

20



WAYS TO ADD DETAILS

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The number one reason students don't pass writing-prompt assessments is their lack of idea development. Their written responses are too short. Student writers didn't spend enough time elaborating on their ideas and explaining the specific details from the text.

Knowing that, Kristina Smekens compiled a list of her 20 favorite ways to develop an idea.

REVEAL EXAMPLES

As you teach each strategy, reveal short excerpts or passages from picture books to show students the type of detail in action. To just tell them to use prepositional phrases, comparisons, or number details isn't enough. Students may need to see several examples of these elements in context to better understand how they can utilize them in their own writing.

While introducing each strategy, consider building a wall chart of these 20 strategies. This provides a constant resource within the classroom environment for students to refer to while drafting each day.

STUDENT APPLICATION

After introducing each detail type and showing several examples in mentor text, have students apply these different strategies within their own writings. Give kids multiple experiences to practice inserting details in previous drafts.

NOTE K-1 TEACHERS: There are pictorial writing applications for many of the strategies.

If students can't insert a prepositional phrase as an afterthought, they can't do it as an initial thought. If they can't develop an idea using sensory details and comparisons in revision, they won't be able to do it off-the-cuff in a new first draft.

Eventually encourage students to apply these elaboration strategies in new first drafts.

ALIGNED WITH COLLEGE & CAREER READY STANDARDS

CCSS:

- **W.1** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- **W.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- **W.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

IAS:

- **W.3.1** Write arguments in a variety of forms...
- **W.3.2** Write informative compositions in a variety of forms...
- **W.3.3** Write narrative compositions in a variety of forms...



1

TELL MORE ABOUT THE “WHO”

What does the subject/character look like?

Physical description, age, gender, etc.

How does the subject/character act?

Personality, habits, gestures, etc.

How does the subject/character speak?

Accent, fast/slow, grammatically correct, baby talk, etc.

K-1 TEACHERS:

Apply this same skill by having students include additional color to the character(s) in their drawings:

More physical character details

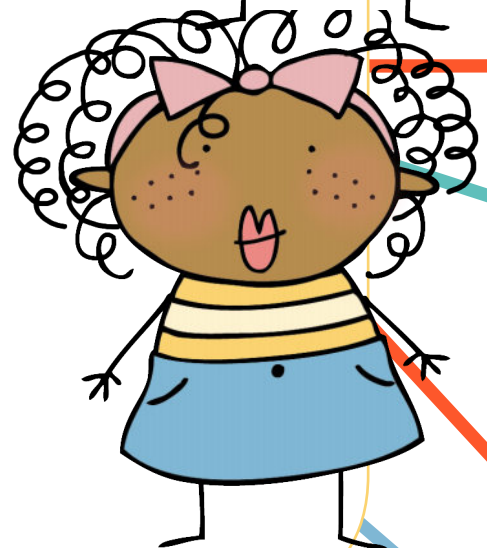
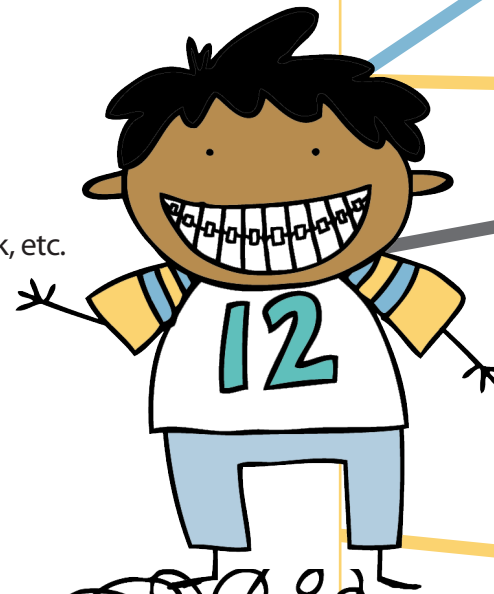
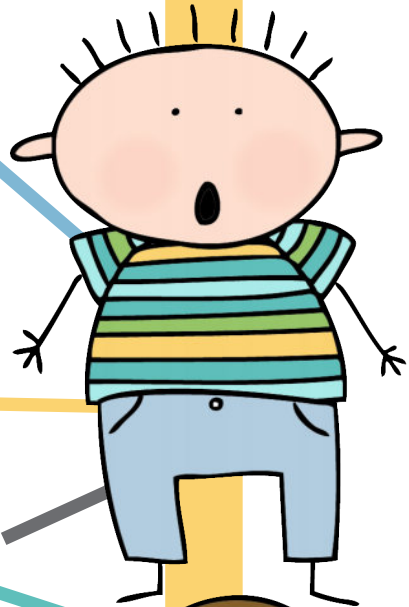
(hair, eyes, clothing, etc.)

