

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## STORY CRITICAL CHARACTERS, SETTINGS, OBJECTS

In every story there are certain people, places and things that are especially important. These are called **story critical characters, settings and objects**. Authors highlight these story critical characters, settings and objects by stopping and taking time to **describe** them. Read each story plan below. Think about the characters, settings and objects that would be most interesting to the reader.

**Underline story critical characters in RED, settings in BLUE, and objects in GREEN.**

1. One day Jake took out his sailboat when a storm blew in and the mast broke. He was stuck out on the water for hours.

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2. This is a story about meeting my new baby sister for the first time. I went to the hospital and brought her a big stuffed teddy bear.

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3. I took a trip to a beautiful rain forest. I met a most unusual creature there. It shared a piece of amazing tropical fruit with me.

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4. One autumn day I strolled along a country road collecting colorful fallen leaves.

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5. I baked some delicious chocolate chip cookies with my grandmother in her cozy kitchen.

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## IRRELEVANT DETAILS

Remember, authors use elaborative detail to describe **story critical** characters, settings and objects. Read this story section below. This author has used description ineffectively. Cross out the describing words that do not add to the effectiveness of the writing. Underline the story critical characters, settings and/or objects that the author **should have** described in greater detail in an elaborative segment with vivid specific details.

I put on my nice red jacket and started up the mountainside. The grass was green and the sky was blue. After about an hour of steady hiking I paused and looked behind me. The view from the mountain was unbelievable! I was certainly far from the places I usually explored! I took a deep breath and continued to climb. Thank goodness for my brown leather hiking boots! Just then I saw the opening to a cave. I took out my gray metal binoculars and took a look. It would be cool to go in there, I thought. I crept inside and turned on my red plastic flashlight. The cave was spooky! But, what was that in the corner? It was a skeleton next to a big trunk. The skeleton seemed to be moving!

**CHALLENGE:** Find an elaborative detail segment in a book you are reading or have read. Discuss the segment with a partner. Use these questions to guide your discussion: What story critical element was described? How did the author describe it? Pick out the specific description. Did he/she use just color or size words? How does elaborative detail make a story entertaining to read?

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### GENERAL OR SPECIFIC?

Read each pair of descriptions below. Circle the example in each pair that uses effective specific detail rather than overly general detail. Which description shows you more? Which is more entertaining?

1. She wore a really pretty fancy cape.  
A cape of purple velvet trimmed in soft white fur covered her shoulders.
2. The dog had a luxurious reddish coat, long silky ears, and alert black eyes.  
It was a nice, awesome dog that looked so cute.
3. The field was covered in tall golden grass and dotted with red and blue wildflowers.  
The view across the big field was very beautiful and nice.
4. The cake looked really good and delicious to eat.  
The double chocolate cake dripped in thick white frosting.
5. A cute little bird perched there on the brown branch of the tree.  
A small green bird with bluish wings and a delicate yellow beak perched on the branch.
6. The shutters hung crookedly and the windows were shattered.  
Faded paint peeled around the rickety front stairs.  
The old house was really a mess and looked like it needed some attention.
7. What an interesting looking old man over there!  
The old fellow had a long white beard and bushy silver eyebrows curled in arcs above his golden colored eyes.

**BONUS:** Go back and read each GENERAL description. Underline the overly general adjectives that the author used ineffectively.

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## STORY CRITICAL CHARACTERS, SETTINGS, OBJECTS

In every story there are certain people, places, and things that are especially important. These are called story critical characters, settings, objects. Authors highlight these **story critical characters, settings, and objects** by stopping and taking time to **describe** these. The author uses specific detail to describe a story critical character, setting, or object. Read the elaborative segments below and tell if the author is highlighting a **character, setting, or object**. Circle the appropriate elements.

1. Then one sunny day, Albert stuck his hand out the window, and the next thing he knew, a twig appeared in it. Albert looked around in surprise. A cardinal flew by and dropped in another twig. And then there were two cardinals and both of them were dropping twig after twig. Albert watched, dumbfounded, as his now cupped hand filled to the brim. The cardinals fluttered and fussed and poked and pulled. They heaped grasses into the center of the twigs. Finally, the female shaped the nest to fit her breast and settled in.

From Albert by Donna Jo Napoli, 2001, Voyager Books, Harcourt, Inc., San Diego, CA, 92101

**Character**

**Setting**

**Object**

*(The author could have said: "The birds built a nest." Would that have been as effective?)*

2. The man looked about and saw the sun streaming through the canopy. Spots of bright light glowed like jewels amidst the dark green forest. Strange and beautiful plants seemed to dangle in the air, suspended from the Kapok tree. The man smelled the fragrant perfume of their flowers. He felt the steamy mist rising from the forest floor. But he heard no sound, for the creatures were strangely silent.

