Primary Examples: Description and Narrative

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| **Learning Objective** | **Text Example** | **Commentary** |
| Consolidation of capitalisation of Proper Nouns for characters and places | Any narrative which names characters and/or places e.g. opening sentences which establish settings: ‘The hottest day of the summer so far was drawing to a close and a drowsy silence lay over the large, square houses of Privet Drive’ (*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix)*; choice of names for title characters e.g. Gangsta Granny, Mr Stink (David Walliams), or main protagonists e.g. Miss Trunchbull, Willy Wonka, Violet Beauregarde, Augustus Gloop, (Roald Dahl), or invented or mythical creatures e.g. the Gruffalo, the Jabberwock, Abiyoyo, the Minotaur, the Kraken. | Teaching can draw out what the name of a place or person might suggest about their character, based on word and sound associations, or investigate how choices of Proper Noun can signal historical period or narrative genre. |
| How compound nouns can be used inventively to name objects and people | Names of the giants in Roald Dahl’s *The BFG*: Fleshlumpeater, Manhugger, Maidmasher, Childchewer, Gizzardguzzler, Bloodbottler, Meatdripper  Anglo-Saxon kennings which create metaphorical descriptions e.g.  blood-ember (axe); spear-din (battle); raven harvest (corpse); sleep of the sword (death)  whale’s road (sea); sea-stallion (ship); tree-breaker (wind); wind racers (horses)    Now was the demon-dragon’s chance, and he took it. Seething with war-hatred he opened his bitter jaws and seized the champion by the neck. The serpent’s fangs bit deep into the flesh, and Beowulf’s lifeblood poured from him. (From *Beowulf* by Michael Morpurgo) | New combinations of compound nouns are invented almost daily and usefully illustrate how to build a store of vocabulary that will allow for more specific and precise choices. Drawing attention to the different ways in which compound nouns are formed also illustrates the flexibility of word classes. Typical patterns are:  noun + noun e.g. firewall, Facebook, website  adjective + noun e.g. software, hard drive  adverb + verb e.g. output, download, mashup |
| How adjectives are used to distinguish characters in traditional tales | Any traditional folk tale or fable, e.g. Little Red Riding Hood; The Sleeping Beauty; The Little Mermaid; The Valiant Little Tailor; The Naughty Boy; The Talkative Tortoise etc.  Chinye was a quiet, obedient girl, and she worked as hard as she could to please Nkechi. She got no help from Adanma, who was spoilt and lazy. (From *Chinye* by Obi Onyefulu)  And then, one night, I met an old lady down a dark street. She was frail and alone, an easy victim. Her bag was fat and full, but when I tried to snatch it from her, she held on with the strength of heroes. (From The Promise by Nicola Davies – a contemporary text which draws on the conventions of traditional folk tales) | Traditional tales often use adjectives, singly or in pairs, to form one-dimensional archetypal characterisations e.g. *a handsome prince, a wicked stepmother, a greedy king, a wise old woman.* Teaching can draw attention to placing of adjectives before the noun and after the verb. |
| How noun phrases in apposition can be used to reinforce or emphasise aspects of character | Outside the walls of Heorot in the dim and dark there stalked an **enemy** from hell itself, the **monster** Grendel, sworn **enemy** of God and men alike, a **beast** born of evil and shame. (From *Beowulf* by Michael Morpurgo)  The man swept the hall with terrible **eyes**, wolfish **eyes** that froze the courage in a man’s veins, **eyes** you could not hold with your own. (From *Arthur, High King of Britain* by Michael Morpurgo) | Definitions of nouns as ‘names of people, places or things’ are not always enough for children to locate nouns quickly; teaching can show position within a sentence e.g. preceded by a determiner or at the head of a noun phrase, and the form of the noun e.g. abstract/concrete; singular/plural.  Teaching can show how well-chosen nouns can be more effective in providing descriptive detail than over-use of adjectives. Use of synonyms for nouns from the same lexical field is an important way of creating detail authentic to historical period or narrative genre, and for linking ideas convincingly. |
| How noun phrase choices provide descriptive detail of settings and create narrative cohesion | He rode through the dripping trees, crossed a stream and came to a grassy mound. Near the mound stood a small chapel, the roof and walls all as green as the surrounding grass. From somewhere inside the mound itself, Gawain could hear the axe still being sharpened. (from From *Arthur, High King of Britain* by Michael Morpurgo)  I planted beside roads, on roundabouts, among rubble, ruins and rusty railings, train tracks, tramlines and traffic lights. In abandoned parks and gardens laced with broken glass. Behind factories and shopping malls, at bus stops, cafes, blocks of flats. (From *The Promise* by Nicola Davies) |
