

Using Narrative for Context: Showing a story

Prewriting 2



Situating Your Description in a Story

With narrative you use your story to get a point across. In writing it, you need to throw away the idea of “essay” as a dirty, formal, stifled style of writing. Instead, you:

- ◆ Put on your story writing garb and work to create your story **as close to the moment as possible**.
- ◆ Create immediacy by **writing from a personal perspective**.
- ◆ **Show, don't tell**. Use dialogue, onomatopoeia, and deep description to put your reader in the moment.



Back to That Book

If I'm going to really show you the significance of the book Amy gave me, I might do something like this which **describes the book in the context of the story.**



Outside of the English Building at New Mexico State University, there is a concrete bench where my friends and I often gather to talk. It wasn't unusual that Amy showed up on that day, in fact it would have been more unusual if she hadn't. It was unusual however that she extended her hand to me and said, "Here." Grasped in her fingers was a plastic grocery bag wrapped haphazardly around something. "It's your Christmas present." she smiled. "Early."

I reached through the crinkled bag, smiling at the knowledge that Amy was never good at wrapping presents. At first touch, the woven texture of cloth covering revealed the bag's contents. Before I had pulled the book out, I seemed to smell the dustiness that comes with sitting on a shelf for so long.

The binding on the left was an all-too-bright orange, a remnant of 1929, edged by small wisps of thread loosened over time. The front and back covers were a slate blue. I opened the cover and read, *Elmer Gantry*. I lifted the book to my nose, my right hand still between the cover and the title page; there was the chalkiness of dust, the potent age of mold. "I saw it and had to get it for you. I knew you had to have it."

Amy was beaming.



This book now stands among others dusty with age, bearing the scars of wear, abuse, love. From behind the frayed cloth binding on the outer corners, bland, static cardboard peeks out. Between the "r" and the "y" of Gantry, the remnant of a price tag or sticker speaks of the book's past lives. I imagine Amy, who inscribed the book "To Kelli: From Boston's Brattle Bookstore--Amy," standing in between shelves piled high, noticing these details as I would do when buying a book for her. We, in our different times, see the pages faded to manila, darker around the edges framing the text. We flip through them looking for evidence of previous owners, something more to share with the past. We feel the coarse texture of the paper, a texture so unlike a new book's slick pages. At the end of the novel are listings of the publisher's other new releases. "The Novels Of Grace Livingston Hill" tops a column of titles never read in our English classes. Inside the

back, between the cover and the spine, the netting that provides support and creates durability steals out like a lace undergarment.



Narrative + Description

Can you see how this description not only **tells you about the book, but also shows how it is an emblem of the friendship and similar interests Amy and I share?** I obviously love the book, and she knew I would.

I worked to describe not only the book itself, but also the feelings, attitudes and emotions that go with it.



Tips for Narrative

- As you tell your story, **tell it simply and step-by-step.**
- Use the **details** of what happened, giving them from your perspective.
 - Make sure and **use I/me/my** to put the reader in your point of view
- Don't just explain what you saw, **what did you hear, smell, feel?**
- If someone said something to you, **give it in dialogue.**
 - Not “Mom told me to come here,”
 - Instead, “Come here,” called my mom over the din of the TV and chaos of voices.
- Integrate the descriptions you developed in your first prewriting into your story. Show yourself looking at the object, holding it, etc.



Prewriting 2

Now that you've gotten a lot of descriptive phrases or words down about your object, it's time to describe it. However, you will set your description in the context of a narrative.

So, in your Prewriting 2, write the story or a couple of stories of a time you remember the object. As you tell the story/stories, describe the object.

You should have 2-3 paragraphs.



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