

Voice Lessons Detail 1

Whenever he was so fortunate as to have near him a hare that had been kept too long, or a meat pie made with rancid butter, he gorged himself with such violence that his veins swelled, and the moisture broke out on his forehead.

—Thomas Babington Macaulay, “Samuel Johnson”

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1. What effect does the detail (the *spoiled hare*, the *rancid butter*, the *swollen veins*, the *sweaty forehead*) have on the reader?

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2. How would the meaning of the sentence be changed by ending it after *himself*?

Voice Lessons Detail 1

Write a sentence describing someone with disgusting eating habits. It must be one, correct sentence; and it must contain at least three vivid details.

Voice Lessons Detail 6

He went on till he came to the first milestone, which stood in the bank, half-way up a steep hill. He rested his basket on the top of the stone, placed his elbows on it, and gave way to a convulsive twitch, which was worse than a sob, because it was so hard and so dry.

—Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

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1. How do the details in this passage prepare you for the *convulsive twitch* at the end of the passage?

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2. This passage does not describe the character's face at all. What effect does this lack of detail have on the reader?

Voice Lessons Detail 6

Plan a pantomime of the scene described and perform it for the class. After several people have performed, discuss the facial expressions they used in their pantomimes. Discuss the similarities and differences and how they relate to the use of detail in the passage.

Voice Lessons Detail 8

MRS. VENABLE: . . . And the sand all alive, all alive, as the hatched sea-turtles made their dash for the sea, while the birds hovered and swooped to attack and hovered and—swooped to attack! They were diving down on the hatched sea-turtles, turning them over to expose their soft undersides, tearing the undersides open and rending and eating their flesh.

—Tennessee Williams, *Suddenly Last Summer*

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1. Williams uses the repetition of detail in three places in this passage. Identify the three places and discuss whether the repetition enhances or detracts from the overall effect of the passage.

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2. What is Mrs. Venable's attitude toward the scene she describes? Which specific details reveal this attitude?

Voice Lessons Detail 8

With a partner write a detailed description of a sporting event. Emphasize some violent or extreme action by repeating at least two vivid details. Try to create a feeling of revulsion through your choice of details.

Voice Lessons Detail 9

If my mother was in a singing mood, it wasn't so bad. She would sing about hard times, bad times, and somebody-done-gone-and-left-me times. But her voice was so sweet and her singing-eyes so melty I found myself longing for those hard times, yearning to be grown without "a thin di-l-me to my name." I looked forward to the delicious time when "my man" would leave me, when I would "hate to see that evening sun go down . . ." 'cause then I would know "my man has left this town." Misery colored by the greens and blues in my mother's voice took all of the grief out of the words and left me with a conviction that pain was not only endurable, it was sweet.

—Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*

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1. Why are parts of the passage in quotation marks? What do the quoted details add to the passage?

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2. Which details in the passage contribute to the conclusion that pain is sweet? Identify contrasting details that establish this oxymoron.

Voice Lessons Detail 9

Think of a paradoxical feeling such as sweet pain, healthful illness, or frightening comfort; then make a chart listing two details for each side of the paradox. Use the contrasting details in the passage as a model.

Voice Lessons Detail 12

I rounded the hut and saw a man's dead body sprawling in the mud. He was an Indian, a black Dravidian coolie almost naked, and he could not have been dead many minutes. The people said that the elephant had come suddenly upon him round the corner of the hut, caught him with its trunk, put its foot on his back and ground him into the earth. This was the rainy season and the ground was soft, and his face had scored a trench a foot deep and a couple of yards long. He was lying on his belly with arms crucified and head sharply twisted to one side. His face was coated with mud, the eyes wide open, the teeth bared and grinning with an expression of unendurable agony.

—George Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant”

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1. What is the author's attitude toward the coolie's death? What details in the passage reveal this attitude?

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2. Examine the last sentence of this paragraph. How would it have affected the overall impact had Orwell written *his eyes wide open, his teeth bared and grinning . . . ?*

Voice Lessons Detail 12

Think of an event that you have personally witnessed which horrified you. Your job is to describe that event and evoke the horror. Do not state or explain that you were horrified; instead, use detail to describe the event and reveal your attitude.