More close-up character details

(curly eyelashes, painted fingernails, laces on shoes, etc.)

More facial expression details

(tilted eyebrows, frown/smile, big scared eyes, etc.)



2

TELL MORE ABOUT THE “WHERE”

Location

Habitat, setting, city, state, place, inside, outside, etc.

Time of day

Exact time a.m./p.m., sunrise, mid-day, sunset, midnight, etc.

Time of the year

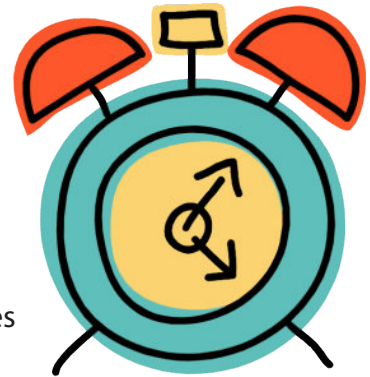
Season, weather, temperature

Mood

Feelings, attitude, atmosphere

Sensory details

Sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches



EXAMPLES:

- Dawn picks bits of dark from between the blades of grass in your backyard.
~ *Twilight Comes Twice*
- They left at four in the morning when it was still dark, before even the birds were awake.
~ *The Relatives Came*
- It's summer on the river, when the air's as thick as soup and you can smell tar melting on the roof.
~ *Root Beer and Banana*

K-1 TEACHERS:

- Include picture details that reference the setting (sun, raindrops, trees, classroom environment, playground, etc.).
- Include objects within the drawing that reference the setting (e.g., holding something in hand, objects nearby).
- Include objects in the foreground or background.
- Place drawn objects closer together, so they don't look so separate or "divorced" from one another.

3

ADD EXAMPLES

Examples help the reader better understand the topic/information. Examples will clarify meaning, especially if it's on a topic of which the reader has little background knowledge. Provide students with the language to weave in such

<i>for example</i>	<i>for instance</i>
<i>one kind is</i>	<i>one type is</i>
<i>like ...</i>	<i>such as</i>
<i>: _____</i>	

4

ADD DEFINITION DETAILS

Depending on the writing topic, there may be domain-specific and/or content-related vocabulary within the piece. That said, if the reader is unaware of a word's meaning, then comprehension suffers. Define terms that may be lesser known. This is also a way for the writer to demonstrate audience awareness. Weave in definitions using the following phrases:

<i>that means</i>	<i>this means</i>
<i>which</i>	<i>_____ are</i>
<i>means</i>	<i>(_____)</i>
<i>like</i>	

STUDENT EXAMPLE:

The T. Rex had up to sixty sharp teeth that were great for ripping hides (that means animal skins).

5

ADD NUMBERS

Add details with specific number facts and statistics.

WEAVING IN NUMBERS

date	October 12, 2005
age	4 years old
quantity	16 chairs
temperature	87 degrees
time	7:30 a.m.
speed	70 mph
weight	65 pounds
length, height	18 inches
percentage	90%
code (model #, ID #, part #)	item #4757
how many times/frequency	3 times
price	\$29
score	53-51

EXAMPLES:

- 8 incisors, 4 canines, 8 premolars and 12 molars, including the 4 wisdom teeth... ~ *Open Wide: Tooth School Inside*
- When I was nine or ten years old I couldn't wait for Saturdays. ~ *Saturdays and Teacakes*
- ...Turned to the secret recipe on page 342. ~ *Piggie Pie*
- "I can catch hundreds!" ~ *Fireflies!*
- It was 6 A.M. and the baker had just hung the open sign in the window. ~ *Arnie the Doughnut*

K-1 TEACHERS:

- Begin this concept with drawing different amounts of items.
- Incorporate numbers on jerseys or scoreboards in pictures.
- Write two-word phrases (e.g., three cats) as labels to pictures.

