

UNIT

3

# Descriptive Writing

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# Writing in the Real World

Descriptive Writing



In the following passage from *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, Alvarez describes the mother through the eyes of her young daughter Sandi.

From *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*  
by Julia Alvarez



Novelist  
Julia Alvarez

Sandi leaned her elbows on the vanity and watched her mother comb her dark hair in the mirror. Tonight Mami was turning back into the beauty she had been back home. Her face was pale and tragic in the lamplight; her bright eyes shone like amber held up to the light. She wore a black dress with a scoop back and wide shoulders so her long neck had the appearance of a swan gliding on a lake. Around her neck sparkled her good necklace that had real diamonds. "If things get really bad," Mami sometimes joked grimly, "I'll sell the necklace and earrings Papito gave me." Papi always scowled and told her not to speak such nonsense.

## A Writer's Process

“Entering the world of the imagination, that’s a portable homeland. . . . I can take out my pad of paper in the Dominican Republic, here in Vermont, in California, in Turkey—and it’s the same blank page. It’s the same sense of creating a world, of making meaning, wherever you go.”

—Julia Alvarez

### Prewriting Playing with Words

“Much of writing is playfulness with words. It’s trying things out,” Alvarez says. “You’re not probably going to get it right the first time. So just let yourself get *some* of it right.”

Learning to create vivid description takes time and practice for every writer. The writer must learn to notice the things of the world and to describe those things in fresh ways. To help herself do this, Alvarez plays a word game. In her journal she’ll describe what she sees in daily life. She might look at the sheep grazing near her house and think of different images to describe them, such as powder puffs and cumulus clouds.

She explains the benefits of this practice: “What’s great is that maybe two weeks down the line—maybe two years down the line—wouldn’t you know it, but I’ll have a character looking at a sheep farm!”

### Drafting Discovering Details

People often say that something important is “beyond words.” Yet Julia Alvarez finds the words to describe complicated experiences and feelings. She does so by keeping things simple. “I think when somebody says that they can’t describe something, they’re trying for the big thing, instead of the little details that, of course, they can describe,” she says.

Alvarez creates large effects with small details. She notices the intimate details that bring a reader close to a character or experience. The detail might be the feel of sun shining on top of a character’s head. Or it might be the look of Mrs. García’s neck while she is combing her hair. When writing the description



## LESSON

# 3.1

# Writing Descriptions

*A good description re-creates sights, sounds, and other impressions. Read the passage below, and share a hot summer night with Lorraine Hansberry.*



Pat Thomas, *Picnic in Washington Park*, 1975

Lorraine Hansberry recalls the sights, sounds, smells, and feelings from her Chicago childhood. The reader can hear doors slamming and can sniff freshly cut lemons in the steamy night air.

In this excerpt, we glimpse Hansberry's personality. It is revealed by her word choice, sentence structure, fluency, and attitude toward her subject—her voice. What kind of person do you think Hansberry is?

### Literature Model

**E**venings were spent mainly on the back porches where screen doors slammed in the darkness with those really very special summertime sounds. And, sometimes, when Chicago nights got too steamy, the whole family got into the car and went to the park and slept out in the open on blankets. Those were, of course, the best times of all because the grownups were invariably reminded of having been children in rural parts of the country and told the best stories then. And it was also cool and sweet to be on the grass and there was usually the scent of freshly cut lemons or melons in the air. And Daddy would lie on his back, as fathers must, and explain about how men thought the stars above us came to be and how far away they were.

Lorraine Hansberry, "On Summer"

## Observe Details

Descriptive writing often starts with a memory or an observation—something that catches your attention. The details that make someone or something stay in your mind become the raw material for creating a description. Notice how writer Nicholasa Mohr brings to life details about Puerto Rico through the observation of one of her characters.



### Literature Model

She saw the morning mist settling like puffs of smoke scattered over the range of mountains that surrounded the entire countryside. Sharp mountainous peaks and curves covered with many shades of green foliage that changed constantly from light to dark, intense or soft tones, depending on the time of day and the direction of the rays of the brilliant tropical sun. Ah, the path, she smiled, following the road that led to her village. Lali inhaled the sweet and spicy fragrance of the flower gardens that sprinkled the countryside in abundance.

Nicholasa Mohr, *In Nueva York*

What words does the writer use to help you see the changing mountains?

Mohr draws you into her memories with a walk along the path.

## Journal Writing

Think about how Nicholasa Mohr brings her village to life. List at least five words that the author uses to describe it. Then choose a memory of your own. Write at least five specific details.

**Editing Tip**

When you edit, use verb tenses consistently. For more information, see Lessons 10.5–10.9, pages 409–418.

**Notice Descriptive Writing**

Good descriptive writing involves using your senses to observe, selecting precise details, and organizing your ideas. You probably read descriptions more often than you realize. The chart below shows some examples of descriptive writing. In the model that follows the chart, Michael Lim describes an unusual fish.

**Places I Find Descriptive Writing****In a Review****SAPPHIRE SENSATION!**

The singer glittered like a sapphire in his blue-sequined suit. Strutting to the microphone, he belted out his first song.

**In a Travel Brochure****FALLING FOR NIAGARA**

Water plunging over the American Falls foams and crashes on the rocks 182 feet below.

**In a Catalog**

Classic Gray Sweatshirt

A city skyline glows on the front of this classic gray sweatshirt. The city lights are neon yellow and fluorescent orange.

The writer includes details such as the color and shape of the fish to help the reader see it.

**Student Model**

**A**t the bottom of the pool, in the very center, was a fish, lying quietly. . . . The fish was a blazing yellow with streaks of almost metallic blue running down its sides, resembling a slender torpedo in shape. It was at least several feet long, streamlined, its head and tail tapered down from its thicker body. The fish's fins and tail were the same blue as its streaks, only translucent.

Michael Lim

The American International School, Vienna, Austria

First appeared in *Merlyn's Pen*

# 3.1

# Writing Activities

## Describe a Person

Picture in your mind a person with whom you enjoy spending time. List words or phrases that capture the person's appearance and personality. Use these details in a written description.

**PURPOSE** To describe a person by using details

**AUDIENCE** Yourself

**LENGTH** 1–2 paragraphs

**WRITING RUBRICS** To describe by using details, you should

- choose details that will bring life to your description
- use your senses to help you choose details



Artist unknown, Mughal, *Fantastic Birds*, c. 1590

## Cross-Curricular Activity

**ART** Imagine you saw one of the birds in the painting on your way to school. Write to a friend and describe what you saw. Include as many precise details as possible about the bird to help your friend picture it.

## Listening and Speaking

**COOPERATIVE LEARNING** Describe to a small group a favorite memory or special place. Make notes on what you will say and include several precise details. As you speak, change the loudness and tone of your voice to fit what you are saying. Use your voice to help bring your description to life for your listeners.

## GrammarLink

Use vivid adjectives to describe people, places, and things.

