

Writing Essentials

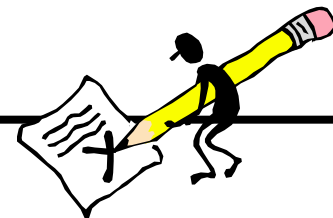


Learning Target

Using Sensory Details to Paint Pictures with Words

I can use sensory details to describe experiences and events precisely.

I can express ideas using carefully-chosen words.



As readers, we rely on writers' words to paint vivid pictures in our minds. Revered writers tap into the five senses to transfer images from their imaginations to those of their readers. As writers, it is our responsibility to use sensory details to make the invisible visible, to allow silent pages to sound, to enable fingers to feel something other than flat pages, to cause our tastebuds to tingle, and to stimulate the sense of scent.

Sight

The sense of sight is one that provides most of the detail for our stories. Our words become our readers' eyes, giving us a blank canvas upon which to paint a picture.



"The trees stood still as giant statues. And the moon was so bright the sky seemed to shine." - Owl Moon by Jane Yolen

"In November, the trees are standing all sticks and bones. Without their leaves, how lovely they are, spreading their arms like dancers. They know it is time to be still." - In November by Cynthia Rylant

"As he tumbled, ears over tail through the air, he managed to catch one last glimpse of Abilene. She was standing on the deck of the ship, holding on to the railing with one hand. In her other hand was a lamp - no, it was a ball of fire - no, Edward realized, it was his gold pocket watch that Abilene held in her hand; she was holding it up high, and it was reflecting the light of the sun." - The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane by Kate DiCamillo

Sound

To make the pictures in our readers' minds come alive, we must tailor our writing to other senses, as well. Sound adds another dimension to the image. As writers, we can describe from where the sound is coming, how close it is, and how the source of the sound affects the characters.



"I could hear it through the woolen cap Pa had pulled down over my ears. A farm dog answered the train, and then a second dog joined in. They sang out, trains and dogs, for a real long time. And then their voices faded away, it was as quiet as a dream." - Owl Moon by Jane Yolen

"In November, some birds move away and some birds stay. The air is full of good-byes and well-wishes. The birds who are leaving look very serious. No silly spring chirping now." - In November by Cynthia Rylant

"[Lucy] even rested her muzzle on his china stomach, and then the noises she made in her sleep, whimpering and growling and chuffing, resonated inside Edward's body. To his surprise, he began to feel a deep tenderness for the dog." - The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane by Kate DiCamillo

Touch

Use of words related to the sense of touch allow readers to experience things they might never be able to or even want to touch. These kinds of descriptions can create sensations in your fingertips or they can even make your skin crawl.



"Our feet crunched over the crisp snow and little gray footprints followed us." - Owl Moon by Jane Yolen

"Never in his life had Edward been cradled like a baby. Abilene had not done it. Nor had Nellie. And most certainly Bull had not. It was a singular sensation to be held so gently and yet so fiercely, to be stared down at with so much love. Edward felt the whole of his china body flood with warmth." - The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane by Kate DiCamillo

Taste

Sometimes, a sentence or two can make a reader salivate. As a writer, you have the power to prepare a tasty treat by mixing together a description so delicious the reader devours it.



"Our teacher has brought paper cups. We line up again, fill them, and drink. We lick our lips. I think I taste my special apple." - One Green Apple by Eve Bunting

"In November,... it tastes like cinnamon and can fill up a house in the morning, can pull everyone from bed in a fog. Food is better in november than any other time of the year." - In November by Cynthia Rylant

Smell

Sense of smell is powerful. With one whiff, a smell can transport a reader back in time. By including details related to smell, you can spark a memory and allow your reader to connect in a meaningful and mouthwatering manner.



"Hay tickles my arms and makes Anna sneeze. It smells of dry sunshine." - One Green Apple by Eve Bunting

"In November, the smell of food is different. It is an orange smell. A squash and a pumpkin smell."
- In November by Cynthia Rylant

"And then she set to work, kneading dough for bread and rolling out dough for cookies and pies. The kitchen soon filled with the smell of baking bread and with the sweet smells of cinnamon and sugar and cloves."
- The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane by Kate DiCamillo.

**Note: Descriptions of unpleasant smells have the potent power to change the mood of your writing. These sour scents can symbolize that something bad is happening or is going to happen.

"But after almost forty days and nights had passed, the weight and the smell of the garbage above and below him clouded Edward's thoughts, and soon he gave up thinking about revenge and gave in to despair."
- The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane by Kate DiCamillo.

Try It!

Choose a sense-less sentence from your draft. Write your original sentence in the DRAFT space below. Then, transform your sentence into something that your readers' senses will savor. Use the multiple sources on the following pages to revise your work thoughtfully.



Four horizontal lines for writing the original sentence.



Four horizontal lines for writing the revised sentence.



Four horizontal lines for writing the original sentence.





Four horizontal lines for writing the revised sentence.

