her lip and tried to blink away the tears that were welling up in her eyes.

_____ Ben was more frustrated than ever.

_____ Juan blushed and he couldn't meet my eye. He mumbled a quiet apology.

_____ I was exhausted.

BONUS: Go back to each "S" example. Write the feeling after the sentence.

Name _____

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

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

Andy was shocked.

On another piece of paper or at the keyboard, revise this by SHOWING rather than TELLING. Be sure to describe Andy's facial expression, body language and any sounds he may have made.

Name _____

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

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

Julia was clearly amused.

On another piece of paper or at the keyboard, revise this by SHOWING rather than TELLING. Be sure to describe Julia's facial expression, body language and any sounds she may have made.

Name _____

The Cutest Kitten in the World

Happy Birthday to me! I bolted joyfully out of bed. With gifts to unwrap and a delicious chocolate cake to eat, I knew the day ahead would be filled with fun. But what I was most excited about was the very special present my parents had promised me — a kitten.

“Are you sure you’re ready to take responsibility for a pet of your very own, Daisy?” Mom had asked me. “Remember, you’ll have to change the litter box every day and make sure your kitten always has fresh water and food.”

“No problem,” I told her, confident that I would be capable of taking care of a pet as soon as I turned 12.

So my parents agreed that on my birthday, they’d take me to the animal shelter where I could adopt the kitten of my dreams. I hadn’t thought of much else ever since. Did I want a fluffy feline with silky, arctic-white fur? Or an elegant, blue-eyed Siamese? A sleek, glossy black kitten with the golden eyes of a lion was another possibility. Making a decision wasn’t going to be easy, but I was determined to find myself the cutest kitten in the world.

I threw on some clothes and wolfed down my extra special birthday breakfast of waffles and strawberries. Mom and I arrived at the animal shelter the moment it opened and it was crawling with kittens of every shape, size and color. There was a orange mother cat who purred as she nursed her litter of six mini-mes. The volunteer at the shelter told me that the family had been living in a dark dirty alley before they were rescued just two nights earlier. Tears came to my eyes as I imagined the skinny mother cat scavenging food from a dumpster. Her kittens weren’t ready to leave her yet, but dozens of other playful, adorable baby cats were.

I cuddled at least 10 kittens. Time was ticking by and Mom was getting impatient. I was wondering how I’d ever manage to select just one kitten when I saw a ball of black and white fluff curled up in the corner. This shy

(continued)

kitten was smaller than the others, almost scrawny, and goofy looking. Mostly white, she had weirdly shaped splotches of black on her face and a bald spot on the top of her head. Her nose was scratched and her ear looked like it had been injured too.

“Oh, that little one has had a rough time,” the volunteer said and went on to explain that the others in her litter had not survived after their mother disappeared, probably hit by a car while looking for food. The kitten had tangled with a wild animal, which had chewed off a piece of her ear and pulled out tufts of her fur.

“It’s amazing she survived,” I said, reaching out a hand to stroke the tiny, courageous kitty. I felt the rumble of a purr in the kitten’s throat and she gazed at me with trusting green eyes. My heart swelled with love.

This wasn’t going to be such a hard decision after all. “You’re coming home with me,” I whispered to the kitten — and that she did. I named her Bernadette, a name that means “brave as a bear.”

I held her close and smiled. Who cares if she’s not the prettiest of cats? Certainly not me. I guess it’s true that beauty really is in the eye of the beholder, because every time I look at Bernadette, I see the cutest kitten in the world.

Name _____

LITERARY ANALYSIS TASK: ELABORATIVE DETAIL

In the story, The Cutest Kitten in the World, the author describes the setting and the kittens waiting to be adopted. Write an essay to explain how the elaborative detail in the story helps the reader to understand the story more deeply. Explain how the story would affect the reader differently without the elaborative detail. 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 and fill out the summarizing framework as a 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:

- The reader visualizes _____.
- The author writes _____.
- Daisy observes that, “_____.”
- The reader continues to see _____.
- The reader discovers that _____.
- In this story _____.
- The reader understands this when _____.
- We know that _____ because _____.
- Instead of seeing _____ she sees _____.
- If the author chose _____.
- This changes when _____.
- The reader would feel _____.
- In paragraph _____, we see that _____.

Transition Language:

- Not only that, but _____.
- Besides that, _____.
- Furthermore, _____.
- In addition to this, _____.
- For example, _____.

Name _____

**NARRATIVE EXTENSION TASK:
ELABORATIVE DETAIL**

You've read the story The Cutest Kitten in the World in which Daisy, the main character, adopts a new pet on her birthday. Now, fast forward one year and write an elaborative segment describing Bernadette now that she's healthy.

THINK AND DISCUSS: How does descriptive detail bring a story to life?

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

- How had Bernadette changed over the past year?
- How did Daisy feel about the cat Bernadette had grown into?
- What kind/color fur?
- What kind/color eyes?
- What kind/color ears?
- What kind/color nose?

SENTENCE STARTERS:

- Bernadette had _____.
- Bernadette purred when _____.
- I wondered if _____.
- Looking closely _____.
- I felt _____.
- I remembered _____.
- A year ago, _____.
- Eyes, the color of _____.

Name _____

LITERARY ANALYSIS TASK: FEELINGS
THE CUTEST KITTEN IN THE WORLD

You've read the story The Cutest Kitten in the World in which the point of view character, Daisy, experiences some strong emotions. Write an essay to explain how the author helped us understand Daisy's feelings throughout the story. Provide evidence from the text.

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:

How does the author "show" how Daisy feels throughout the story?

Provide evidence from the beginning.

Provide evidence when she is at the shelter.

Provide evidence from the end.

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

SENTENCE STARTERS:

- The technique(s) the author used _____.
- Instead of just telling how Daisy felt _____.
- At the beginning, we see _____.
- This is evidenced when _____.
- We know this because _____.
- Rather than simply writing _____.
- Once Daisy arrived at the shelter _____.
- The author describes _____.
- When we read _____.
- At the end the reader discovers _____.
- We know this because _____.