

Detail: A

Consider: Whenever he was so fortunate as to have him 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"

Discuss:

- 1.) What effect does the detail(the spoiled hare, the rancid butter, the swollen veins, the sweaty forehead) have on the reader?
- 2.) How would the meaning of the sentence be changed by ending it after himself?

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

Detail: B

Consider: An old man, Don Tomasito, the baker, played the tuba. When he blew into the huge mouthpiece, his face would turn purple and his thousand wrinkles would disappear as his skin filled out.

- Alberto Alvaro Rios, "The Iguana Killer"

Discuss:

- 1.) The first sentence is a general statement. How does the second enrich and intensify the first?
- 2.) Contrast the second sentence with the following.
When he blew the tuba, his face turned purple and his cheeks puffed out.
Which sentence more effectively expresses an attitude toward Tomasito? What is that attitude and how is it communicated?

Apply: Describe someone jumping over a puddle. Your first sentence should be general, stating the action simply. Your second sentence should clarify and intensify the action through detail. Share your sentence with a partner.

Detail: C

Consider: CHARLEY(to WILLY): Why must everybody like you? Who liked J.P. Morgan? Was he impressive? In a Turkish bath he'd look like a butcher. But with his pockets on he was very well liked. Now listen, Willy, I know you don't like me, and nobody can say I'm in love with you, but I'll give you a job because – just for the hell of it, put it that way. Now what do you say?

- Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*

Discuss:

- 1.) Who was J.P. Morgan? What is a Turkish bath? What picture comes to mind when someone is said to look like a butcher? How do these details contribute to the point Charley is trying to make?
- 2.) How would the passage be different if Charley said J.P. Morgan would look like a *baker* in a Turkish bath?

Apply: Think of someone famous and powerful. Use detail to create an unflattering but accurate description of the physical appearance of this famous person. Model your description on Miller's description of J.P. Morgan. Share your description with a partner.

Detail: D

Consider: 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,” *Churchill’s History of the English-Speaking People’s*

Discuss:

- 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?
- 2.) What is Churchill’s attitude toward Henry? What specific details reveal this attitude?

Apply: Think of someone you know who has two strong sides to his/her personality. Using Churchill’s sentence as a model, write a sentence which captures – through detail – these two sides. Share your sentence with a partner.

Detail: E

Consider: The truck lurched down the goat path, over the bridge and swung south toward El Puerto. I watched carefully all that we left behind. We passed Rosie’s house and at the clothesline right at the edge of the cliff there was a young girl hanging out brightly colored garments. She was soon lost in the furrow of dust the truck raised.

- Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima*

Discuss:

- 1.) Circle the words that provide specific detail and contribute to the power of the passage.
- 2.) Contrast the third sentence with: *We passed Rosie’s house and saw a girl hanging out the clothes.*
Explain the difference in impact.

Apply: Rewrite the passage eliminating the specific detail. How does the elimination of detail change the meaning of the passage?

Detail: F

Consider: 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 sob, because it was so hard and so dry.

- Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*

Discuss:

- 1.) How do the details of this passage prepare you for the *convulsive twitch* at the end of the passage?
- 2.) This passage does not describe the character’s face at all. What effect does this lack of detail have on the reader?

Apply: Plan a pantomime of the scene described in this passage.

Detail: G

Consider: The dog stood up and growled like a lion, stiff-standing hackles, teeth uncovered as he lashed up his fury for the charge. Tea Cake split the water like an otter, opening his knife as he

dived. The dog raced down the back-bone of the cow to the attack and Janie screamed and slipped far back on the tail of the cow, just out of reach of the dog's angry jaws.

- Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Discuss:

- 1.) Which details reveal that the dog has rabies? What effect do these details have on the reader?
- 2.) Contrast the details used to describe Tea Cake (the male protagonist) and Janie (the female protagonist). What do these details reveal about the author's attitude toward these two characters?

Apply: Think of two contrasting characters. Write a sentence for each showing their reaction to a fight. Do not explain the different reactions; instead, show the different reactions through use of detail.

Detail: H

Consider: 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*

Discuss:

- 1.) Williams uses the repetition of detail in three places in this passage. Underline the three places and discuss whether the repetition enhances or detracts from the overall effect of the passage.
- 2.) What is Mrs. Venable's attitude toward the scene she describes? Which specific details reveal this attitude?

Apply: 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.

Detail: I

Consider: 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-I-ime 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*

Discuss:

- 1.) Why are parts of the passage in quotes? What do the quoted details add to the passage?
- 2.) Which details in the passage contribute to the conclusion that pain is sweet? Make a chart with the categories of "Sweet" Details, and "Pain" Details, to show how Morrison sets up this oxymoron.

Apply: 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 your chart as a model.

Detail: J

Consider:

About suffering they were never wrong,

The Old Master: how well they understood

It's human position; how it takes place

While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;

- W. H. Auden, "Musee des Beaux Arts"

Discuss:

- 1.) *Suffering* is a general term. What is a general term that sums up the detail in line 4?
- 2.) Compare line 4 with the following: *While someone else is not suffering*;
Why is Auden's line more effective?

Apply: Substitute the word *laziness* for *suffering* in line one of the poem. Now rewrite line four to complete the following:

While someone else is _____ or _____ or _____.

Your new line should give details about the *opposite* condition of laziness. Use Auden's line as a model.

Detail: K

Consider: Under the hard, tough cloak of the struggle for existence in which money and enormous white refrigerators and shining, massive, brutally-fast cars and fine, expensive clothing had ostensibly overwhelmed the qualities of men that were good and gentle and just, there still beat a heart of kindness and patience and forgiveness.

- John Okada, *No-No Boy*

Discuss:

- 1.) What does Okada's choice of detail reveal about his attitude toward money?
- 2.) How would the elimination of *and enormous white refrigerators and shining, massive, brutally-fast cars and fine, expensive clothing* modify the meaning and effectiveness of the sentence? Make a chart with categories of Money Details and People Details with details that support your understanding of Okada's attitude toward money.

Apply: Choose a general noun then list three concrete noun phrases that reflect your opinion of the general noun. For example, Okada uses *money* as a general noun. He then expresses his opinion of money with detailed noun phrases: *enormous white refrigerators*; *shining, massive, brutally-fast cars*; and *fine, expensive clothing*.

Detail: L

Consider: 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 his 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 has 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"

Discuss:

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

Apply: 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.

Detail: M

Consider: Until I returned to Cuba, I never realized how many blues exist. The aquamarines near the shoreline, the azures of deeper waters, the eggshell blues beneath my grandmother's eyes, the fragile indigos tracking her hands. There's a blue, too, in the curves of the palms, and the edges of the words we speak, a blue tinge to the sand and the seashells and the plump gulls on the beach. The mole by Abuela's mouth is also blue, a vanishing blue.

- Cristina Garcia, *Dreaming in Cuban*

Discuss:

- 1.) The narrator details the blues of the landscape and the blues of her grandmother (Abuela). What connection is revealed by this juxtaposition of images?
- 2.) Why is the last *blue* in the passage a *vanishing blue*?

Apply: Choose a color and describe a scene using at least three varieties of that color. Try to mix details of landscape and people.