



Descriptions for story writing



We will be writing our own alternative versions of Beowulf over the next couple of weeks, but first we need to make sure that we are using excellent descriptions for our characters and settings. The Writing Tasks you have been given may be similar to tasks authors will use before they start writing their own stories.

The Importance of Show not Tell

Over this year, we have looked at lots of ways to make our writing more interesting:

- Relative clauses to add more information about a noun (whose, who, which, that, where, when)
- Our vocabulary choices including:
 - powerful verbs (**sprinted** rather than ran)
 - adjectives when making expanded noun phrases (the **rickety, decrepit** bridge)
 - interesting adverbs to describe the action (**stealthily** creeping through the open window)
- Use of figurative language
 - similes (The water was **like glass**.)
 - metaphors (The warrior **was a lion** waiting to pounce on its prey.)
 - personification (The leaves **danced** merrily on the autumn breeze.)
- Varying sentence starters (see [previous help sheet](#))

Another interesting way is to **SHOW rather than tell** – instead of saying how a character is feeling or behaving, an author can describe what they are doing that show this emotion. An example is below:

Tell: David was in a furious temper.

Show: David stomped to his desk, spilling his coffee as he went. Pushing past a group of people, he threw himself into his chair. With one sweep of his hand, he cleared his desk and growled at the nearest secretary.

The reader will know from reading both of these that David is angry – but the second one does this in a more interesting way. The reader is able to tell that David is angry through his actions, such as clearing his desk of its contents and pushing past people.

Your Turn: Show not Tell

Re-write the statements below so that you are showing, not telling, the reader how the characters are feeling. Think about what it looks like to experience these emotions, rather than what is causing them.

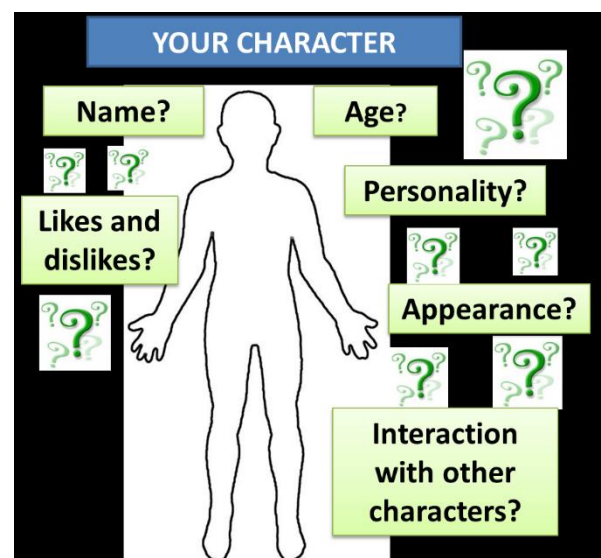
- 1) Caitlin was frightened.
- 2) Jim was unhappy.

Remember to use:

- Interesting verbs – ‘doing’ or ‘being’ words
- Adverbs – describe the action
- Adjectives – describe the noun(s)

Challenge: Can you use a simile or metaphor?

Read your description out to someone at home. Can they guess which emotion the character is feeling based on your description?



YOUR TASK: Describing the Main Character

In the last Unexpected Adventure Trail, you were asked to describe an Anglo-Saxon warrior so you have seen what they wore and may have already started to think about the way they act or behave.

Make sure you have read *The Tale of Mighty Beowulf* on the [Beowulf Help Sheet](#) first before completing this task.

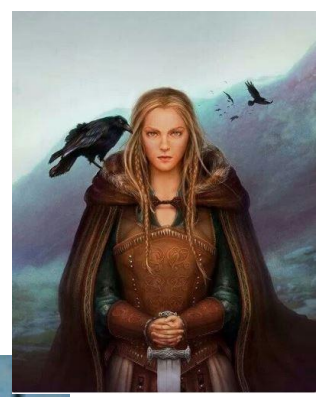
Take the character of Beowulf. Your task is to write a paragraph describing him entering a room – you can decide on an appropriate room, e.g. arriving at the feast hall (Heorot) or getting off of the boat.

The success criteria are listed below. Think about how you could challenge yourself. Are you going to add some of silver? Some of gold? Everyone must include ALL of the bronze challenge.

CHALLENGE: Create your own Anglo-Saxon hero character (male or female) – we have included some images that may help.