Sensory Words



Sight

abrasive
biting
bleary
blurry
boiling
brilliant
bubbly
bulky
bumpy
burning
bushy
clammy
colorless
cool
cottony
crisp
cushioned
damp
dazzling

dim  
dingy
downy
drenched
faded
faint
feathery
fine
flashy
fluffy
foamy
freezing
furry
fuzzy
gaudy
glance
glassy
gleaming
glimpse
glistening

glittering
gloomy
glossy
glowing
greasy
grimy
gritty
gushy
hairy
hazy
heavy
hot
humid
humid
knobbed
indistinct
lacy
leathered
light

lukewarm
matted
metallic
misty
moist
mushy
numbing
oily
peer
piercing
plastic
pocked
pointed
pulpy
radiant
rocked
sandy
scalding
scorching
scratchy

scummy
shadowy
shaggy
sharp
shimmering
shiny
silky
slimy
slippery
sloppy
smooth
smothering
smudged
soapy
soft
sopping
soupy
sparkling
spongy

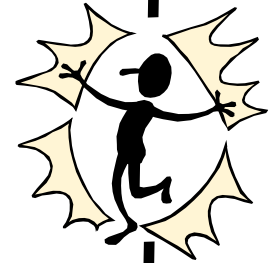
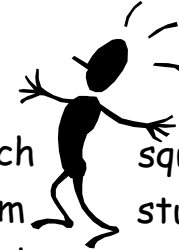
steamy
steely
sticky
stifled
stinging
stony
streaked
striped
stubby
tangled
tarnished
tender
tepid
thick
tickling
tough
twinkling
velvety
warm
waxy



Sensory Words

SOUND

bang	click	grunt	peep	scratch	squeal
bark	coo	gurgle	piercing	scream	stutter
bawl	crackle	hiss	ping	screech	swish
bellow	crash	honk	plop	shriek	tear
blare	creak	howl	pop	shout	thud
boom	croak	hush	quack	shrill	thump
buzz	crunch	jabber	quiet	silent	tick
cackle	cry	jangle	rant	sing	tinkle
chatter	drip	laugh	rap	sizzle	twitter
cheer	explode	moo	rasp	slam	warble
chime	fizz	mumble	rave	snarl	wheeze
chirp	gag	murmur	rim	snore	whimper
clamor	gasp	mutter	ring	splash	whine
clang	giggle	noisy	roar	squawk	whisper
	grate		rumble		whoop
	grumble		rustle		yelp



Sensory Words

Touch

abrasive
balmy
biting
boiling
bristly
bubbly
bulky
bumpy
burning
bushy
chilly
clammy
coarse
cold
cool
cottony
crawly

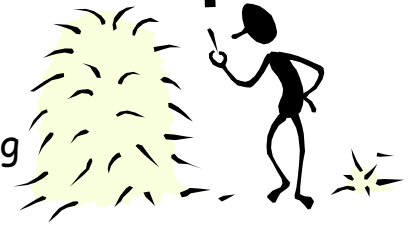
creepy
crisp
cuddly
cushioned
damp
downy
drenched
dusty
feathery
feverish
fine
fluffy
foamy
freezing
furry
fuzzy
glassy
gluey
gooey

grainy
greasy
gritty
gushy
hairy
heavy
hot
humid
icy
knobbed
lacy
leathery
light
lumpy
lukewarm
matted
metallic

moist
mushy
numbing
oily
piercing
plastic
pocked
pointed
powdery
prickly
pulpy
ragged
rocky
rough
rugged
sandy
scalding
scorching

scratchy
scummy
shaggy
sharp
shivery
silky
slimy
slippery
sloppy
smooth
smothering
soapy
soft
sopping
soupy
spongy
springy

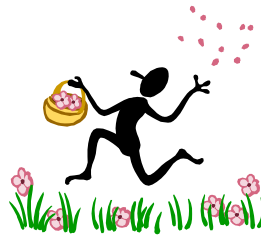
squashy
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steely
sticky
stifled
stinging
stony
stubby
sweaty
tangled
tender
tepid
thick
tickling
tough
velvety
warm
waxy



Sensory Words

Taste

appetizing	gingery	rich
acidic	hearty	ripe
alkaline	hot	rotten
biting	lemony	salty
bitter	luscious	savory
bland	medicinal	sharp
burnt	minty	sour
buttery	moist	spicy
cold	nauseating	spoiled
creamy	palatable	stale
delectable	peppery	sugary
delicious	perfumed	tangy
doughy	pickled	tasteless
flavorful	piney	tough
flavorless	piquant	unappetizing
floury	plastic	unripe
fresh	raw	vile
fruity		vinegary
garlicky		zesty



Smell

acidic	perfumed
aroma	pungent
aromatic	putrid
burnt	rancid
earthy	rank
fetid	reeking
fishy	scent
flowery	scented
foul-smelling	smell
fragrant	smoky
moldy	spicy
musky	stagnant
musty	steno
nauseating	sweaty
nidorous	sweet
odiferous	waft
odor	whiff
odorless	
old	