| How noun phrases support visual descriptions of characters | The man I found at my side was a head taller than I was. When he put back the hood of his dark cloak, I saw his face, parchment-silver and etched with age. His hair was long to his shoulders and shone silver in the sun. (From *Arthur, High King of Britain* by Michael Morpurgo)  Her name was Mrs Pratchett. She was a small skinny old hag with a moustache on her upper lip and a mouth as sour as a green gooseberry. (From *Boy* by Roald Dahl) | Useful constructions for adding post-modified detail include:   * adjectives placed after the noun * relative clauses starting with a relative pronoun (e.g. who, which, that, whose) * a prepositional phrase starting ‘with…’ * a subordinate clause * similes |
| How noun phrases, especially with post-modification, generate descriptive detail of characters | He wore round glasses held together with a lot of Scotch tape because of all the times Dudley had punched him on the nose. The only thing Harry liked about his appearance was a very thin scar on his forehead which was shaped like a bolt of lightning. (From *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* by J.K.Rowling)  The mere sight of her grimy right hand with its black fingernails digging an ounce of Chocolate Fudge out of the jar would have caused a starving tramp to go running from the shop. (From *Boy* by Roald Dahl) |
| How noun phrases create descriptions which help readers to infer character | At that moment, from outside in the courtyard, came the clatter of horses’ hooves on the cobbles. The doors of the hall flew open, and before I had time to call for them to be closed, a giant of a man rode in on a towering warhorse that pawed the ground, sides lathered up, tossing its fine head, snorting its fury. But it was not the man’s eyes that amazed us most, it was not his size either - and I tell you I’d never in my life set eyes on a bigger man – no. It was the colour of him. Green, the man was green from head to foot.  (From *Arthur, High King of Britain* by Michael Morpurgo) | Teaching can bring out how noun phrase detail is used to ‘show not tell’ information about characters and to firmly link reading and writing processes, by focusing on the ‘clues’ we use to make inferences when we read and how as writers we can lay a trail of similar clues for our reader. |

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| How verbs can establish character by showing what characters do | At that moment, from outside in the courtyard, came the clatter of horses’ hooves on the cobbles. The doors of the hall flew open, and before I had time to call for them to be closed, a giant of a man rode in on a towering warhorse that pawed the ground, sides lathered up, tossing its fine head, snorting its fury. The man swept the hall with terrible eyes, wolfish eyes that froze the courage in a man’s veins, eyes you could not hold with your own. (From *Arthur, High King of Britain* by Michael Morpurgo) | Teaching might bring out the descriptive power of well-chosen lexical verbs that make the use of adverbs redundant. |
| How minor sentences (all noun phrases) create a frozen moment in time and focus attention on the description | “Hold your noise!” cried a terrible voice, as a man started up from among the graves at the side of the church porch. “Keep still, you little devil, or I’ll cut your throat”  A fearful man, all in coarse grey, with a great iron on his leg. A man with no hat, and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied round his head. A man who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and cut by flints, and stung by nettles, and torn by briars; who limped and shivered, and glared and growled; and whose teeth chattered in his head as he seized me by the chin.  (From *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens)  I found him in the garage on a Sunday afternoon...Nobody else was there. Just me.  (From *Skellig* by David Almond) | Minor sentences do not have a finite verb - compare ‘A fearful man...with a great iron on his leg’ with ‘He was a fearful man...with a great iron on his leg’ or ‘A man who limped and shivered’ which is a subordinate clause, with ‘He limped and shivered’, which are co-ordinated main clauses. Without attention paid to the role of the verb in forming a clause, children can be misled by the idea that a main clause ‘makes sense on its own’ and a subordinate clause ‘doesn’t make sense on its own’. |
| How noun phrases can create evocative images | I will put in the box...  the swish of a silk sari on a summer night,  fire from the nostrils of a Chinese dragon,  the tip of a tongue touching a tooth... (from *The Magic Box* by Kit Wright)  He has knobbly knees and turned-out toes and a poisonous wart on the end of his nose. His eyes are orange, his tongue is black, he’s got purple prickles all over his back. Oh help! Oh no! It’s a Gruffalo! (from *The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson) | Text examples like these offer scope for combining literary and linguistic analysis, for example by drawing attention to word choices within the noun phrase that appeal to the senses or that sound appealing because of the use of alliteration and rhyme. |