6

ADD NAMES

Add details with specific names and proper nouns.

WEAVING IN NAMES

<i>person/human character</i>	<i>Mr. Write</i>
<i>animal character</i>	<i>Rover</i>
<i>type of (e.g., breed)</i>	<i>Dalmation</i>
<i>place (e.g., restaurant, store, company)</i>	<i>McDonald's, Aeropostle, 3M</i>
<i>event/activity</i>	<i>Indy 500</i>
<i>title/occupation</i>	<i>principal</i>
<i>day/date</i>	<i>Tuesday, June 24</i>
<i>story/book/publication</i>	<i>The Three Little Pigs</i>
<i>city, state</i>	<i>Chicago, Illinois</i>
<i>brand name</i>	<i>Nike, Kitchenaid</i>

EXAMPLES:

- She hurried to the pantry and pulled down her Old Hag Cookbook... ~ *Piggie Pie*
- Every Saturday, I got up early, dressed and rolled my bicycle out of the garage.
~ *Saturdays and Teacakes*
- They were permitted to go to the Lightbulb Lab.
~ *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*
- Uneasy, Mamma looks over to me. ~ *Come On, Rain!*

K-1 TEACHERS:

- Nudge students to broaden their writers' vocabulary by eliminating the use of "stuff" and "things" from their writing. "Grabbed my toy" is better than "grabbed my stuff." Even better would be "truck" or "monster truck toy."
- *Fancy Nancy* is a great picture book to read and introduce general versus specific nouns. Nancy wears a "dressing gown" rather than pajamas. She likes "fuchsia" not purple. And she eats "parfaits" instead of sundaes.

7

ADD A SINGLE SENTENCE OF DIALOGUE

Purposeful dialogue can be effective within a piece. However, in narratives, students often drown the reader in pointless, irrelevant, uninteresting dialogue that goes on and on and on ... Consider what a character would say if he could only speak 1-2 sentences within the whole piece. What would be vital for reader insight? What is better said through speech than narration?

When quoting a sentence from text, choose the most relevant sentence or excerpt. Introduce the quote with a common sentence stem:

According to the text, ...
One detail from the reading, ...
The author states, ...

EXAMPLES:

- The boat roars forward; the tow line snaps tight. I leap from the water, riding the waves. "Lean back!" they scream.
~ *Up North at the Cabin*
- I despised myself for every note, every harmonica-breath until one day a whisper grazed my ear. "Bless you."
"For what?" I asked the dark. "Schubert." I slipped that into my pocket. Each night, like the very stars, my notes had reached other prisoners. ~ *The Harmonica*

K-1 TEACHERS:

- Introduce dialogue with speech bubbles. Even if it's just squiggle lines or letter strings within the bubbles, the students are recognizing that their characters have something to say.

8

ADD ACTION TO DIALOGUE

With purposeful dialogue, add details as to *how* the character spoke. When the writer explains what the character said and *how* he said it, the reader is left with a clearer picture.

"said" phrase, followed by character action

...," she screamed, slamming the door.

...," she sassied, turning on her heel and walking out.

...," he sighed and flopped on his bed.

...," she mumbled, looking ashamed.

...," he grunted, shrugging his shoulders.

...," she wept as she wiped snot from her runny nose.

EXAMPLES:



- Mamma lifts a listless vine and sighs. "Three weeks and not a drop," she says over her parched plants. ~ *Come On, Rain!*



- "I've got you in my sights now, you little porkers!" she cackled as she circled overhead. ~ *Piggie Pie*



9

ADD ONOMATOPOEIA

A word that mimics the sound of an action is called onomatopoeia. These sound-effect words are often written in all caps and end in an exclamation point. They might also be repeated (separated by a comma) for impact.