*Sharp mountainous peaks . . .*

Complete each sentence below with one or two vivid adjectives.

1. They enjoyed the \_\_\_\_\_ dinner.
2. The \_\_\_\_\_ players left the arena.
3. It was late on a \_\_\_\_\_ summer evening.
4. She smiled when she heard the \_\_\_\_\_ music.
5. We neared the \_\_\_\_\_ mountains.

See Lesson 3.3, page 122, and Lesson 12.1, page 457.



LESSON  
**3.2**

# Collecting Sensory Details

*We use our sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste to experience the world. These sensory details help bring a description to life.*

Imagine that you've stepped into the painting below. What do you see, hear, feel, smell, and taste?



Thomas Hart Benton, *Cradling Wheat*, 1938

## Use Sensory Detail

Artists use color, shape, and pattern to pull you into a painting. Writers do the same thing with sensory language—language that appeals to the senses. Sensory language describes how something looks, sounds, feels, smells, or tastes. In the following passage, Beverly Cleary's word choice helps engage our senses.



## Literature Model

These walks, with the sound of cowbells tinkling in the woods by the river, and bobwhites, like fat little hens, calling their names, filled me with joy as I searched for flowers whose names Mother taught me: shy kitten's ears with grayish white, soft-haired pointed petals which grew flat to the ground and which I stroked, pretending they really were kitten's ears; buttercups and Johnny-jump-ups to be gathered by the handful; stalks of fox-gloves with pink bell-shaped flowers which I picked and fitted over my fingers, pretending I was a fox wearing gloves; robin's eggs, speckled and shaped like a broken eggshell, which had such a strong odor Mother tactfully placed my bouquet in a mason jar on the back porch "so they will look pretty when Daddy comes in."

Beverly Cleary, *A Girl from Yamhill*

## Prewriting Tip

Before you take notes for a description, close your eyes and concentrate on the senses of taste, touch, hearing, and smell.

What words does Cleary use to appeal to different senses?

Descriptive Writing

Cleary, like all good writers, tries to engage her reader's senses when she writes a description. You can hear the tinkling cowbells and see grayish white kitten's ears. You can feel the velvet touch of petals and smell the nasty odor of robin's-eggs flowers. The writer takes you with her by telling exactly what she experienced.

## Journal Writing

In your journal, list words and phrases describing a meal you remember: the food you ate and the people you were with. Use words and phrases from all five senses.



## Use Observations to Write Descriptions

Writing a good description begins with careful observation. This first step may be difficult if you are not used to looking at things closely. The chart shows how you can move from observing details to writing descriptions. In the model Jessica Griffiths uses details she observed to describe a familiar day.

From Observing to Writing	
Impressions	Description
Relaxed smile New (short) haircut	Mr. Marshall greets students with a relaxed smile. His thick black hair, which was rather long last year, is clipped neatly above his ears.
Slamming lockers Squeaky new shoes	As the hallways fill with students, locker doors slam with a staccato beat. New shoes squeak as they skid across the freshly polished floor.
Shiny pencil sharpener Smelly pencil shavings	On the first day of school, the shiny pencil sharpener doesn't get a rest. It grinds pencils to a sharp point. The strong smell of shavings fills the air.

What sounds of the first day of school does the writer describe?

The writer combines sounds and scents to create this description.

### Student Model

The first day of school is always exciting and a bit scary. Students greet old friends, and teachers chat in the hallways. The squeak of new shoes and the scuffling of sneakers on the linoleum floor mingle with the girls' giggling. Slamming lockers echo in the long corridors. The scent of bubble gum contrasts with the sharp smell of erasers and lead shavings. Pencil sharpeners grinding are a reminder that class has started. Late students hurry to their classrooms. A new school year has begun.

Jessica Griffiths, Springman Junior High School  
Glenview, Illinois

## 3.2

## Writing Activities

### Write a Description of a Walk

Think of a walk you take often. It could be down the hall of your school or through a park. List sensory details from your walk.

Use the details to write a paragraph describing your walk. Have a friend read and comment on your description. Take into account your friend's comments as you revise your writing.

**PURPOSE** To describe a familiar walk using sensory details

**AUDIENCE** A friend

**LENGTH** 1 paragraph

**WRITING RUBRICS** To use sensory details in a description, you should

- observe or recall the details of your experience
- take notes on what you see, hear, smell, touch, and taste
- use your notes to write your description

### Listening and Speaking

**COOPERATIVE LEARNING** In a group, list names of characters from television or books. Select characters familiar to everyone in the group. List details that describe each character. Then choose a character to describe. Share your description and challenge the group to identify the character you described.

### Viewing and Representing

Choose an advertisement from a magazine. The advertisement should picture an item that appeals to the senses, such as a pile of dried leaves or a freshly baked pizza. Write a one-paragraph description to go with the picture. Be sure to use sensory details. Share your description with a partner.

### GrammarLink

#### Use apostrophes correctly in possessive nouns.

Use an apostrophe plus *s* to form the possessive of a singular noun and of a plural noun that does not end in *s*. Use an apostrophe alone to form the possessive of a plural noun that ends in *s*.

Some examples are *a kitten's paws*, *the mice's tails*, *the girls' friends*.

Write each sentence, using apostrophes where necessary.

1. The childrens tears were salty on their tongues.
2. The suns rays warmed my skin.
3. When Al opened the carton, both boys noses wrinkled in disgust.
4. Not a ripple disturbed the lakes placid surface.

See Lesson 20.7, page 611.

## LESSON 3.3

# Using Precise Language

**P**recise language is exact language; it says what the writer means and creates an image in the reader's mind. On a poster for a lost dog, precise language gets results.



### Choose Precise Nouns and Adjectives

A good description includes specific nouns and exact adjectives. A precise noun, *beagle* or *Harry*, is more informative than a general noun, *dog*. The adjectives *brown*, *black*, and *white* describe the dog's coat more precisely than the vague adjective *smooth*. The difference between a general and a precise description is like the difference between the dogs in the pictures on the next page. Notice the precise words that Sarah Burch used in the next model.

## From General to Specific



## Student Model

As the sound of thunder rumbles through the foggy November rain, you sit next to the roaring fire in your cozy living room. Waiting patiently for the wicked storm to pass, you notice clouds of varying shapes and textures highlighted by zig-zags of lightning. Branches plunge to the ground as winds gust violently. Rain forms muddy puddles along the rutty driveway. The crackling birch in the fireplace and the constant glow of the embers comfort you throughout the ferocious storm.

Sarah Burch, Springman Junior High School  
Glenview, Illinois

What adjectives does the writer use to contrast the scenes inside and outside the house?

## Journal Writing

Imagine that you have lost an object that is important to you. Make a list of precise words that describe the lost object. Then use the words to write a notice asking for help in locating the object.

**Presenting Tip**

Before reading your finished writing aloud, use a dictionary to check the pronunciation of any words you are not sure how to pronounce.

