

**Grammar for Writing: Teaching Activities**

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| **Writing Learning Focus:** | * How Dickens creates a sense, on our first introduction to Magwitch, that he is both terrifying and deserving of sympathy.
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| **Grammar Learning Focus:** | * How character can be established through noun phrases (and minor sentences)
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| **Context:** | The text extract here comes from the opening chapter when Pip first meets Magwitch: from Pip’s perspective, Magwitch is terrifying but Dickens conveys a more ambivalent perspective for the reader. At the end of the novel, of course, Pip and Magwitch are very close, and Magwitch a sympathetic character. The use of detailed noun phrases to establish character, especially through the ‘Show not Tell’ technique, is very common in narrative fiction. |
| **Let’s Talk!**Give the opening discussion enough time to allow students to explore their first impressions.In the whole class discussion:* Check they understand these are minor sentences, which are each a noun phrase (with *man* as the head noun). There is no main verb.
* Extend understanding by noting the passives in the third sentence (*had been… soaked/smothered/lamed* etc), grammatically positioning him as victim/done unto.
* Invite students to note the contrasting verbs: those which depict his discomfort, or vulnerability, (*limped; shivered; chattered*) with verbs which suggest aggression (*glared; growled; seized*).
 | **Activity Outline:**Whole class: share the reading of the opening and gather first impressions of Pip and Magwitch.Teacher: display the text extract, and re-read it, and note that this moment is both Pip’s first sight of Magwitch and ours as reader.Pairs: highlight in red all words or images which suggest Magwitch is to be feared, and in blue all words or images which suggest Magwitch is a victim/in discomfort. Teacher: take feedback and display the text extract with red and blue colours.Whole class: look at the three noun phrases Dickens uses to present Magwitch. What does the first NP convey? (he is an escaped prisoner/to be feared?) What does the second NP suggest? (poor; in a bad condition?) What does the third NP suggest? (he has had unpleasant things happen to him? But also he is frightening?) Foster discussion about whether Magwitch is a good or bad character, and how Dickens establishes this.Individual: using allocated visual image of a character, develop a description which clearly establishes their character, thinking carefully about how the choice of noun phrases supports this description.Pairs: read each other’s descriptions and explain to each other what language choices you have made and how these choices establish the character | **Text example:**  from *Great Expectations**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.* |