Things to think about:

- **Verbs:** How do they enter? (Do they shuffle, stride, skip?)
- **Adverbs:** How do they move? (Confidently, cautiously, briskly)
- **Similes:** What could you compare them to? What about their appearance: eyes/hair/smile?
- **Metaphors:** e.g. his hands were flat spiders; she had a heart of stone
- **What are their facial features like?** E.g. small, shifty eyes could indicate that they are secretive
- **What are they wearing?** Style of clothes and colours



Main Character Success Criteria

- ✓ I have used capital letters and full stops to start and end my sentences
- ✓ I have maintained tense throughout my description
- ✓ I have described what my character looks like
- ✓ I have used expanded noun phrases in my description
- ✓ I have used powerful verbs
- ✓ I have used a subordinating clause (I SAW A WABUB)
- ✓ I have attempted to SHOW rather than tell
- ✓ I have used relative clauses to add information
- ✓ I have varied some of my sentence openers (ISPACED)
- ✓ I have chosen interesting vocabulary
- ✓ I have thought about how I start each of my sentences
- ✓ I have included parenthesis () , -

Remember: SHOW NOT TELL

Stomping, making tiny earthquakes as he walked, Beowulf marched angrily towards Heorot. The blood thief burst through the gigantic engraved, wooden archway. Startled, the men of Heorot jumped out of their seats. In front of them stood a muscular, ferocious beast of a man with a forest of blonde hair, who looked as strong as an ox.

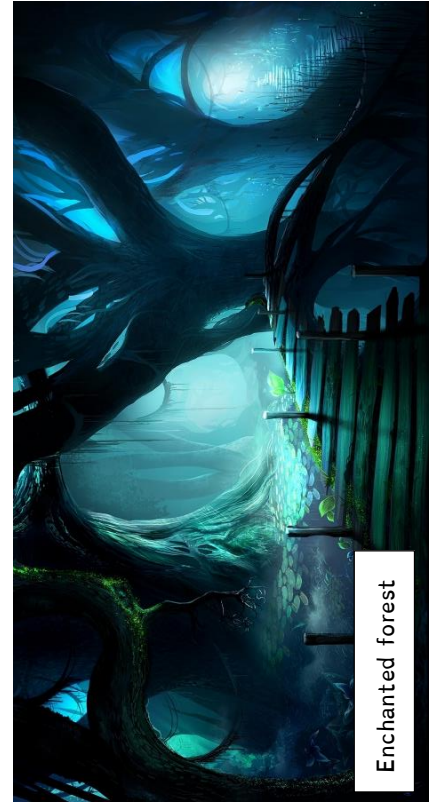


Think about your sentence openers!

YOUR TASK: Where does your monster live?

You have been asked to write a description of your monster and its lair. Although it may seem a bit backwards, it will be easier to think of where your monster lives first. If you know where it lives, you can then start to picture what the monster will look like. Think of it being like your bedroom: you will probably have items or decorations in your room which tell a little bit about you. Why would it be any different for a ferocious monster?

Choose a scene for your monster's lair. Think about your senses... if you were there, what would you **SEE? HEAR? SMELL? TASTE? FEEL/TOUCH?** Write down 2-3 ideas for each sense – see the example below.

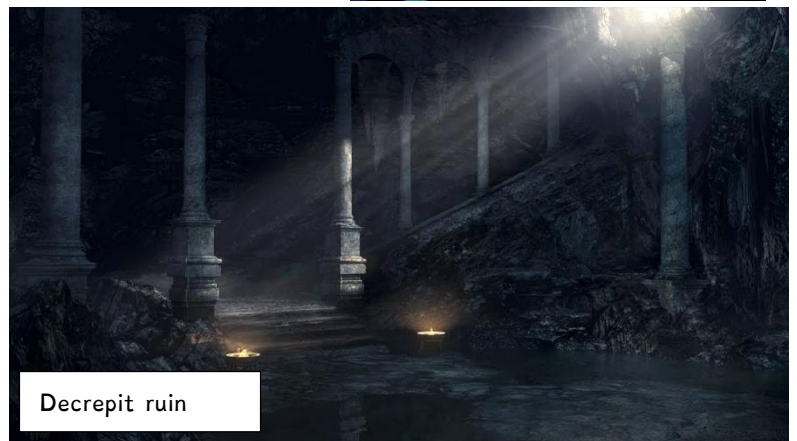


SEE **HEAR** **SMELL** **TASTE** **FEEL**

melancholy
shipwrecks that the monster has destroyed/pulled down
feel the mist dampening exposed skin
In the distance miles of roots and branches stuck out of the water like grasping hands

Squelching mud
hear birds in the distance cackling like a witch
stepping on the ground were the crunches stones or bones?
Smell overpowering salt and metal

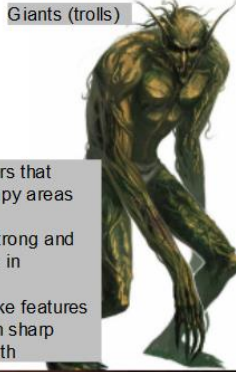
feet disappearing into the murky mere
shadows from the trees spread across the still, glass-like water, reaching towards...
water splashing as the monster waded through





- Monsters capable of copying human speech
- Man's body and a lion's head
- Very strong
- Tricked people by having pleasant conversations