**Choose Precise Verbs and Adverbs**

Just as precise nouns and adjectives help create a vivid description, precise verbs and adverbs energize descriptive writing. Your choice of words will depend on the impression you want to make. For example, you might decide on the verb *devour* or *gobble*, rather than *eat*, to describe the action of eating hungrily.

Notice how the writer concentrated on finding more precise verbs and more vivid adverbs as she revised her description of her guinea pig.

Find examples of precise, well-chosen adverbs.

Why does "whirls" create a clearer picture of Attila than "circles"?

"Stalks" is more exact than "walks."

Attila is a guinea pig with an attitude. From his tiny white ears to his short black legs, Attila wages war mercilessly. Mealtime is his battlefield. At dinnertime he fixes his beady eyes on me as he ~~eats~~ <sup>devours</sup> his well-prepared guinea pig salad. Then his plump, black-and-white body tenses. He waits impatiently for the main course. Attila ~~scratches angrily~~ <sup>claws fiercely</sup> at the cage. He ~~circles~~ <sup>whirls</sup> around the cage. All night long Attila ~~walks~~ <sup>stalks</sup> restlessly near his plate. The next morning the battle begins again.

## 3.3

## Writing Activities

### Describe from an Animal's Point of View

Using precise words, write a description of an object from an animal's point of view. Choose your own topic or one of these: a canoe as it might seem to a whale; a pizza slice as it appears to an ant; a ball of yarn from the point of view of a cat playing with it.

**PURPOSE** To use precise words to create vivid and energetic descriptions

**AUDIENCE** Your classmates

**LENGTH** 1–2 paragraphs

**WRITING RUBRICS** To write a vivid description, you should

- use specific nouns and adjectives
- use precise verbs and adverbs

### Collaborative Writing

In a small group, revise a piece of writing found in a newspaper or magazine. One person in the group should list precise nouns. The second should list vivid adjectives. The third should list strong verbs. The fourth should list intense adverbs. The group should work together to complete the revision. Finally, one member of the group should make a final copy that includes all the changes and read the revised article aloud to the group.

### Viewing and Representing

Make up a sales brochure—for clothing, hobbies, music, or another kind of product. Draw illustrations of your product or clip them from magazines.

Arrange the pictures on paper that has been folded in thirds, like a letter. Then write two or three sentences of vivid, precise description beneath each illustration.

### GrammarLink

Use vivid adverbs to describe verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs.

*Attila wages war **mercilessly**.*

*Attila claws **fiercely** at the cage.*

For each sentence below, list three different adverbs that could be used to complete it.

1. The horse trotted \_\_\_\_\_ around the paddock.
2. Jamila approached the foul line \_\_\_\_\_ tentatively.
3. Quentin searched \_\_\_\_\_ for his lost notebook.
4. The \_\_\_\_\_ graceful dancers moved to the beat of the music.
5. The car traveled \_\_\_\_\_ down the street.

See Lesson 3.3, page 122, and 12.5, page 465.

## LESSON

# 3.4

## Using Spatial Order

*A painter arranges details so that the viewer sees an ordered picture. A writer describes details so that the reader imagines a scene clearly.*

The Flemish painter Jan Vermeer arranged the details in this image so that the viewer's eye moves from behind the artist to the scene he is painting. Writers, like painters, arrange the details of a scene in a certain order and for a particular reason.

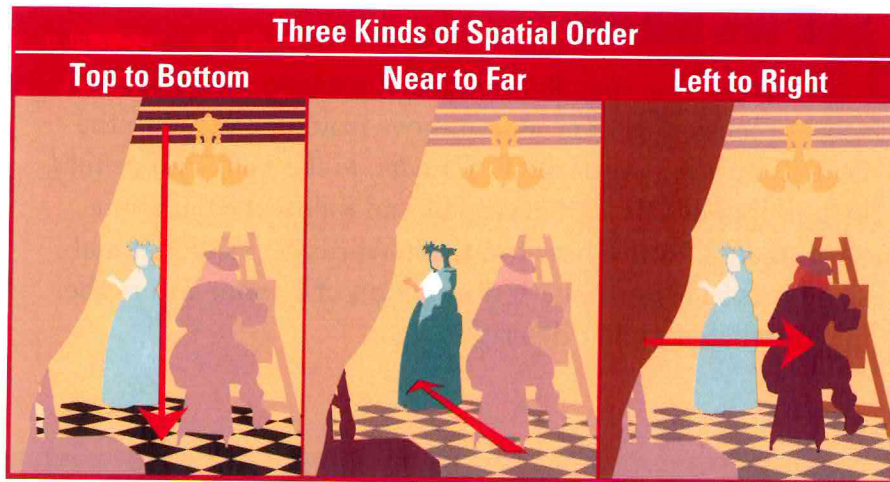


Jan Vermeer, *Allegory of the Art of Painting*, c. 1665–1670

### Order Details Logically

Writers can order details in several ways, depending on the point in space that seems a logical starting place. Details can be ordered from top to bottom, from near to far, or from left to right. When looking at a building, for example, you might first see a nearby detail such as a decorative door frame. Then, farther up the front of the building, you notice decorative stone faces above the windows. To describe this building, you could order these details from near to far.





Sometimes a scene lends itself to a particular kind of spatial order. Notice how Laurence Yep uses top-to-bottom spatial order to describe a Chinese playground.

#### Literature Model

In those days, it consisted of levels. The first level near the alley that became known as Hang Ah Alley was a volleyball and a tennis court. Down the steps was the next level with a sandbox (which was usually full of fleas), a small director's building, a Ping-Pong table, an area covered by tan bark that housed a slide, a set of bars, and a set of swings and other simple equipment.

Laurence Yep, *The Lost Garden*

Which words in the description identify the spatial order as top to bottom?

### Journal Writing

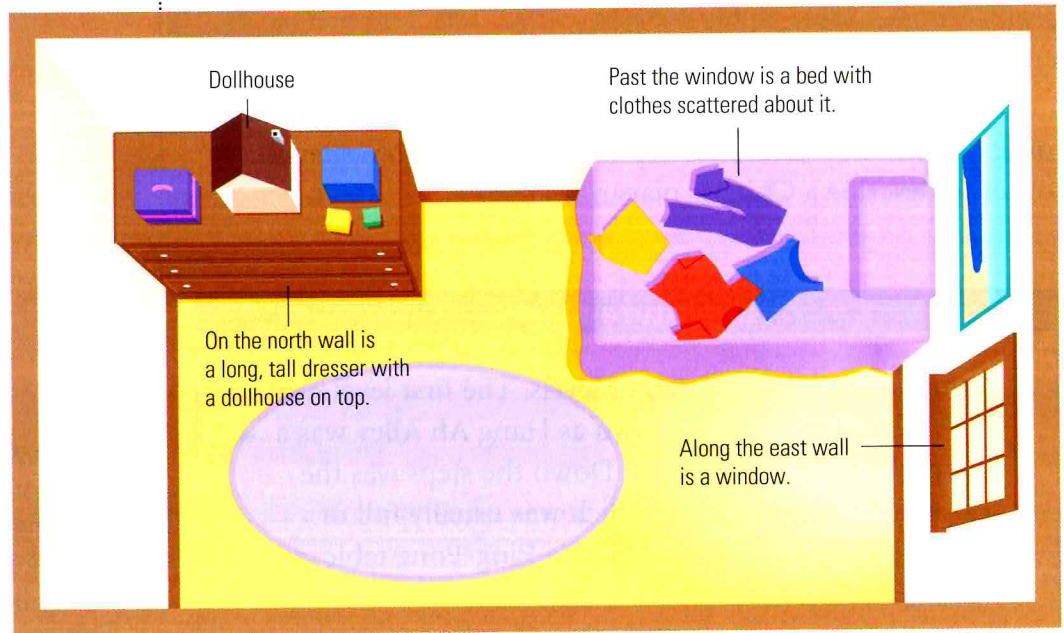
Imagine that you are at a place you remember well. Choose one type of spatial order to describe the details of the place. In your journal write your description in that order.