CLICK

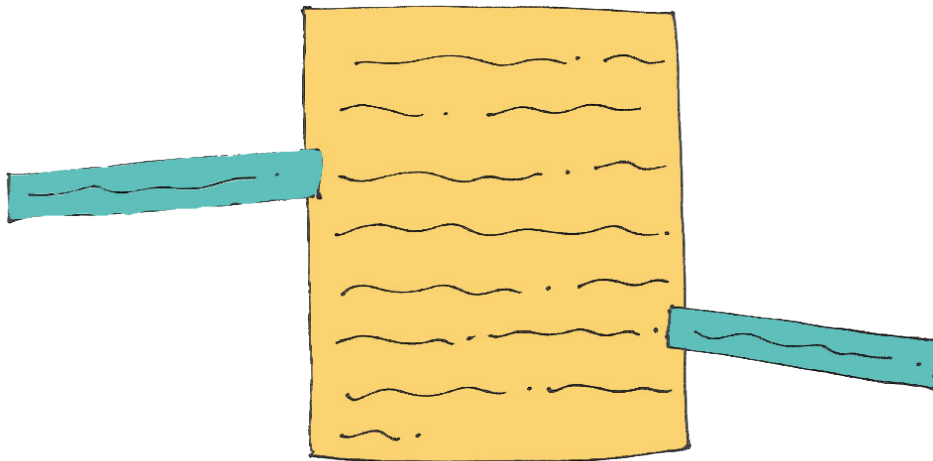
BAM! BAM!

POP

10

ADD SPIDER LEGS

Find an idea within the current draft that needs further elaboration. Think of a second sentence to develop that idea. Write it onto a spider leg (strip of paper). Tape it onto the draft right where it would fall. Adding “leg” sentences to the “body” is a fun way to encourage elaboration. See how many “legs” a writer can add.



K-1 TEACHERS: Spider legs can be used to turn a set of fragments into complete thoughts.

BEFORE

cat
Sneakers
bobtail
short

AFTER

I have a cat
Sneakers is his name.
He is a bobtail cat.
His tail is short. It's
not broken.

11

ADD WORDS TO CREATE LONG SENTENCES

Writing an intentionally long sentence can be powerful.
Common opportunities to play with sentence length include:

1. Create a calm, slow, quiet mood with a longer sentence.
2. Create an opportunity for the reader to think or ponder an idea with a longer sentence.
3. Add variety after several short sentences in a row (e.g., short — short — long) with a longer sentence.

Find a sentence to add words to in order to make it longer. However, be conscious of including the necessary punctuation in order to maintain grammatical correctness.

Long sentences maintained by punctuation

...	Trees sway under a swollen sky, the wind grows bold and bolder ... and just like that, rain comes. ~ <i>Come On, Rain!</i>
,	The bed is white and silent, and much life can hide beneath its blankets. ~ <i>In November</i>
—	He seemed like a splendid chap, after all— even if he couldn't spell. ~ <i>Mystery of Eatum Hall</i>
()	When it felt right Mammaw said, "Look in the Frigidaire (that's what she called her refrigerator) and find me two sticks of Blue Bonnet." ~ <i>Saturdays and Teacakes</i>

K-1 TEACHERS:

- Teach students to stretch their sentences, also known as supersizing their sentences. Teach them to take a simple sentence— *The dog slept*— and include answers to different questions (What kind? Did what? Where? When? Why?). A supersized sentence might then read like this: *My golden retriever Max slept in the sunny corner of the living room all day long.* Do this orally before asking students to apply it in their writing.

12

ADD ALLITERATION

Alliteration is a repetition of the starting sounds (letters or syllables) in two or more consecutive (or nearby) words. It creates a musical rhythm and fluency through the writing. It is especially pleasing when read aloud.

EXAMPLES:

- ...squishy, sandy, soggy ground, slippery seaweed that wraps around ...
~ *Hello Ocean*
- Air balls, bricks, clincks, clanks and clunks are cleaned up and KG (Kevin Garnett) puts back all the junk...
~ *Hoop Kings*

knick

Knack

Knock

~ *Night Noises*

K-1 TEACHERS:

- Play with alliteration in student writing when you are targeting phonics and phonemic awareness in reading. As you work on initial sounds and blends, brainstorm words orally that all start the same. Then point out when authors utilize this same technique (alliteration) within your read alouds.