| How prepositional phrases can establish a clear picture of a setting | I found him **in** the garage **on** a Sunday afternoon...He was lying there **in** the darkness **behind** the tea chests, **in** the dust and dirt (From *Skellig* by David Almond)  I planted **beside** roads, **on** roundabouts, **among** rubble, ruins and rusty railings, train tracks, tramlines and traffic lights. **In** abandoned parks and gardens laced **with** broken glass. **Behind** factories and shopping malls, **at** bus stops, cafes, blocks of flats. (From *The Promise* by Nicola Davies)  Silver eel waits for a night that is moonless, when the rain **from** the mountains has flooded the stream. Then he slips **down** the river, **down** to the seashore. (From *Think of an Eel* by Karen Wallace) | Prepositional phrases provide detail that can be part of a noun phrase, relating back to the noun and functioning like an adjective e.g. *the* ***darkness*** *behind the tea chests*; *the rain from the mountains*. They also provide adverbial detail, relating back to the verb e.g. *I* ***found*** *him in the garage; I* ***planted*** *beside roads*. They are therefore an important way of making writing ‘more detailed’ or ‘more descriptive’. Teaching can build a store of prepositions and experiment with positioning prepositional phrases differently within a sentence. |
| How subject verb inversion in sentences alters the emphasis in a sentence for plot effects | And, to my amazement, up out of the lake came a shining sword, a hand holding it, and an arm in a white silk sleeve. (From *Arthur, High King of Britain* by Michael Morpurgo)  Outside the walls of Heorot in the dim and dark there stalked an enemy from hell itself, the monster Grendel, sworn enemy of God and men alike, a beast born of evil and shame. (From *Beowulf* by Michael Morpurgo) | Teaching might draw attention to moments in a text when ‘normal’ word order is subverted, and speculate about the writer’s intentions. Subject verb inversion is more common in older texts or the genre of myth, and legend, as here, where it helps to ‘elevate’ the importance of actions or to suggest an air of magic and mystery. |
| How varied sentence rhythms can draw attention to the narration of an episode and create a hook for the reader | The Iron Man came to the top of the cliff. How far had he walked? Nobody knows. Where did he come from? Nobody knows. How was he made? Nobody knows. Taller than a house, the Iron Man stood at the top of the cliff, on the very brink, in the darkness. The wind sang through his iron fingers. His great iron head, shaped like a dustbin but as big as a bedroom, slowly turned to the right, slowly turned to the left. His iron ears turned, this way, that way. He was hearing the sea. His eyes, like headlamps, glowed white, then red, then infra-red, searching the sea. Never before had the Iron Man seen the sea.  (From *The Iron Man* by Ted Hughes) | One purpose of manipulating sentence lengths and types is to create distinctive textual rhythms that might emphasise ideas or alter the pace of reading, for example:   * the opening pattern of questions and short statements to withhold information about the Iron Man’s identity and suggest a sense of mystery; * successive short phrases and clauses separated with commas to mirror the movement of the Iron Man’s eyes; * the subject verb inversion in the final sentence, typical of folk tales, myths and legends, so helping to establish genre |
| How short sentences can create emphasis or anticipation in developing a plotline | I was just pushing the lower half of the ladder back up when I heard it. There was someone at the front door. I held my breath. It was OK. They couldn’t get in. I slid my hand into my pocket to make sure the key was still there. It wasn’t. I’d left it in the front door. I could hear it turning in the lock now. I raced back up the ladder and hauled it after me. When I reached down to pull the hatch back up, I could hear someone coming up the stairs. I quickly pulled the hatch back into place and scrabbled over to the water tank, holding my breath. (From *Millions* by Frank Cottrell Boyce) | Note that ‘short sentences’ can have one clause (*I held my breath*.) or more than one clause (*I could hear it turning in the lock now*.) Short sentences can be presented as an ‘automatic’ way of increasing narrative tension but text examples like this offer scope for open-ended discussion of choices and effects about how well they ‘work’ in creating suspense. |