**Editing Tip**

As you edit, punctuate prepositional phrases correctly. For more information see Lesson 20.2, page 601.

**Link the Details**

When you use spatial order, you must give your audience a way to picture the scene as you move from one detail to the next. Transition words, such as *under*, *to the right*, and *behind*, help to link details so that readers can follow the path you have created. Notice how transition words act as directional sign posts in Sarah Fisher's description of a room and in the diagram based on her description.



Notice how Sarah uses phrases like "on the north wall" to help you find your way around the room.

Sarah's use of parallelism unifies the paragraph. How do the sentences begin?

**Student Model**

**A**long the east wall is a window. Past the window is a bed with clothes scattered about it. On the north wall is a long, tall dresser with a dollhouse on top. To the right of the dollhouse are three jewelry boxes, one big and two small. To the left of the dollhouse is a purple box with a pink handle. This box holds my hair accessories and small gift boxes.

Sarah Fisher, Solomon Schechter Day School  
Skokie, Illinois

## 3.4

## Writing Activities

### Use Spatial Order

Use spatial order to write a one-paragraph description. Choose your own topic or one of these: a person's face from top to bottom or a ballpark from home plate to left field. For help with using spatial order in describing details, see **Writing and Research Handbook**, page 836.

**PURPOSE** To describe, using spatial order

**AUDIENCE** Your teacher

**LENGTH** 1 paragraph

**WRITING RUBRICS** To describe using spatial order, you should

- decide how you will describe—from top to bottom, near to far, or left to right
- use transition words to help readers follow your spatial description



Carolyn Brady, *Sky Blue and Peach*, 1989

### Cross-Curricular Activity

**ART** Write a one-paragraph description of Carolyn Brady's painting, using one kind of spatial order. Show your description to a friend, and ask if he or she can identify the type of order you have used.

### GrammarLink

Use prepositional phrases in spatial descriptions.

*Down the steps* was the next level . . .

Incorporate each prepositional phrase below into a sentence of spatial description.

1. through the swinging doors
2. across the street
3. between the two paintings
4. on top of the crates
5. against the opposite wall

See *Lesson 13.1*, page 481, and *Lesson 21.1*, page 629.

### Listening and Speaking

Write a one-paragraph spatial description of a real or imagined place. Read your description to a partner. Your partner should sketch the place according to the details you have provided. Use the drawing to evaluate whether your description was precise. Then trade roles.



## LESSON

# 3.5

## Describing a Thing

**D**escribing a thing involves creating a clear image of that particular thing in the reader's mind. The reader can picture the object's size and shape; more importantly, the reader knows what makes it special.



A packed suitcase bulges before you. You're in a new place, about to unpack and start a new life. Your thoughts turn to the things you couldn't bring with you. You picture some of the treasures you left behind. How can you describe something that is important to you? In the student model below, notice how Amanda Morgan describes a well-loved bear.

### Student Model

**T**eddy is no placid-looking bear. He is stubborn looking. He is very well loved (as bears often get), and he is beginning to come apart at the seams. Mom tried to fix this tragic problem by sewing him up with bright red-and-blue yarn. The yarn is faded and looking a bit tattered itself, for the surgery was done about nine years ago.

Amanda Morgan, Neskowin, Oregon  
First appeared in *Treasures: Stories and Art*  
by Students in Oregon

## Choose the Details

The process of writing a good description begins with choosing an object that has meaning for you. It may be right in front of your eyes, or it may be stored in your memory. Once you decide on your subject, note details that will help you describe it. If you're looking at the object, jot down the details you observe. If you're remembering something, list details that make it memorable for you.

Asking yourself questions can help you choose details. For example, you might ask how something appears at different times of the day, what senses you use to observe it, or to what you might compare it. The questions below, although linked to a specific object, may help you think of other questions you can ask yourself to remember descriptive details.

	1. <i>How old is my bike?</i>
<input type="radio"/>	<i>My brother bought it new three years ago.</i>
	2. <i>What condition is it in?</i>
	<i>worn but well cared for; cracked seat</i>
	3. <i>What color is my bike?</i>
	<i>mostly metallic blue with gray tires</i>
	4. <i>What memories about my bike come to mind?</i>
<input type="radio"/>	<i>the first time I rode it down our street after moving here; riding in the rain with Chris</i>

## Journal Writing

Write three or four questions about the appearance of something that is important to you. Answer your questions in your journal, making sure to record specific details.

**Revising Tip**

As you revise a description, be sure that the details you have included follow the grouping you are using.

**Prewriting Tip**

For help with organizing details that describe a thing, see **Writing and Research Handbook**, page 836.

What precise adjectives does the writer use?

**Organize the Details**

As you list the important details that describe a thing, consider ways to group these details. The thing itself may suggest a certain kind of grouping. The chart below shows three principles you can use to group details.

Grouping Details by Different Principles	
Principle	Examples
Shape/Color	Baggy blue-gray sweater, ankle-length denim skirt
Appearance/Function	Porch chair, rusted and bent, but still comfortable
Whole/Parts	Broken checkerboard, a bag of dominoes

**Make the Details Interesting**

Notice how Leslie Marmon Silko groups her details around the color of the sandstone. Like Silko, you can make your writing interesting by using vivid sensory details—details that appeal to the senses. Comparisons in the form of similes and metaphors also work to bring your subject to life. Remember to use precise language and include transitions.

**Literature Model**

**B**ut this time there was something about the colors of the sandstone. The reddish pink and orange yellow looked as if they had been taken from the center of the sky as the sun went down. She had never seen such intense color in sandstone. She had always remembered it being shades of pale yellow or peppered white—colors for walls and fences. But these rocks looked as if rain had just fallen on them.

Leslie Marmon Silko, "Private Property"

## 3.5

## Writing Activities

### Write a Description of a Childhood Treasure

Think of something that was important to you in your childhood, such as a book or a stuffed animal. Write a description of it to share with a friend.

