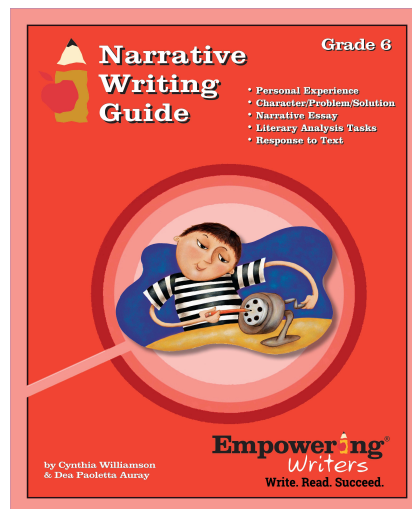




Grade 6 Narrative Writing Guide

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. My first canoeing trip didn't go smoothly. It was a good thing that the lake was calm that day and that I'd brought along an extra set of oars.
2. Clark visited a tropical island with his family and was fascinated with the colorful birds that lived there.
3. Just outside my bedroom window, I heard a deep growl and the sound of gnashing teeth. Had the werewolf followed me home?
4. It was my little sister's birthday. I baked her a very special cake for the occasion and decorated it on the dining room table.
5. Once again, Charlie sat in the classroom playing with the fidget spinner and his teacher was not happy.

BONUS: Most of these story plans are for realistic personal experience narratives, but one is not. Circle that story plan.

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.

It was the start of baseball season and I was suited up for our first practice. I wore white baseball pants and a green cotton t-shirt with our team's name scrawled across the front. My socks were also green and I carried my lucky mitt. The grassy field at the city park where we played was just a few blocks away from the red house where I lived with my mom, dad and sister. My friend Sean, who played shortstop, lived across the street in a yellow house where we hung out often in the summer. Sean ran out to meet me, carrying his favorite bat. Together we raced to the field. Suddenly, the sky went dark and there was a loud crack of thunder. Rain poured from the sky, soaking me from the top of my green baseball cap to the tips of my black and white canvas sneakers. Sean and I turned around and rushed back home, but by the time we got there, the rain had stopped and the sun was shining brightly in the sky.

BONUS: On another piece of paper, write an elaborative segment for the story critical characters, settings and/or objects you underlined.

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. The subway went fast.

Like a streamlined streak of silver, the subway zoomed into the dark tunnel.

2. To observe silently as a tall, graceful giraffe nibbled on the leaves of a towering tree was the experience of a lifetime.

Seeing a giraffe was awesome.

3. She had a big smile on her face.

Her blue eyes twinkled with happiness as a joyful smile lit up her whole face.

4. The bus ride was bumpy.

We were bouncing in our seats as the bus rambled its way up the rugged dirt road.

5. I was nervous about giving my oral report.

My hands were trembling and my knees felt weak as I walked up to the podium to deliver my oral report.

6. Perched in a thicket of jungle vines was a parrot with long, lush feathers in a rainbow of gorgeous colors like bright red, vibrant yellow, and deep, rich blue.

The parrot was pretty.

7. We scorched our bare feet on the hot sand as we searched for a spot to lay our blanket and plant our umbrella on the crowded beach.

It was a hot day and the beach was crowded.

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. “Inside, I trailed my fingers over the massive kitchen table. The room was dark, with a huge fireplace; copper pots hung on hooks, and vegetables simmered on the stove, almost ready for the jars on the counter. A crusty loaf of bread covered with a tea towel was on the table, and I cut myself a slice to munch on.”
- From p. 11 *Genevieve’s War* by Patricia Reilly Giff, *Holiday House*, 2017
(The author could have generalized by saying “I went into the kitchen and cut myself a slice of bread.” Would that have been as effective as this description of a story critical setting — the kitchen.)
2. “Did I really look like a wolf? Mir was not the first to say so. Even my mother sometimes brushed the hair from my eyes with her hand and asked, “What are you seeing, Kai? Who gave you those eyes? They glow like amber in the firelight.” I had glimpsed them myself, staring back from the surface of still water. An odd brown —almost golden —with green sparks. Strange eyes. Wolf eyes. - From p. 12 *The Wolf’s Boy* by Susan Williams Beckhorn, *Disney-Hyperion*, 2016
(The author could have generalized by saying “People told me I looked like a wolf.” Would that have been as effective as this passage describing a story critical character?)
3. “And then I saw her. At lunch. She wore an off-white dress so long it covered her shoes. It had ruffles around the neck and cuffs, and looked like it could have been her great-grandmother’s wedding gown. Her hair was the color of sand. It fell to her shoulders. Something was strapped across her back, but it wasn’t a book bag. At first I thought it was a miniature guitar. I found out later it was a ukulele.” - From p. 4 *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli, *Scholastic*, 2000
(The author could have generalized by saying describing “a girl wearing a white dress.” Would that have been as effective as this description of a story critical character and possibly, a story critical object — the ukulele?)