13

ADD SENSORY DETAILS

Teach students to develop their ideas with more than just color and number details. Look in literature for examples of well-described, detailed passages. Help students dissect mentor text for the *types* of description the author utilized.

This skill naturally leads into mini-lessons on “showing, not telling.” Teach students to recreate moments and scenes, rather than tell them to the reader secondhand.

20 DESCRIPTIVE ATTRIBUTES

<i>size</i>	<i>function</i>
<i>color</i>	<i>location</i>
<i>shape</i>	<i>habitat</i>
<i>movement</i>	<i>direction</i>
<i>symmetry</i>	<i>orientation</i>
<i>texture</i>	<i>state</i>
<i>number</i>	<i>temperature</i>
<i>composition</i>	<i>weight</i>
<i>smell</i>	<i>age</i>
<i>taste</i>	<i>special features</i>

EXAMPLES:

- Just before reaching Mammaw’s back porch, I slammed on my brakes, sending a shower of tiny pebbles into her flowers.
~ *Saturdays and Teacakes*

K-1 TEACHERS:

- Encourage young writers to add color, texture, shape, etc. to their drawings.

14

ADD PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES

Add prepositional phrases to paint a more detailed picture and provide readers specifics on how, when, where, and which one.

K-1 TEACHERS:

- Students can add “where” details to their drawings that include objects drawn *next to, inside, over, under, etc.*

PREPOSITIONS

<i>aboard</i>	<i>because of</i>	<i>from</i>	<i>prior to</i>
<i>about</i>	<i>before</i>	<i>in</i>	<i>since</i>
<i>above</i>	<i>behind</i>	<i>inside</i>	<i>through</i>
<i>across</i>	<i>below</i>	<i>into</i>	<i>throughout</i>
<i>after</i>	<i>beneath</i>	<i>near</i>	<i>to</i>
<i>against</i>	<i>besides</i>	<i>of</i>	<i>toward</i>
<i>along</i>	<i>between</i>	<i>off</i>	<i>under</i>
<i>among</i>	<i>beyond</i>	<i>onto</i>	<i>underneath</i>
<i>apart from</i>	<i>by</i>	<i>on top of</i>	<i>until</i>
<i>around</i>	<i>down</i>	<i>opposite</i>	<i>up</i>
<i>aside from</i>	<i>during</i>	<i>out</i>	<i>with</i>
<i>at</i>	<i>except</i>	<i>outside</i>	<i>without</i>
<i>away from</i>	<i>for</i>	<i>over</i>	

15

ADD COMPARISONS

There are multiple ways to write a comparison. Some of the more common approaches include:

-er or -est words

Bigger, taller, kinder, the best, the worst, the oldest

Use *like* to create a simile

The perfume smelled *like* a flower garden.

Use *just like*

The hilly highway was *just like* being on a roller coaster.

Use *as* to create a simile

Her shirt was as tight *as* Saran plastic wrap.

Use *so* _____ *that*:

Her story was *so fabulous that* I wish I'd written it!