**PURPOSE** To write an effective description of an object

**AUDIENCE** A friend

**LENGTH** 1–2 paragraphs

**WRITING RUBRICS** To write an effective description, you should

- list details
- group the details in a logical order, such as by shape/color, appearance/function, or whole/parts

### Cross-Curricular Activity

**SOCIAL STUDIES** One common childhood treasure is the teddy bear. How did teddy bears come to be? What president

is the bear named after, and why? Find out the history of teddy bears. Write a paragraph and share your findings with the class.

### GrammarLink

**Be sure that each pronoun clearly refers to its antecedent.**

The antecedent is the word or group of words to which a pronoun refers. A pronoun must agree with its antecedent in number and gender.

*But these **rocks** looked as if rain had just fallen on **them**.*

Complete the sentences below with appropriate pronouns.

1. When Sam's mother asked to see his report, \_\_\_ showed \_\_\_ to \_\_\_.
2. The principal posted the announcements so that we could read \_\_\_.
3. The students weren't expecting the fire drill buzzer, so \_\_\_ were startled when \_\_\_ heard \_\_\_.
4. Since my younger sister knows I'm good in math, \_\_\_ asked \_\_\_ to help \_\_\_ with the word problems.
5. Sarah said that \_\_\_ does not know who will be at the party.

See Lesson 11.1, page 435, and Lesson 11.2, page 437.

### Using Computers

Create a computer vocabulary file listing words that describe or name sensory details related to your childhood treasure. Use your computer's thesaurus to find adjectives that precisely describe colors, shapes, textures, smells, and sizes. Refer to the list as you draft a description.



## LESSON

## 3.6

## Descriptive Writing

## WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE

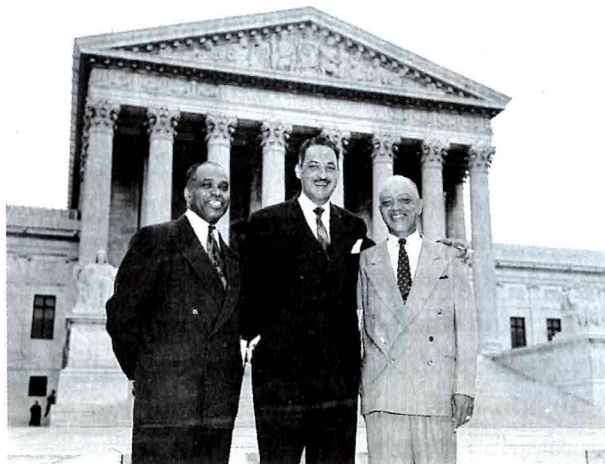
# Describing the Subject of a Biography

*In a biography a writer, or biographer, tells the true story of a person's life. In the following passage, Lisa Aldred creates a verbal snapshot of the young boy who would later become Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall.*

**Literature Model**

**H**e “was a jolly boy who always had something to say.” But, she added, Thurgood showed a serious side as well. “I can still see him coming down Division Street every Sunday afternoon about one o’clock,” she said. “He’d be wearing knee pants with both hands dug way into his pockets and be kicking a stone in front of him as he crossed over to Dolphin Street to visit his grandparents at their big grocery store on the corner. He was in a deep study, that boy, and it was plain something was going on inside him.”

Lisa Aldred, *Thurgood Marshall*



A biographer's purpose is to make the subject of the biography come to life on the page. In this model biographer Lisa Aldred uses the words of a family friend, Odell Payne, to give us a vivid glimpse of the serious side of young Thurgood Marshall (pictured in the center)—future Supreme Court Justice.



## Form Strong Impressions

By telling what a person did and said, a biographer can bring the person to life on the pages. Descriptions of the subject's physical appearance and personality help the reader form impressions of the person. Here are some students' reactions to young Thurgood Marshall.

○ *The description of the boy reminds me of my cousin Wilma. She used to spend hours skipping stones at the pond. I once crept up behind her. She didn't even notice me. Like Thurgood, Wilma was always "in a deep study." Sometimes that annoyed me, though!*

How is Thurgood like this student's cousin Wilma?

○ *I just read a book my grandfather should read. It tells about the early life of Thurgood Marshall, who was a Supreme Court justice. Grandfather's always telling me to pay attention. If he reads the book, he'll know I'm just "in a deep study."*

This student has a good impression of Thurgood because he sees some of his own traits in the famous man.

## Journal Writing

Describe someone you know well doing something he or she does often. Concentrate on using this action to illustrate your subject's personality.

**Editing Tip**

As you edit, be sure that you have correct subject-verb agreement in your sentences. For more information, see Lessons 16.1–16.5, pages 541–550.

**Focus on the Subject**

A good biography paints a portrait of the subject, including his or her appearance, personality, and attitudes. With precise language, sensory details, clear organization, and strong transitions, the subject of a biography comes into sharp focus. After reading Jean Fritz's *The Great Little Madison*, Andrea Gaines wrote the imaginary letter below. Notice how she uses details that paint a portrait of the young Madison.

**Student Model**

October 16, 1769

Dear Aunt Winnefred,

How are you?

Sorry I haven't written you lately, but I've been busy here at Princeton. This is only my first year here, but I feel as though I have a number of friends already. One of them is a quiet sophomore, James Madison. He's kind of short and thin, and has a very low voice. His handsome face glows with energy. He throws himself into everything he does, whether it's reading books, protesting British taxes, or joining student fun.

I must run to class. I'll write to you later about my other friends.

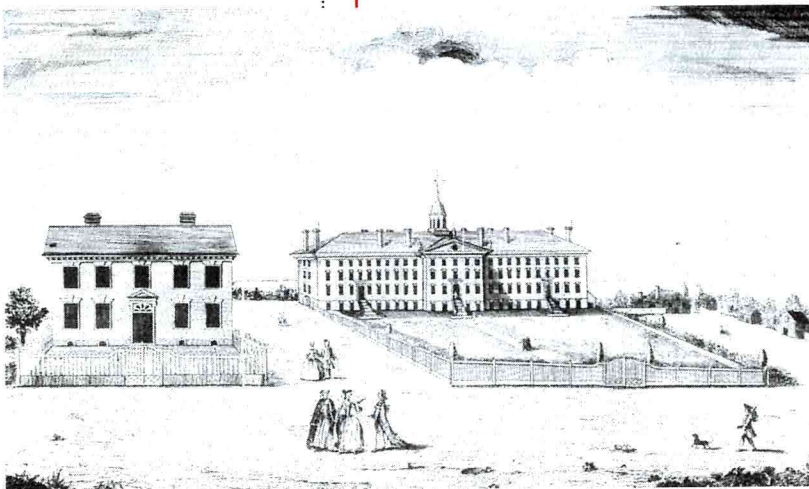
Your loving niece,  
Susan

Andrea Gaines,  
Martha M. Ruggles  
Elementary School,  
Chicago, Illinois

What details of Madison's appearance does Andrea provide?