Name _____

BONFIRE

- 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 bonfire blazed at our campsite.

Name _____

FIREFIGHTER

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!

The firefighter arrived at the scene of the explosion.

Name _____

BICYCLE

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 bicycle was in the driveway.

Name _____

MOUNTAIN

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 specifically what the mountain looked like (size, plants, trees). Do NOT write a grocery list. Use interesting words and make it entertaining!

The mountain was tall and it had a steep peak.

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 setting. The sensory information allows the reader to see, hear and experience this setting right along with the main character.

- *“The floor of the courtyard looked like it was made of huge stone blocks, many of them cracked and filled with long grasses and weeds. An odd, dilapidated wooden building near one of the corners of the square contrasted greatly with the gray stone. A few trees surrounded it, their roots like gnarled hands digging into the rock floor for food. Another corner of the compound held gardens — from where he was standing Thomas recognized corn, tomato plants, fruit trees.”*

- From: p. 7, The Maze Runner by James Dashner, Delacorte Press, 2009

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.

CHALLENGE: Go to your favorite room in your home and think about what you like best about this place. Write an elaborative segment describing this room in great detail. Make sure your reader will be able to visualize the entire room. The questions below will help you.

- How large or small is the room?
- What kind of windows does it have?
- What kind/color floor covering?
- What color walls?
- What kinds of furniture are there?
- What decorates the walls?

Name _____

ELABORATIVE DETAIL (2)

Read the descriptive segment below. The author uses elaborative detail to bring this character to life and make her real. The sensory information allows the reader to become acquainted with this story-critical character.

- *“Mom leaned against the washing machine in the mud room and tucked her hair back. Normally her frizzy curls were tied back in a ponytail or a braid because of work, but this morning they were wild and free. When she asked what she was going to do with me, I suggested she give me a dollar. She smiled at that, which made me happy. Mom didn’t smile much anymore. Well, she did but most of the time it was like something was missing. You could tell.”*
- From: p. 6, The Saturday Boy by David Fleming, Viking, The Penguin Group, 2013

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: Think about a person you admire. Write an elaborative segment describing this person in great detail. Make your reader feel acquainted with this person. The questions below will help you.

- How old is this person?
- What kind/color hair does she/he have?
- What kind/color eyes?
- What kind of distinguishing marks or scars?
- What is he/she wearing?
- What does her/his voice sound like?
- Does she/he use any specific gestures or use any particular phrases?

Name _____

ELABORATIVE DETAIL (3)

Read the descriptive segment below. The author uses elaborative detail to paint a portrait of a story-critical object. The sensory information alerts the reader that the dying potato plants are important to the story.

- *“It hardly seemed like much. It was just the tiniest edge of the leaf that has shriveled and curled under, but it was enough to see that the stem underneath was soft and pulpy.”*

“Look across,” Mrs. Mallon said in her harsh voice. “There.” She pointed with one thick finger. “And there.”

It was everywhere. A leaf lying back against a stem as if it had no strength to stand up by itself. Another stem seemed to lose color in front of our eyes. I backed away, stepping on one plant, shaking the edge of my skirt where the plant had left a smear of brownish ooze. I tried not to take a deep breath because the smell was stronger now.”

