

Three Descriptive Writing

Picture Prompts

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Teacher Notes – Effective Description

What is the difference between these two paragraphs?

I was really scared to ride the roller coaster. I felt a little sick, but excited at the same time. When the bar clicked into place, I held on tight. When the ride started, I hoped for the best.

As I slid into the red plastic seat of the roller coaster, my mouth went dry and my hands felt clammy. The bar in front of my clicked into place and I gripped it so hard my knuckles turned white. I could taste the cotton candy I'd eaten earlier at the back of my throat. When the car jolted forward, my stomach dropped, I held my breath, and I told myself I would survive.

In the first paragraph, the writer is *telling* the reader what is happening. In the second paragraph, the writer is *showing* the reader, or putting the reader in the story, allowing him or her to experience what the writer experienced. The writer accomplishes this through concrete, or sensory, detail.

Words like “scared” or “excited” tell an emotion, but don’t show it. These are abstract descriptions, because there’s nothing to see, hear, feel, taste or smell. In the second example, the reader experiences “scared” when the writer says, “my mouth went dry and my hands felt clammy.” The reader understands that the writer “felt a little sick” when the writer says, “I could taste the cotton candy I’d eaten earlier in the back of my throat.” The reader feels the anxiety when the writer says, “I gripped it so hard my knuckles turned white.” This is showing, rather than telling.

Picture prompts are a great way to reinforce this concept. You can use them for free writing practice, or assign a finished paragraph.

Picture Prompt #1



Use concrete detail to show what it would be like to be this bike racer. What does he see? What does he hear? What is he thinking? What is going on inside his body? Use all the senses to help the reader be in the moment.

Picture Prompt #2



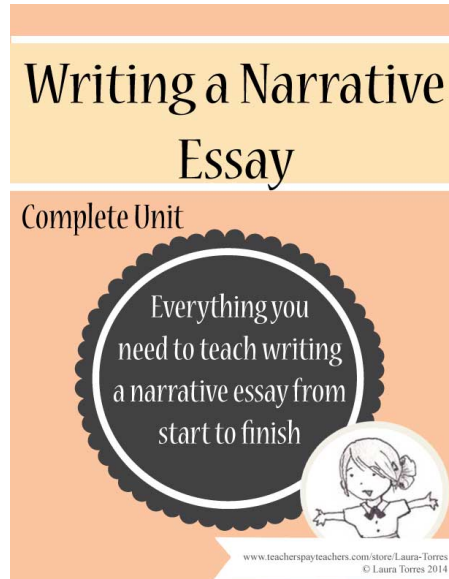
Use concrete detail to describe what is going on in this scene. What does it sound like? How do the people feel? What do they see in the room? What is making them laugh?

Picture Prompt #3

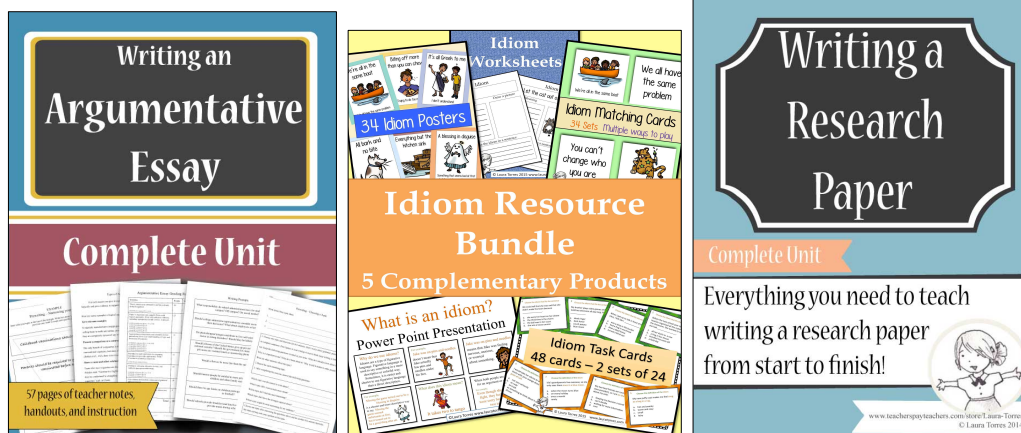


Use concrete detail to describe the setting here. What do you hear? What do you see? What do you smell? What does it feel like?

This lesson is part of a complete unit: “Writing a Narrative Essay”



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