

Description

Words to Know

appeasement (ə pēz' mənṭ). The act or means of pacifying.

emanating (em' ə nāt ing). Proceeding from.

lacerations (las ə rā' shənz). Torn or cut wounds in the skin.

scintillating (sint' əl lāt ing). Flashing or sparkling.

In LightUnit 3, you learned that spatial order is important for descriptive writing. You learned to describe scenes in an orderly way—left to right, top to bottom, near to far, least prominent feature to most prominent feature, or the reverse of these. A writer cannot describe at random or his reader becomes confused; the reader's eye must be led carefully by the writer. Remember the rule? See the scene clearly yourself; then show it to your reader. Now you will have more opportunity to practice using spatial order in writing.

The following story is largely description. See how well you can visualize the scenes.

Shadows!

¹ Travel backward in time with me 3,500 years, and I will take you into one of the most awe-inspiring buildings this world has ever seen. It is no skyscraper—fifteen feet tall it stands, barely a story and a half. It has no glistening windows, no resplendent dome, no paintings like modern cathedrals. From the outside, it is actually drab, a tentlike structure covered over with skins, bleached nearly white by the hot sun.

² It is the Old Testament tabernacle in the Sinai desert, 1,490 years before the time of Christ.

³ Let's walk (without being Jews we would never have been allowed) through the curtained gate at the eastern end of the courtyard. Directly ahead of us is a large bronze altar, seven and a half feet square. Silent smoke rises in perpetual **appeasement**. Priests in white linen clothing solemnly perform their rituals about the altar, listening to the hushed confessions and requests of the people who come to sacrifice; preparing their sacrifices—a lamb, a goat, a young bull, or a pair of doves. There is a quietness in the air. The people talk quietly, the priests move quietly, the animals die quietly. One could easily pray here.

Beyond the altar is a large bronze container of water—the laver—where the priests wash in unhurried reverence before and after every task. And beyond the laver stands the sun-bleached tabernacle.

⁴ We slip past the washing priests and stand before the “door”—the curtained entrance to the tabernacle. Unlike the covering over the tabernacle, this curtain is richly colored—blue, purple, and scarlet intertwined on a white linen background—the first hint of the fabulous beauty inside. Only priests are permitted beyond this door, and only for special tasks. As we pause gazing at the folds of this hanging, an even deeper solemnity descends upon us.

⁵ Soundlessly, we pull back the door hanging, step inside, and slowly walk forward. The change from the sense of being outside to the sense of being inside is instantaneous. Gone is the harsh sunlight. Gone is the sky. Gone is the scrubby desert growth. Gone is the world of people with their sowing and reaping, business and commerce, sweat and toil, talk and haste. That world is outside. We have stepped into another world.

⁶ The fifteen-foot walls stretch ahead of us on either side, thirty feet of glistening gold until they disappear into the next room. On our right is a golden table, handsomely garnished with a border and decorative ledges. The table is furnished with twelve large loaves of bread, a pitcher of frankincense, twelve golden spoons, and various golden trays and dishes. To our left is a lampstand, elaborately fashioned with a central shaft and six branches, three on a side—seven up-reaching arms delicately ornamented with golden flowers and fruit, ending in seven lamps, one magnificent piece of craftsmanship, solid gold. The light from the lamps leaps upward and radiates off the walls and furniture like rays of living sunshine. Overhead is a covering of the same material as

the door hanging—white linen with blue, purple, and scarlet interwoven. Our eyes drop again, and directly ahead is a third piece of furniture, a gold-encrusted altar, again decorated with a border and ledges. On the table, incense is glowing. There is a hallowed glory in the very aroma of this room. Behind the altar stand four stalwart pillars, each of them fifteen feet of shining gold from head to toe. Hanging behind the four pillars is the Veil, thick fold upon fold. It is the same color as the door hanging and the overhead canopy, but richer in appearance and intricately woven with cherubim. It hangs, hushed and watchful.

⁷ Looking at that Veil, we suddenly realize that the holiness we sensed in coming in, cutting us off from the world outside, is a holiness **emanating** from behind the Veil. This is a place of Presence. The Veil is not there to keep us out so much as to protect us, to give us a shield, a covering from the Most Holy, the Holiest of Holies, who resides in the heart of this tabernacle. The more we sense that, the more thin the Veil seems, a bare scrap of protection before Omnipotent Holiness.

⁸ Our footfalls stop.

⁹ We dare not go behind that Veil to gaze on



what is there. What is there is no longer important to us. Any Jew in the camp outside could tell us the ark is there, that it is a gold-plated chest containing two tables of stone, that above it is the mercy seat, a lid of solid gold over which stretch two golden cherubim, that only the high priest ever enters that Most Holy Place, that he enters only once each year with atoning blood, sprinkling it seven times across the mercy seat eastward. But masterpieces of furniture no longer hold our attention, for we realize, standing in the skimpy shadow of the Veil, that the beauty of this place is not in its gold, not in its intricate weavings, not in the workmanship, not in anything we see. The beauty of the tabernacle is the beauty of Holiness Himself.