- From: p. 45, Nory Ryan’s Song by Patricia Reilly Giff, Scholastic, 2000

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: Look around your classroom. What particular object catches your eye? (The teacher’s desk? A computer? A bulletin board?) Write an elaborative segment describing this object. The questions below will help you.

- How large or small is this object?
- What is it made of?
- What color is it?
- How is it used?

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 verbs “was” or “were .”

Ex. There was a big hurricane coming our way!

A massive hurricane roared its way toward our town, bringing drenching rains and howling winds.

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

1. There were power outages after the storm.

2. There were flooded highways.

3. There were people stranded at the airport.

4. There were powerful winds.

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. I had poison ivy!

Poison ivy covered my body in an itching, oozing rash.

Now it's your turn. Revise these sentences by “flipping the sentence” and using more interesting verbs.

1. It grows in most wooded areas around the world.

2. There is another plant called poison sumac that causes a rash and some blisters.

3. There are special soaps and ointments for poison ivy.

4. It is easy to spread the rash if you scratch it.

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. Spence was nervous about the test.

or....

Spence felt his heart begin to pound. His mouth was dry and his hands were trembling so badly that it was hard to hold a pencil.

2. Jamie looked into the kitten’s innocent eyes and gently stroked its soft, thick fur.

or...

Jamie loved her kitten.

Revise each of these examples.

3. Matthew was disappointed.

4. Taylor was horrified!

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.

_____ Tracy stomped up the stairs and kicked her bedroom door shut.

_____ Rosie was happy when she realized it was her birthday.

_____ Dan's face was flushed and he felt a stream of sweat pour down his back. He fanned himself with a newspaper.

_____ The color drained from Sam's face as the roller coaster began to pick up speed. He felt his fingers start to tremble and his stomach lurch.

_____ Theo had worked hard on his project and he was sleepy.

_____ Chris gasped in horror and covered her face as the action intensified and the movie got gory.

_____ I was so excited to see my dad after his long trip for work.

_____ The puppy looked up at me with big, trusting eyes and wagged its tiny tail.

_____ Peter was disgusted with Paula because she was always late.

_____ Leah's stomach grumbled and her head ached. "When's lunch?" she asked.

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

Name _____

REVISION ACTIVITY (1) - WHAT FEELINGS LOOK LIKE

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

Emma was happy to be home after her adventure in the woods.

Revise this by SHOWING rather than TELLING. Be sure to describe Emma's facial expression, body language and any sounds she may have made.

Revision:

Name _____

REVISION ACTIVITY (2) - WHAT FEELINGS LOOK LIKE

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

Juan was horrified.

Revise this by SHOWING rather than TELLING. Be sure to describe Juan's facial expression, body language and any sounds he may have made.

Revision:

Name _____

The Best Report Card Ever

Scrawled in bold red marker at the top of my paper was 68%. Tears stung my eyes when I saw that I'd barely passed my social studies quiz. Of course, everybody will think I didn't study, but I did. The night before the test, I re-read the chapter in the textbook three times and quizzed myself on the important facts until I could barely keep my eyes open.

I crumbled the paper into a ball and tossed it into the trash. I want to do well in school, but academics are really hard for me. I read slowly and my spelling is an embarrassment. Remembering my math facts seems nearly impossible. Just the idea of a test makes my hands tremble and sweat bead up on my forehead. Sometimes I wonder if I'm just stupid.

My teacher and my mom are always begging me to "try harder," but my dad seems to understand that I am giving it my best shot. "I was never an A-student either," he tells me. "And look at me now!"

My dad is a successful man who owns his own business and works with his hands. I hope I grow up to be just like him. Until then, I want to be a good student, like my friend Fiona. She reads just for fun and passes every test with flying colors. I asked her how she does it, and she just shrugged and said "it's easy."

Easy? For me, it was anything but easy. Fiona is one of my best friends, but as those words came out of her mouth, I felt the sudden urge to say something really mean to her — even though I knew she wasn't trying to make me feel bad. Fiona was just stating the truth. School was easy for her and hard for me. End of story.