| How choice of past or present tense in narratives establishes different viewpoint/narration | Charlie is taking me by the hand, leading me because he knows I don’t want to go. I’ve never worn a collar before and it’s choking me. My boots are strange and heavy on my feet. My heart is heavy too, because I dread what I am going to. Charlie has told me often  how terrible this school-place is: about Mr Munnings and his raging tempers and the long whipping cane he hangs on the wall above his desk. I don’t want to go with Charlie. I don’t want to go to school. (From *Private Peaceful* by Michael Morpurgo)  I arrived at the school just three feet tall and fatly wrapped in my scarves. The playground roared like a rodeo, and the potato burned through my thigh. Old boots, ragged stockings, torn trousers and skirts went skating and skidding around me. The rabble closed in; I was encircled; grit flew in my face like shrapnel. (From *Cider with Rosie* by Laurie Lee) | Children might need support to find the finite verbs (underlined in these examples) that dictate present or past tense, and the pronouns that dictate voice (underlined in second use of example from *Cider with Rosie*). There is scope for experiments in changing from one tense to another and evaluating effects, and from changing narrative voice and viewpoint e.g. by switching from first to third person. Children might need support to move from ‘formulaic’ responses (e.g. ‘present tense is like it’s still happening’; ‘first person is like it’s happening to you’) to consider specific contexts and purposes, which might be modelled through questions e.g. ‘What details does he notice because he’s a small child and not an adult?’ |
| How choice of first, second or third person voice in narrative openings alters narrative voice and viewpoint | I arrived at the school just three feet tall and fatly wrapped in my scarves. The playground roared like a rodeo, and the potato burned through my thigh. Old boots, ragged stockings, torn trousers and skirts went skating and skidding around me. The rabble closed in; I was encircled; grit flew in my face like shrapnel. (From *Cider with Rosie* by Laurie Lee) |
| How co-ordinated clauses are used to link events and actions in a story | Nkechi and Adanma **screamed** and **clutched** each other. A lion **roared** and Chinye **was** scared... She **smashed** open the gourd but it **was** empty. (From *Chinye* by Obi Onyefulu and Evie Safarewicz)  They **punched** and **kicked** and **scratched** and **bit** and **butted** each other as hard as they could...He **rolled** and **wiggled**, he **fought** and he **figgled**, he **squirmed** and he **squiggled**...  The giants **roared** and **screamed** and **cursed**, and for many minutes the noise of battle **rolled** across the yellow plain. (From *The BFG* by Roald Dahl)  Crisp snow **sparkled** in icy stars beneath her huge paws and all the while she **sang**.  They **came** with fire and fear, and the villagers **fled**. (From *The Snow Leopard* by Jackie Morris) | Deliberate use of co-ordinated conjunctions (and, but, or) to link clauses is very different from uncontrolled chaining together of ideas. Teaching might bring out the use of ‘and’ in *Chinye* to join closely linked events or actions and the use of ‘but’ to signal an unexpected event; in the examples from *The BFG*, the use of ‘and’ to create humour through exaggeration.  In *The Snow Leopard*, the number of clauses co-ordinated with ‘and’ reflects that this text is a simple narrative, a myth. The ‘and’ joins sequences of narrative events. |
| How a pattern of three co-ordinated clauses creates a strong rhythm in a text; use of ‘and’ and comma to substitute ‘and’ | ...and the cat stirred, rose and leapt high into the high, wild mountains with the child clinging tight on her back.  And back in the mountains, the young Snow Leopard looked up at the stars mirrored in her blue cat’s eyes, heard the whisper – and began a new song. (From *The Snow Leopard* by Jackie Morris) | The pattern of three clauses again is suggestive of myth and creates strong textual rhythms – particularly satisfying when used in the final sentence, a good signal that the story has ended.  Note the rhetorical use of ‘And’ to begin the final sentence; another signal of an ending. |
| How subordinate clauses are used to suggest simultaneous actions in a narrative | When I reached down to pull the hatch back up, I could hear someone coming up the stairs. I quickly pulled the hatch back into place and scrabbled over to the water tank, holding my breath. (From *Millions* by Frank Cottrell Boyce) | Teaching can draw attention to placing of subordinate clauses in different positions with the sentence and how this might affect which actions are emphasised or prioritised. |
| How non-finite clauses can add strong visual images of a character or setting | High above the hidden valley, her song clothed the world in white and built a crackling fortress of snow, **buttressed with ice**, to keep all things safe and secret.  High in the mountains the scared cat walked alone, **cloaked in her shadow-dappled fur**. | The non-finite clauses are strongly descriptive and a concise way to write. They are all additional information that could be removed, so we can see that the writer has added extra detail, appealing especially to how we picture the scene. |