¹⁰ We stand silent.

¹¹ The wheel of time spins.

¹² A heavier hush descends in this Holy Place.

¹³ Behind us the door curtain opens and a man enters. His body is horribly mangled—blood runs down His face, patches of His beard have been ripped out, deep welts and bruises cover His body, a severe wound in His side seeps blood, He is carrying a cross, His back is running with blood from open **lacerations**. His breathing is hoarse; the cross scrapes heavily on the floor—the sounds grate upon the atmosphere of this sanctuary.

¹⁴ The man labors past us, right up to the Veil. It moves aside with an attitude of reverence to let Him in. He drags Himself around to the back of the mercy seat. Before the Veil falls back in place, we catch a glimpse of the Man wiping blood from His own body to begin the sevenfold sprinkling. Then the Veil hides Him from our view.

¹⁵ Suddenly the Veil rends from top to bottom as though the splendor of the Holiness behind has burst it open! Involuntarily, we fall on our faces, but the scene behind the rent Veil is burned on our minds. A throne!—sapphire, rainbow brilliance, wave upon wave of **scintillating** glory, stretching up from the throne as far as eye can see. A sound!—a clap of thunderous praise like a rushing, mighty ocean, ten thousand times fuller and clearer than the best choir we have ever heard on earth. And the Man!—transfigured, standing before the throne in brilliant white, with glorious joy and invitation in His face, arms extended! One word He speaks: “COME!”

¹⁶ When we open our eyes, there is no tabernacle. There are no bright lights, no loud sounds, no cherubim. We are in the twentieth century. But are we not now more convinced that the life we

Lesson 5

have in our spirit and the hope we cherish in our heart are not products of human imagination? These are REALITIES! More real than anything we can touch or see. Our redemption has been planned by the God of Eternity, the One who spans time, and who, because He is eternal, was able to imprint the Old Testament with exact, precise shadows of spiritual realities in the New Testament.

This writing has very little narration because very little happens—at the beginning the priests are offering sacrifices; at the end Christ enters with His cross and the Veil is torn. Largely, the writing is description—you see the scenes. The visual impressions are accented by the writer act-

ing as a guide to the reader—as though he is physically taking you into the tabernacle to show you its sights.

Effective description does not happen automatically. It takes skill and careful thought. A writer needs to practice these skills. Following are several guidelines for writing description.

1. Pay attention to details.

Vivid description points out specific details, tells you exact numbers and figures, names precise colors and shapes. This precision gives a clear picture and helps the reader to feel that he is right there.



To appreciate the detail in the description of the tabernacle, answer these questions.

1. How tall is the tabernacle? _____
2. How many years before the time of Christ was it built? _____
3. At which end of the courtyard is the entrance? _____
4. What is the size of the altar? _____
5. What kinds of animals are sacrificed on the altar? _____
6. What fabric do the priests wear? _____
7. What color is the fabric? _____
8. What piece of furniture is beyond the altar? _____
9. Of what material is it made? _____
10. What does it contain? _____
11. What is its function? _____

The details in Nos. 1-11 are all from the first three paragraphs. Notice, however, that although the writer gives many specific details, he gives only those that are important to creating a visual effect. There are many details about the tabernacle the writer didn't give. A writer selects details that are crucial to his purpose.

2. Choose words with the proper tone.

Words have a sound and a feel to them that extend beyond their exact meaning. We call this their connotation—you studied this in Language Arts 1101. In description, a writer must pay careful attention to his word choice because words set the tone as much by their feel as by their precise

meaning. You would use an altogether different tone in describing a sanctuary as compared to describing a Dairy Queen.

A writer may want to describe objectively, or he may purposely want to cast a slant to the description. If he wants to be objective, he is factual, choosing nonemotional words, words without mood connotations. If he wants to cast a slant to the description and create a mood for the reader, he uses words that convey that feeling. The writer of "Shadows!" had a definite slant. He was not merely reporting on the tabernacle, but he wanted to convey the feel and atmosphere of holiness and glory in his description.



To better appreciate the word choice in “Shadows!” complete these exercises.

12. In the third paragraph list all the words that give a sense of hush. _____

13. In the fourth paragraph you read, “We slip past the washing priests”
- What would be the normal verb used to convey the literal action? _____
 - What is suggested by the verb *slip*? _____
 - List at least two verbs that could be substituted for *walk* that would convey a totally different tone. _____
14. The veil is described near the end of Paragraph 6.
- List the words and phrases used to describe the posts and the veil.