Voice Lessons Detail 16

In fact right behind her Gabriel could be seen piloting Freddy Malins across the landing. The latter, a young man of about forty, was of Gabriel's size and build, with very round shoulders. His face was fleshy and pallid, touched with colour only at the thick hanging lobes of his ears and at the wide wings of his nose. He had coarse features, a blunt nose, a convex and receding brow, tumid and protruded lips. His heavy-lidded eyes and the disorder of his scanty hair made him look sleepy.

—James Joyce, “The Dead”

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1. Joyce employs different types of details to describe Freddy's physical appearance. For each detail, identify whether the detail is objective (making observation) or evaluative (making judgment).

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2. What is Joyce's attitude toward Freddy? Which specific details reveal this attitude?

Voice Lessons Detail 16

Write a paragraph describing a character's personality by describing his or her physical traits. Do not make any direct statements about his or her personality or character. Instead, use detail about appearance to capture character.

Voice Lessons Imagery 7

I sat on the stump of a tree at his feet, and below us stretched the land, the great expanse of the forests, somber under the sunshine, rolling like a sea, with glints of winding rivers, the grey spots of villages, and here and there a clearing, like an islet of light amongst the dark waves of continuous tree-tops. A brooding gloom lay over this vast and monotonous landscape; the light fell on it as if into an abyss. The land devoured the sunshine; only far off, along the coast, the empty ocean, smooth and polished within the faint haze, seemed to rise up to the sky in a wall of steel.

—Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*

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1. Identify the images that describe the land and those that describe the sea.

I sat on the stump of a tree at his feet, and below us stretched the land, the great expanse of the forests, somber under the sunshine, rolling like a sea, with glints of winding rivers, the grey spots of villages, and here and there a clearing, like an islet of light amongst the dark waves of continuous tree-tops. A brooding gloom lay over this vast and monotonous landscape; the light fell on it as if into an abyss. The land devoured the sunshine; only far off, along the coast, the empty ocean, smooth and polished within the faint haze, seemed to rise up to the sky in a wall of steel.

2. What attitude toward the land and the sea do these images convey?

Voice Lessons Imagery 7

Select a partner and describe an utterly silent experience you have had. Your partner should write down on visual (and nonfigurative) image from your description. Switch and repeat the procedure.

Voice Lessons Detail 4

To those who saw him often he seemed almost like two men: one the merry monarch of the hunt and banquet and procession, the friend of children, the patron of every kind of sport; the other the cold, acute observer of the audience chamber or the Council, watching vigilantly, weighing arguments, refusing except under the stress of great events to speak his own mind.

—Winston Churchill, “King Henry VIII”

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1. Churchill draws attention to the contrasting sides of Henry VIII through detail. How is the impact of this sentence strengthened by the *order* of the details' presentation?

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2. What is Churchill's attitude toward Henry? What specific details reveal this attitude?

Voice Lessons Detail 4

Think of someone you know who has two strong sides to his or her personality. Using Churchill's sentence as a model, write a sentence which captures—through detail—these two sides.

Voice Lessons Imagery 9

Queen: There is a willow grows askant the brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
There with fantastic garlands did she make
Of crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples . . .

There on the pendant boughs her coronet* weeds
Clamb'ring to hang, an envious silver broke,
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,

(5)

*coronet

And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up,
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds,*
As one incapable of* or her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued*

(10)

*hymns

*unaware of

*endowed

Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.

(15)

—William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up,
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds,* (10) *hymns
As one incapable of* or her own distress, *unaware of
Or like a creature native and indued* *endowed
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
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1. Examine lines 8-13. How does the imagery in these lines help the reader understand that Ophelia (the *she* of the lines) is mad?

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2. Line 10 is not figurative. Would it strengthen or weaken the line to change the image to a simile such as, “Which time she sang like a flawed recording”? Defend your opinion.

Voice Lessons Imagery 9

Write an image which captures a moment of intense exuberance. Your image should be no more than one sentence and should contain no figurative language.