- Evil creatures that appeared in the shape of a large dog or hound
- Typically acted as gatekeepers or guardians to a pathway
- Some capable of shapeshifting into other animals



- Giant monsters that dwell in swampy areas or caves
- Abnormally strong and often hideous in appearance
- Has human-like features by armed with sharp claws and teeth



- Fire-breathing reptile
- Large and ferocious
- Have a desire for gold and often linked to greed

Do you notice any similarities between these Anglo-Saxon monsters?

claws like daggers teeth like dinosaurs razor sharp teeth
 spiny fierce

Scary **Beware the** terrifying

fearsome muscular

ferocious hideous unnatural tail

spiky

YOUR TASK: Planning Your Monster

Anglo-Saxons believed in various monsters who would force a hero to arise to save the day by ridding the terrified people of the grotesque beast. In Beowulf's story, you will have read of Grendel and his mother.

Examples of monsters with Anglo-Saxon origin (or earlier) can be found opposite. You will notice that most of the monsters share qualities of real-life animals. You can use one of these creatures, research more online or create your own!

We would like you to create a plan for your own monster and think about what its lair would be like. You may choose how you present this: it could be a fact file, annotated sketch, poster, bubble map, character profile. You MUST include full sentences and ideas you understand so you can include these in later tasks.

Think about:

- How does your monster behave? What does it want to achieve? (Control the kingdom, steal gold, hates humans)
- Where does your monster live?
- Does your monster use weapons?
- How can it be defeated? (This is important to think about, what are its weaknesses?)

Description, Action, Dialogue (DAD)

We have looked at showing rather than telling to give character description, but we can also use their dialogue – what they say and how they say it.

Description: choose careful adjectives and adverbs to describe the setting and character and the five senses

Action: powerful verbs to describe what is happening in the story

Dialogue: between two or more people to show character

If you need a reminder on how to punctuate speech, look back at the [previous Grammar Help Sheet](#).

YOUR TASK

Your task is to write a dialogue between Beowulf (or your created hero) and Hrothgar who asks them to help with your monster. The conversation must result in Beowulf or your character accepting to fight the monster.

Look at the example and Success Criteria below. Think about how you are going to challenge yourself. Make sure there is a reason why you are including speech, each line should have a purpose.

Example

Sitting on his golden, ancient throne, Hrothgar glared – staring directly at the intruder stood calmly in the centre of hall. Guards around the outside edge of the hall unsheathed their swords and charged towards Beowulf like a herd of bulls. Beowulf opened his mouth and thunder echoed throughout Heorot, “Halt!” he boomed. “I am here in service to your king,” he continued. Hrothgar’s puzzled eyes relaxed at the stranger’s exclamation.

“Your name?” the King enquired.

“Beowulf,” the warrior replied coolly. Upon hearing his name, the guards lowered their swords – the Dane’s reputation preceded him. They knew if he wanted to attack, he would have done so already. “I have come to vanquish this land of the grotesque beast,” Beowulf continued calmly, his voice echoing around the now-silent hall.

“Many have already tried and failed,” Hrothgar challenged. He hoped no one had heard the quiver in his voice. “No mortal man stands a chance.”

“Maybe you have not found the right mortal man.”

“We have all heard of your bravery and determination, young thegn.”

“Then you will know I have never faltered or been defeated,” Beowulf interjected. Eyes were glued to him as if he were a precious jewel.

“You have not even seen with the monstrosity we face,” Hrothgar said. He was concerned. Too often he had heard young men mistake their stupidity for bravery. “How can you be certain you will be successful?”

“It matters not,” Beowulf answered calmly. “Just know it will be done.”

Making your dialogue interesting

Here are some tips for making your dialogue more interesting:

1. Vary the shapes of your sentences by moving the words that tell the reader who is speaking (**reporting clause**), e.g.
 - “We’re going to be late,” said Jack.
 - Jack said, “We’re going to be late.”
 - “We’re going,” said Jack, “to be late.”
2. Use alternatives to *said* – there are so many options!
3. Remember that if only two characters are speaking, you don’t need to write the reporting clause for each piece of speech (you will be able to tell someone else is speaking as it will be on a new line)
4. Embedding the speech with description and action will make dialogue more realistic and lively
5. Make characters say things that show what they are like as people

Description, Action, Dialogue Success Criteria

- ✓ I have written a dialogue between two characters
- ✓ I have put inverted commas “ “ around the speech
- ✓ I have included a reporting clause to tell the reader who has spoken
- ✓ I have used appropriate punctuation between the speech and closing inverted comma (speech mark)
- ✓ I have included some description as well as dialogue
- ✓ I have written a new speaker’s speech on a new line
- ✓ I have used alternatives to ‘said’
- ✓ I have included some action
- ✓ I have varied where the reporting clause is in my writing
- ✓ I have chosen alternatives for ‘said’ which help give an idea of the character
- ✓ I have thought about how I start each of my sentences