What details of Madison's personality does Andrea point out?

Eighteenth-century  
Princeton University



## 3.6

## Writing Activities

### Write a Descriptive Response

Respond to a biography about a political figure. You may use the excerpt from *Thurgood Marshall* or choose another biography that interests you. Think of creative ways to respond, as Andrea Gaines does on the previous page. Include your own description of the subject, as you see him or her.

**PURPOSE** To write a descriptive response

**AUDIENCE** Your teacher and classmates

**LENGTH** 2 paragraphs

**WRITING RUBRICS** To write a descriptive response, you should

- use vivid details and precise language to describe your impressions
- make sure your description brings the subject to life

### Viewing and Representing

Locate images of the subject you have chosen for your response. View photographs, portraits, political cartoons, and even film footage, if available. What does each image show of the personality of your subject? List your reactions and discuss them with a partner.

### GrammarLink

Use quotation marks and other punctuation correctly in direct quotations.

*"A painting, as well as a book, can be a biography," said the art teacher.*

Write each sentence, adding quotation marks and other punctuation where necessary.

1. The student asked Did Joan Brown really swim to Alcatraz?
2. She tried said the teacher but she did not make it to the island.
3. A ship passed by her and the wake nearly caused her to drown explained the teacher.
4. The teacher explained She created a painting after she attempted to swim to the island.

See Lesson 20.6, page 609.



### Using Computers

Using a software drawing program, create a graphic organizer, such as a web. Organize details about your subject in the graphic organizer. Add precise words that will help you describe. Then use your web to develop your descriptive response.



## UNIT 3

# Writing Process in Action

## Descriptive Writing

In preceding lessons you've learned about using memories and observations in descriptive writing. You've learned about sensory details, precise language, and order of details. You've written a variety of descriptions. Now, in this lesson, you'll have a chance to describe the people, places, and things that are part of something you enjoy doing.

### Assignment

<b>Context</b>	You are writing an article for the magazine <i>Popular Hobbies</i> . This magazine contains descriptions of the people, places, and things associated with various student hobbies.
<b>Purpose</b>	To describe people, places, and things related to your favorite hobby
<b>Audience</b>	Student readers of <i>Popular Hobbies</i>
<b>Length</b>	1 page

### Planning to Write

The following pages can help you plan and write your descriptions. Read through them, and then refer to them as you need to. But don't be tied down by them. You're in charge of your own writing process. Be sure to set a time frame for completing this assignment. It will help you to manage your time wisely. Keep in mind the controlling idea: to describe people, places, and things related to your hobby.



LOG ON  **Writing**  
Online

For prewriting, drafting, revising, editing and publishing tools, go to [glencoe.com](http://glencoe.com) and enter QuickPass code WC87703p1.

# Writing Process in Action

## Prewriting

Start by thinking about the people, places, and things that go with your favorite hobby. To explore your answers, you might use one or all the options at the right. Perhaps you'll observe and take notes, use your journal to recall details, or freewrite.

### Option A

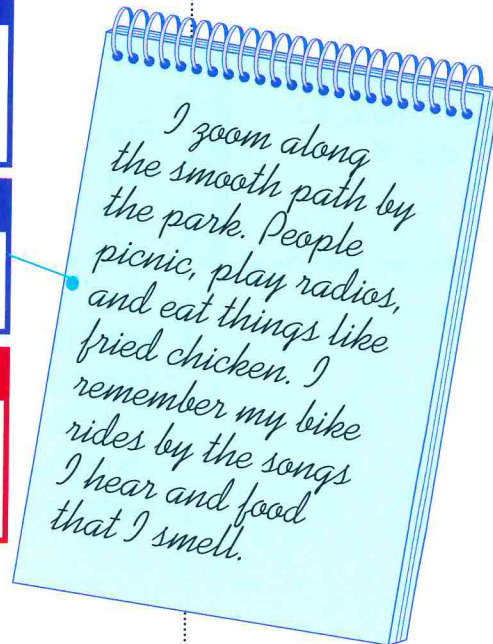
Observe and take notes on details.

### Option B

Review your journal.

### Option C

Explore your ideas through freewriting.



## Drafting

Look over your prewriting, and think about ways of organizing your material into clear images. You might start with the most important details or with the details closest to you. Just use the order that makes the most sense to you, and let the writing flow. Notice how David Weitzman sets the scene at an old-time

### Literature Model

**I**t was like the Fourth of July. Kids clambered up and slid down the hay stacks, played tag and skip-to-my-lou. Some of the men were pitching horseshoes and you could hear the thump of shoes fallen too short and the solid clank of a ringer. The women looked after all the little kids and put out lunches on big tables—heaps of potato salad, sandwiches, cakes and cookies, and frosty pitchers of iced tea.

David Weitzman, *Thrashin' Time*

### Drafting Tip

For more information about using sensory details, see Lessons 3.1 and 3.2, pages 114–121.

harvest. A description rich in detail and sensory language can give your readers a clear picture of the world of your hobby.

# Writing Process in Action

## Revising Tip

Check to see that your word choice makes sense. For more information, see Lesson 3.2, page 18.

## Revising

Begin by rereading the assignment. Have you written what's been asked for? As soon as you're satisfied that you have, you can move on.

Now it's time to look at your draft and make it better. But first put your draft aside for a day, if possible. During this time, you might go back and review pages 66–77.

To begin revising, read over your draft to make sure that what you have written fits your purpose and your audience. Then have a writing conference. Read your draft to a partner or small group. Use your audience's reactions to help you evaluate your work.

Look at the revision below and use questions like the ones shown to guide your own revisions. Remember, revising is where many great writers do their best work, so work with care.

### Question A

Have I used all my senses?

### Question B

Are my images crisp and clear?

### Question C

Are my details specific and linked with transitions?

*Biking by the park is a great hobby because of*

*all the picnics you <sup>h</sup>wiz past. On weekends you <sup>zoom</sup> can go by and hear radios, <sup>blasting and smell the barbecues</sup> You pass by all the <sup>on soft blankets</sup> people sitting <sup>or</sup> throwing Frisbees. And*

*sometimes when you <sup>see</sup> see people you know, you can stop and talk to them or share a glass of <sup>sweet pink</sup> lemonade. Alongside you all the sights, sounds, and smells blur together.*

## Editing/Proofreading

Edit your description to correct any mistakes. Read it several times, using the questions in this checklist. Ask a different question each time through. For example, you might **proofread** for capitalization and punctuation on your first pass and spelling on your second pass. Afterward, have someone else review your work. Other people can often see your mistakes better than you can.

## Publishing/Presenting

Make a clean copy of your description. If possible, use a computer or word processor to give your work a professional look. Now you are ready to send your work to *Popular Hobbies*. You may want to include a drawing or photograph to illustrate your description. Do not feel that you have to include an illustration, though. Even without a picture, your description should be detailed enough so that your readers should be able to imagine the people, places, and things related to the hobby you have chosen.