Use *it reminds me of*

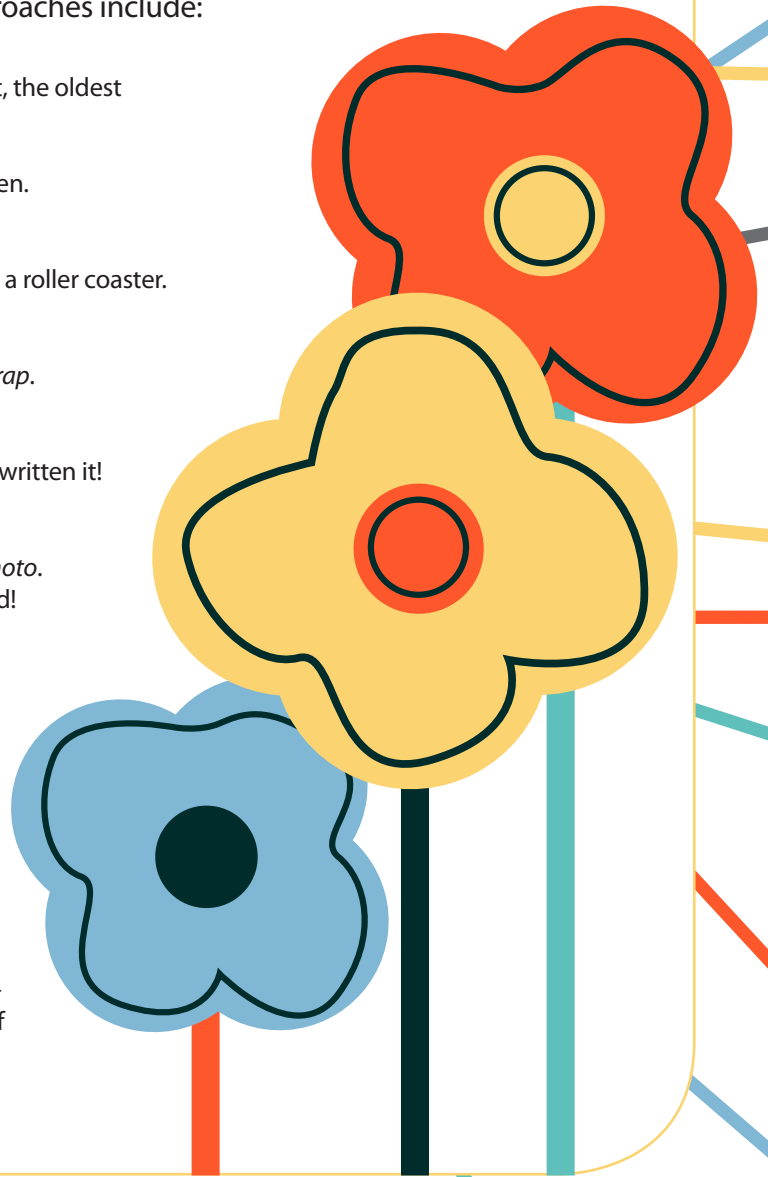
Her house *reminds me of* a magazine photo.
Everything is just so perfectly decorated!

Use a *metaphor*

The garden *is a* kaleidoscope of color.

EXAMPLES:

- From the dock I dive headfirst, skimming over sand that swirls behind me. Anchored to the bottom, upside down, I am an acrobat in a perfect handstand. Then rising in a sea of air-bubble balloons, I float on a carpet of waves. ~ *Up North at the Cabin*
- My lips love the harmonica, cool as water. ~ *The Harmonica*



ADD ACTION VERBS

Verbs are the engine of the sentence— unfortunately, students often utilize the first verb they think of. These include:

go/went

make/made

get/got

do/did

take/took

put

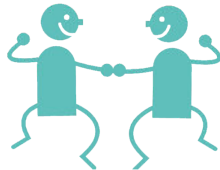
Think of action verbs associated with your topic. Incorporate some of these stronger action verbs. NOTE: Often this will require more than a simple ~~strikeru~~ and substitution. The sentence structure may need to be altered.

ACTION VERBS

run
race
speed



dance
boogie
shaking



jump
hop
bounce



K-1 TEACHERS:

- Teach young writers how to draw people/ subjects in action. This will give them more to label.
- When labeling pictures, be sure students note more than adjectives and nouns (e.g., brown dog, floppy ears, tail). Encourage verb labels, too (e.g., bark, wag).



17

ADD THOUGHT-SHOTS

Character dialogue can become predictable and unimportant. However, insights into a character's thoughts and feelings are always vital. Thought-shots are opportunities to "hear" what a character is thinking but not saying.

EXAMPLES:

- How much? I think, then
I smack the water like
an angry northern pike.
~ *Up North at the Cabin*
- Banana or root beer?
Root beer or banana?
Which one will I
choose?
~ *Root Beer and Banana*

K-1 TEACHERS:

- These thought-shots
are portrayed in
literature and early
children's writing as
thinking bubbles or
thinking clouds above
characters' heads.

What a character thinks ...