 - What impressions do these words convey? _____
15. In the next paragraph the veil is described differently.
- List the words and phrases used to describe the veil in Paragraph 7. _____

 - What impressions do these words convey? _____

16. The climax of description comes in Paragraph 15.
- List several of the most descriptive phrases in the paragraph. _____

 - The first two sentences and the last sentence are full sentences. The remainder of the paragraph contains broken sentence fragments. How does this add to the tone of the paragraph?

17. Read Exodus 26:31-33.
- What part of the tabernacle does this describe? _____
 - How is this type of description different from the description in “Shadows!”?

LOOKING BACK . . .



Circle the letter of the correct ending for each sentence.

18. In the story of Nathan and King David, the frame is . . .
- Nathan coming to David.
 - the rich man coming to the poor man.

Lessons 5, 6

19. A story's frame is usually . . .
 - a. not important to the understanding of the story's theme.
 - b. important to the understanding of the story's theme.
20. A frame could be described as . . .
 - a. a story within a story.
 - b. a story around another story.

Lesson 6

Practicing Description

In choosing words to create tone, a beginning writer is often tempted to use flowery language. Unfortunately, this saps vitality from the writing and actually creates the opposite effect than that intended.

Flowery language is usually an overdose of adjectives.

Lush, verdant pastures dotted with lazy, lowing cattle lend a harmonious grace to the pictur-

esque landscape. Buzzing, whirring bees flit everywhere in search of their precious, sweet nectar, while gorgeous butterflies grace the air with their colorful wings.

Doesn't that paragraph almost nauseate you? Adjectives gush out in such a flood that the meaning is drowned. Effective description is clear and precise, not gushy.



**Complete these activities.**

1. List the guidelines for effective description.

2. Tell two approaches a writer may take in description and tell how his approach will affect his word choice.

3. Describe flowery writing. _____

4. Tell what the effect of flowery writing is. _____

5. The story "Shadows!" uses near-to-far spatial organization.

- a. Tell how this is apparent in the description of the courtyard. _____

- b. Tell how this is apparent in the description of the inside of the tabernacle. _____

**Identify each of these descriptive sentences as *objective* (O) or *slanted* (S).**

6. _____ Even the mailbox looked dead, impaled on a post, lower jaw flopping on a partial hinge.
7. _____ We live in a 26 x 36, two-bedroom, ranch-style house with cream-colored siding and dark brown trim.
8. _____ Grandfather's Bible, ragged and marked by years of use, lay open like the doors of an ancient church, mute but inviting.
9. _____ The children's whooping, soprano gaiety and the syncopated thud of snowballs caroled enthusiastically, if a little off-key, "Winter is here!"
10. _____ Father's desk had a telephone on the left with a notepad for messages, a pencil holder and letter caddy at the back, and three stacking trays on the right containing various folders.

**Practice some description.**

- 11. On a separate sheet of paper write two descriptions of one of the subjects below. First write an objective, factual description. Then describe the same thing, slanting your description to create a particular mood. Label the first *Objective* and the second *Slanted*, and at the end of the second description, tell what mood you were trying to convey. Give your descriptions to your teacher.

a barn

a pair of hands

your bedroom

a face

LOOKING BACK . . .



Complete the sentences using information from Lessons 5 and 6.

12. Description often uses _____ order because its purpose is to help you visualize scenes.
13. Two guidelines for descriptive writing are
 - 1) Pay attention to _____ and
 - 2) Choose words with the proper _____ .
14. Details should be _____ and precise, not general and vague.
15. Words should be chosen with a view to their _____ , not just their denotations.
16. A writer may describe _____ —just giving the facts, avoiding words that will give a particular feeling. Or he may purposely choose words that cast a _____ to his description. This slant could also be called mood.



Rewrite these sentences in non-flowery language.

Lush, verdant pastures dotted with lazy, lowing cattle lend a harmonious grace to the picturesque landscape. Buzzing, whirring bees flit everywhere in search of their precious, sweet nectar, while gorgeous butterflies grace the air with their colorful wings.

17. _____

Lesson 7

Dialogue

“You’re sick.”
“Thanks a lot. So are you.”
“No, I don’t mean that unkindly. I’m just telling it like it is.”
“So am I.”
“You really are sick. Could we talk about it?”
“Go bother someone else. I’m just fine, and I don’t fancy being told by a sick preacher there’s something wrong with me.”
“But—”
“But, nothing. I’m as good as anyone else I know.”

Narration tells the story. Description shows us snapshots from the story. Dialogue introduces us to story characters. As we listen to what the characters say, we learn to know them. Furthermore, conversation adds realism. It makes us feel that we are right there in the story.

Here are a few pointers for writing dialogue:

1. Use dialogue to reveal character.

Conversation reveals character more directly than either narration or description. In the above dialogue, you already are able to form some