### Editing/Proofreading Checklist

1. Have I correctly used apostrophes in possessive nouns?
2. Do my pronouns have clear antecedents?
3. Have I correctly punctuated quotations?
4. Have I spelled every word correctly?

### Proofreading Tip

For proofreading symbols, see pages 79 and 863. If you have composed on the computer, use the spelling and grammar checkers to help with proofreading.

## Journal Writing: Write to Learn

Reflect on your writing process experience. Answer these questions in your journal: What did you like best about your description? What was the hardest part of writing it? What did you learn in your writing conference? What new things have you learned as a writer?

# Literature Model



FROM

## Thrashin' Time

by David Weitzman

*In Thrashin' Time: Harvest Days in the Dakotas, David Weitzman describes farm life in 1912 North Dakota through the eyes of young Peter Anders. As you read the following passage, pay special attention to the way Peter describes an autumn day when the whole neighborhood gathers to see a steam traction engine for the first time. Then try the activities in Linking Writing and Literature on page 148.*

**A**nna and I began pestering Pa to take us over to see the new engine. But it didn't take much doing. I could tell he wanted to go as much as we did. Pa glanced again at the smoke billowing into the sky. "Ya, sure, we can go. I'll finish up a bit here. Peter, you go hitch the horses up to the wagon. Maggie, if you and Anna

put up a picnic, we'll go have us a look at that steam engine."

We got there to find that a lot of folks had come in wagons and buggies to gather 'round and watch the thrashin'.<sup>1</sup> Steam engines were still

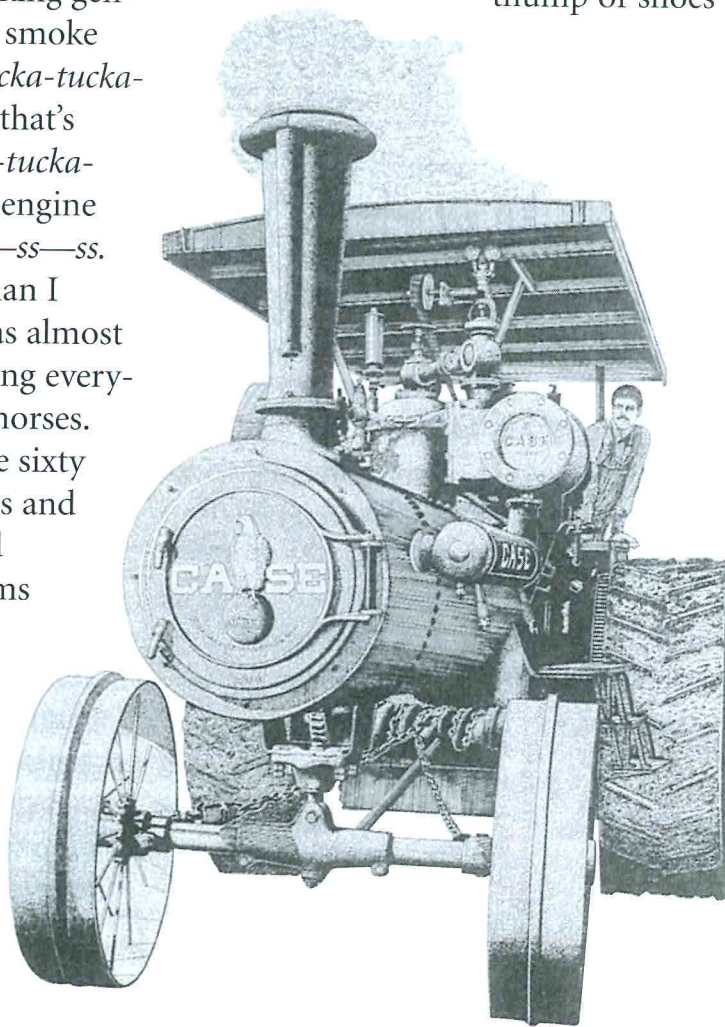
<sup>1</sup> **thrashin'** (thrash' ən) [or threshing (thresh' ing)] separating grain or seeds from a plant



## Literature Model

new in these parts. And there it was, the engine with its dark blue boiler, shiny brass whistle, red wheels all decorated with yellow stripes, gears spinning and rods going back and forth, rocking gently in time to the puffs of smoke from the stack—*tucka-tucka-tucka-tucka-tucka*. The sounds, that's what I liked. *Tucka-tucka-tucka-tucka* and the little steam engine going *ss—ss—ss—ss—ss—ss—ss*. The engine was quieter than I thought it would be. It was almost alive like the horses working everywhere 'round it. And the horses. Why, I'll betcha there were sixty head, big horses—Belgians and Percherons<sup>2</sup>—coming and going that afternoon. Teams pulled bundle wagons heaped tall with sheaves of wheat in from the fields, pulled wagons of yellow grain away from the separator to the silo. Another team hauled the water wagon, and another wagon brought loads of cord wood to keep the engine running sunup to sundown.

It was like the Fourth of July. Kids clambered up and slid down the hay stacks, played tag and skip-to-my-lou. Some of the men were pitching horseshoes and you could hear the thump of shoes



David Weitzman, from *Thrashin' Time*, 1991

<sup>2</sup> **Belgians** (Bel' jənz) and **Percherons** (Pur' chə ronz') large, powerful horses used to drag heavy loads

## Literature Model

fallen too short and the solid clank of a ringer. The women looked after all the little kids and put out lunches on big tables—heaps of potato salad, sandwiches, cakes and cookies and frosty pitchers of iced tea. Dogs napped in the dark cool under the wagons, not paying any mind to the puppies tumbling all over them. The older boys stood around together, pretending they were chewing plugs of tobacco, hawking and spitting, like the thrashermen, only theirs wouldn't come brown. The men stood around the engine and the separator, puffing on their pipes, thumbs hooked under their suspenders. They inspected every part of that machine, pointing to this and that, looked up and down the belt stretching between the engine and the separator in a long figure eight. Most of them had never seen a steam traction engine before.

*“You know, Peter, that’s a wonderful thing, the steam engine. You’re witnessin’ the beginnin’s of real scientific farmin’.”*

Some of the older folks didn't like the new machine. “The old ways is the best ways,” one of them said, tug-

ging on his whiskers. “All this talk about steam engines is just a bunch of gibble-gabble,” agreed another, “I’ll stick to my oxen and horses.” Others told of hearing all about engines exploding, killing and maiming<sup>3</sup> the thrashin’ crews, of careless engineers starting fires that burned up the farmer’s whole crop and his barn besides. “Horses live off the land,” Mr. Bauer said, “and don’t need wood or coal. No, nothin’ but some hay and oats and we don’t have to buy that! What’s more they give you foals.” He reached over and rubbed his hand down the neck of a stout gray Percheron mare hitched to a grain wagon. “All you get from steam engines is debt.” Mr. Bjork agreed, “and what would we do for fertilizer? Steam engines don’t make much manure, you know.” Everyone laughed. “More trouble than they’re worth. Why, last year Silas McGregor had to come borrow my oxen to pull his engine out of the mud. Wouldn’t have one of those smoke-snortin’ strawburners on my place,” old Mr. Erstad scoffed, turning and waving away the scene.