It was October, nearing the end of first marking period of the school year and I was hoping to see at least one "B" in a subject other than art or gym on my report card. I did all my homework assignments and paid close attention in class. I went to school with a scratchy throat because I was afraid of missing a day and falling behind. But I ended up with a bad cold and fever that kept me at home for three days — and I did, indeed, fall behind. Catching up was a major struggle.

Report cards were distributed at the end of the month. I crossed my fingers and held my breath as I opened mine — C's in language arts, social studies and science; and my usual D in math. My teachers said good things

(continued)

about my behavior in class and I got A's in gym and art. So it wasn't all bad, but still I was discouraged.

When I got home, I handed my report card to my mother and stomped upstairs, sure that mom would say, "Just try a little harder, Ellen." I knew I'd lose my temper if I heard those dreaded words again. Alone in my room, the tears I'd been holding back started streaming down my cheeks.

I cried for a long time and came down to dinner with swollen eyes and tear-stained cheeks. On my plate, I found this written in my dad's distinctive handwriting:

Ellen's Report Card

Being a great big sister	A+
Doing cartwheels on the beach	A
Helping your old man rake the yard and shovel the snow	B+
Making your family laugh	A
Baking the world's most delicious ginger cookies	A+
Being the greatest daughter in the universe	A+++++++

A huge smile broke out on my face and I hugged my dad as hard as I could. "It's fine to be a good student, Ellen," he said. "But it's more important to be a good person with a sense of humor who treats others with respect and compassion — a person like you. I couldn't be prouder of you."

I posted Dad's report card on the wall in my room and I look at it every time I feel discouraged about my academic performance. While I'll keep giving school my best effort, I realize that my gifts may never be properly showcased in the classroom. From now on, I am going to focus on being a good person who makes her Dad proud — and that's way more important than being an A-student.

Name _____

LITERARY ANALYSIS TASK: ELABORATIVE DETAIL

You've read the story The Best Report Card Ever. Ellen's perspective changed once she saw the report card her father prepared for her. How did Ellen's point-of-view change from the beginning to the end of 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:
 - What was Ellen's point of view at the beginning of the story? At the end?
 - How does this help the reader understand the main character?
 - Why is this important?
 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:

- At the beginning of the story _____.
- The author makes it clear that _____.
- For example _____.
- She also _____.
- The author writes _____.
- Ellen observes that, “_____.”
- The reader continues to see _____.
- Paragraph _____.
- In this story _____.
- The reader understands this when _____.
- In paragraph _____.
- Instead of seeing _____, she sees _____.
- If the author chose _____.
- This changes when _____.
- The reader would feel _____.
- Towards the end of the story _____.

Name _____

LITERARY ANALYSIS TASK: FEELINGS

You've read the story The Best Report Card Ever in which the point of view character, Ellen, experiences powerful emotions about her struggles in school. Write an essay to explain how the author helped us understand Ellen's feelings. 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 did Ellen feel at the beginning of the story?
 - How did Ellen feel when she received her report card?
 - How did Ellen feel when she received her Dad's version of a report card?
 - Why is this important to include?
 - How does this enhance the story for the reader?
 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 Ellen felt _____.
- At the beginning, we see _____.
- This is evidenced when _____.
- We know this because _____.
- Rather than simply writing _____.
- When Ellen received her report card _____.
- The author describes _____.
- When we read _____.
- At the end the reader discovers _____.
- We know this because _____.

Name _____

NARRATIVE EXTENSION TASK: FEELINGS

You've read the story The Best Report Card Ever in which Ellen receives a disappointing report card. Write an elaborative segment describing how her friend Fiona feels when she gets her usual excellent report card. How does it make Fiona feel about herself and her friend Ellen?

THINK AND DISCUSS: How does showing or telling bring a story to life?

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

- How did Ellen feel about her own grades?
- How did Ellen feel about Fiona?
- How did Fiona feel about her grades?
- What did Fiona admire about Ellen?
- How might Fiona's parents have reacted to her achievements?

SENTENCE STARTERS:

- I would feel _____.
- I wished _____.
- My parents would _____.
- I was proud _____.
- I tried to imagine _____.
- Ellen would _____.
- My grades _____.
- Ellen's father might _____.
- I felt good about myself when _____.