What a character senses ...
wonderings, worries
predictions, questions

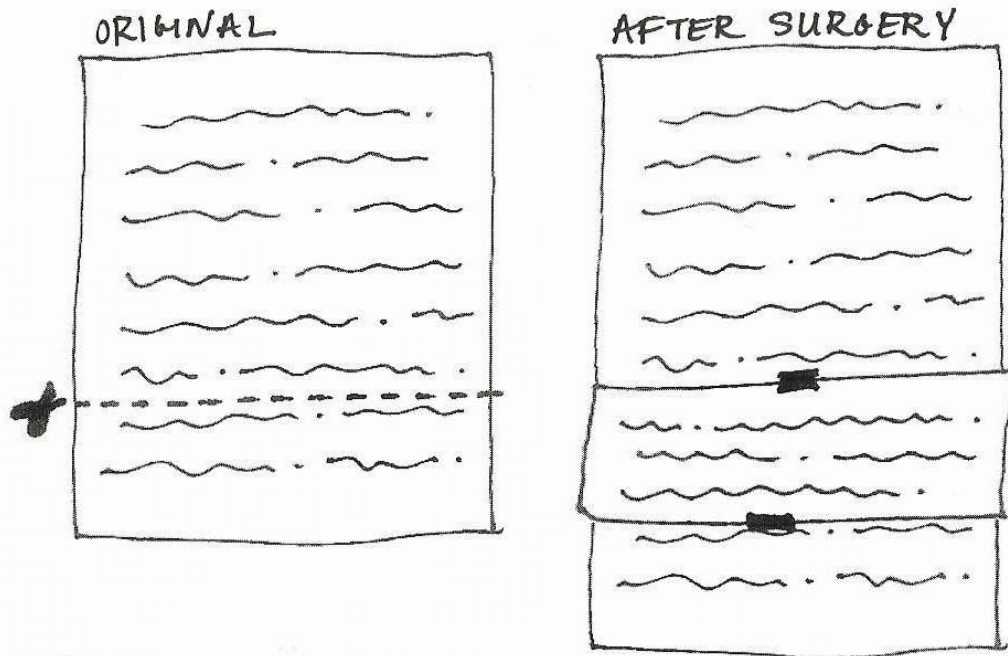
What a character feels ...
feelings, emotions, reactions

18

ADD SLOW-MOTION MOMENTS (SNAPSHOTS)

Find a moment to stop and develop. What's a part worth pausing and developing. Bring a moment to life with sensory descriptions, vivid verbs, figurative language, and so much more!

Create space in your draft for such a revision. This is going to require more than a sentence (spider leg). It will more than likely require a paragraph's worth of space. That said, have the students prepare for "story surgery." With tape and scissors, have them cut open their writing and mess with the guts! While doing so, they will tape in a new "organ" (a half-sheet of paper). This is where they can then develop the slow-motion moment they'd previously identified.



19

ADD THREE-ITEM LISTS

Find a place in the draft where ONE item was mentioned.
Turn it into a three-item series.

THREE NOUN ITEMS

I forked my meat into my mouth.

I forked my meat and corn and potatoes into my mouth.

THREE COLOR DESCRIPTIONS

The jar began to glow green.

The jar began to glow green, then gold, then white as the moon.

THREE ACTIONS

The fireflies just lay there.

The fireflies beat their wings against the glass, and fell to the bottom, and lay there.

NOTE: The second sentence of each example is from Julie Brinckloe's *Fireflies!*

meat and
corn and
potatoes

20

REPEAT A WORD, PHRASE, SENTENCE

To create drama, build momentum, and/or convey importance, use repetition for impact. Repeating a word, phrase, or sentence lets the reader know the writer is building toward something. There is a purpose behind the repetition. Its impact will be felt.

EXAMPLES:

- Pedal... pedal... p-e-d-a-a-l-l-l—
up the next hill and left onto
Almon Street.
~ *Saturdays and Teacakes*

K-1 TEACHERS:

- This “repetition for impact” begins as “recurring lines” in the primary grades. Read favorite literature that has a predictable and repetitive line (e.g., *The Magic Hat*, *Mem Fox*).