<sup>3</sup> **maiming** (mām’ ing) causing an injury so as to cripple or cause the loss of some part of the body

*Literature Model*



Thomas Hart Benton, *July Hay*, 1943

Descriptive Writing

## Literature Model

But Mr. Torgrimson, now I could tell he was enjoying it. We were looking at the steam engine there up on the boiler, the connecting rod whizzing back and forth and the fly-wheel spinning so that the spokes were just a red blur. He was smiling and his eyes just twinkled. Then he pointed the stem of his pipe at the engine, squinted in a thoughtful way and rocked back and forth on his heels. “You know, Peter, that’s a wonderful thing, the steam engine. You’re witnessin’ the beginnin’s of real scientific farmin’.” He couldn’t take his eyes off that engine. “I read about a steam outfit—over Casselton way it was—that thrashed more than six thousand bushels in one day! Imagine that, six thousand bushels in just one day! Why you and your Ma and Pa all workin’ together couldn’t do more’n twenty or thirty in the same time.”

Mr. Torgrimson was the one who told me all about bonanza farming, where a bunch of engines would start out together, side-by-side, before daybreak, each pulling a fourteen-bottom plow almost as wide as our house. “They go all day, Peter, breakin’ up thousands of acres of prairie grasslands before they rest at night—some even have head lamps so they can just keep going all night. The holdin’s are so big, young fellow,

that they go on ’n on for days like that ’fore they reach their line and turn ’round and plow back to where they started. Day after day, week after week they go up and back. Then they sowed all that land to wheat and thrashed one hundred and sixty-two thousand—here, I’ll just write that number in the dust so you can see how big it is—162,000 bushels of wheat that season.”

*“They go all day, Peter,  
breakin’ up thousands of acres  
of prairie grasslands before  
they rest at night”*

I could tell Pa liked the engine too. He got up on the wagon and pitched bundles for a while, and then stood on the engine platform talking to the engineer, Mr. Parker. When he got down, he came over and put his hand on my shoulder, all the time looking at the engine, shaking his head like he couldn’t believe his eyes. “Parker’s got some machine there, by jippers, quite an outfit. What do you think about all this, Peter, steam power instead of horse power?”

I wasn’t sure. “If the engine took the place of the horses, I think I’d miss Annie and Lulu and Quinn. Wouldn’t you, Pa?”

## Literature Model

“I would, but, you know, horse-power thrashin’ is awful hard on them, son. Sure, I’d miss them, but we work them hard all year plowin’ and diskin’,<sup>4</sup> and seedin’ and mowin’.

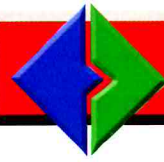
“*If the engine took the place of the horses, I think I’d miss Annie and Lulu and Quinn. Wouldn’t you, Pa?*”

Then just when they’re so tuckered out, about to drop and needin’ a good rest, we put them to thrashin’.

You and I both have seen too many good horses broken, seen them drop, die of the heat and tiredness right there in the traces. And for all their work we might get a hundred bushels, maybe two in a day. I don’t know, Peter, maybe steam power is a better thing. I just don’t know.” Pa chuckled and his eyes got all crinkled and wrinkled with laugh lines the way they do. “I do know one thing though. If you asked the horses, I betcha they wouldn’t be against this new steam power the way some folks ’round here are.”

<sup>4</sup> **diskin’** (disk’ən) breaking up soil with a disk-shaped tool

## Literature Model



# Linking Writing and Literature

### Learning to Learn

Think about the main idea of *Thrashin' Time*. Write briefly in your journal about the effects of new technologies in your life. Do you usually accept new technology readily, or are you sometimes resistant? Explain.

### Talk About Reading

Discuss with your classmates the issues raised in *Thrashin' Time*. Select one classmate to lead the discussion and another to take notes. The following questions will help focus your discussion.

- 1. Connect to Your Life** In this story, it is clear that the steam engine is going to change life on North Dakota farms. Think about one exciting new technology that you have experienced. How has it changed your life?
- 2. Critical Thinking: Evaluate** The characters in this story express a number of opinions about the new steam engine. Which of these opinions do you most agree with? Why?
- 3. 6+1 Trait®: Ideas** What is the main idea of *Thrashin' Time*? What technique does David Weitzman use to express that main idea in his writing? In other words, how do you know what the main idea is?
- 4. Connect to Your Writing** Think about how David Weitzman describes the steam engine. Make a list of the details he includes to bring the steam engine to life for his readers.

### Write About Reading

**Persuasive Essay** Write a persuasive essay in which you argue for or against some new technology you have seen or read about. Begin with a vivid description of the technology. Then explain why you find this technology either exciting or troublesome. Be sure to state your position clearly and support it with solid arguments. Once you have supported your position, restate your main idea in the conclusion.

**Focus on Ideas** The ideas of your persuasive essay are the arguments you use to support your position. As you develop these arguments, ask yourself what those who disagree with you might say. In the end, your ideas will be stronger if you have thought about opposing views.

For more information on ideas and the 6+1Trait® model, see **Writing and Research Handbook**, pages 838–840.

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## UNIT 3 Review

### Reflecting on the Unit: Summarize What You Learned

Focus on the following questions to help you summarize what you have learned in this unit.

- 1 How does descriptive writing begin?
- 2 How do sensory details improve descriptive writing?
- 3 What does describing an object involve?
- 4 What kind of language improves a description?
- 5 Why is clear spatial order important to descriptive writing?
- 6 How can a biographer bring a person to life?



### Adding to Your Portfolio

#### CHOOSE A SELECTION FOR YOUR

**PORTFOLIO** Look over the writing you did for this unit. Choose a piece of writing for your portfolio. The writing you choose should show one or more of the following:

- personal memories or observations
- vivid word pictures
- sensory details that appeal to more than one of the five senses
- precise language
- details in a clear spatial order
- an effective choice of details

**REFLECT ON YOUR CHOICE** Attach a note to the piece you chose, explaining briefly why you chose it and what you learned from writing it.

**SET GOALS** How can you improve your writing? What skill will you focus on the next time you write?

### Writing Across the Curriculum

**MAKE A HISTORY CONNECTION** Think about your favorite hobby, and imagine that you are living before electricity was used in homes. How would living then affect the people, places, or things that are part of your hobby? Would your hobby exist? If not, what hobby might you have instead? Write a paragraph explaining how you might have spent your time.

*“You are the prettiest girl here,  
will you dance . . .  
and we are dancing. . . .”*

—Sandra Cisneros,  
“Chanclas”