From The Great Kapok Tree by Lynne Cherry, 1990, Voyager Books, Harcourt, Inc., San Diego, CA, 92101

**Character**

**Setting**

**Object**

*(The author could have said: "I was in the rainforest." Would that have been as effective?)*

3. Gerald was a tall giraffe whose neck was long and slim. But his knees were awfully crooked and his legs were rather thin.

From Giraffes Can't Dance by Giles Andreae, 1999, Scholastic, Inc., NY, NY 10012

**Character**

**Setting**

**Object**

*(The author could have said: "I saw a giraffe." Would that have been as effective?)*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### COWBOY

**REMEMBER:** • When you elaborate, you STOP THE ACTION and observe.

- Use the five senses to describe!
- Your elaborative segment should make the reader feel as though he or she is right there with the main character.
- Use specific rather than general details.
- Remember that sentence variety is important!

Write an ELABORATIVE SEGMENT of the **character** below. Tell SPECIFICALLY what he/she looked like, (kind/color hair, what he/she wore, and other remarkable characteristics). Do NOT write a grocery list. Use interesting words and make it entertaining!

I stared at the cowboy/cowgirl in the corral.

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

**ELABORATIVE DETAIL (1)**

Read this descriptive segment below. The author uses elaborative detail to describe this story critical **character**. The sensory information allows the reader to see, hear, and experience this character right along with the main character.

• *And then the dog came running around the corner. He was a big dog. And ugly. And he looked like he was having a real good time. His tongue was hanging out and he was wagging his tail. He skidded to a stop and smiled right at me. I had never before in my life seen a dog smile, but that is what he did. He pulled back his lips and showed me all his teeth.*

*Once we were safe outside, I checked him over real careful and he didn't look that good. He was big, but skinny; you could see his ribs. And there were bald patches all over him, places where he didn't have any fur at all. Mostly, he looked like a big piece of old brown carpet that had been left out in the rain. (The author asked, "What size? What kind/color fur? What did it remind you of?)*

From: Because of Winn Dixie by Kate DiCamillo, 2000, Candlewick Press, Somerville, MA

Read the passage above and think about the kinds of detail-generating questions the author would have to ask himself or herself in order to generate this type of detail. On the lines below, write your questions.

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**CHALLENGE:** Think about a dog you know. It could be your dog or someone else's. On a separate piece of paper write an elaborative detail segment describing this dog. Use the following questions to help generate specific detail.

- How big/small is the dog?
- What kind/color fur? What condition is the fur in?
- What kind/color eyes?
- What kind of tail, ears, mouth?
- What other markings are on the canine?
- What expression does it make?
- Anything unusual about the dog?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### ELABORATIVE DETAIL (2)

Read this descriptive segment below. The author uses elaborative detail to describe this story critical **setting**. The sensory information allows the reader to see, hear, and experience this setting right along with the main character:

- *Jack opened his eyes. Sunlight slanted through the window. The tree house was still high up in a tree. But it wasn't the same tree. "Where are we?" said Annie. She and Jack looked out the window. The Pteranodon was soaring through the sky. The ground was covered with ferns and tall grass. There was a winding stream, a sloping hill, and volcanos in the distance. The valley below was filled with nests – big nests made out of mud. The nests were filled with tiny dinosaurs!.*

From: Dinosaurs Before Dark by Mary Pope Osborne, 1992, Random House, NY, NY

Read the passage above and think about the kinds of detail-generating questions the author would have to ask himself or herself in order to generate this type of detail. On the lines below, write your questions.

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**CHALLENGE:** : Imagine landing in a foreign setting. Notice all of the details. Write an elaborative detail segment of this strange setting. Make sure the reader will be able to visualize the whole scene. Use the following questions to help generate specific detail.

- What kind of plants? Size, shape, color?
- What kinds of animals? Size, color?
- What sounds do you hear?
- What makes the setting unusual?
- What other interesting elements do you see, hear, or smell?

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### ELABORATIVE DETAIL (3)

Read this descriptive segment below. The author uses elaborative detail to describe this story critical **object**. The sensory information allows the reader to see, hear, and experience this object right along with the main character.

- *On foggy mornings, Charlotte’s web was truly a thing of beauty. This morning each strand was decorated with dozens of tiny beads of water. The web glistened in the light and made a pattern of loveliness and mystery, like a delicate veil. Even Lurvy, who wasn’t particularly interested in beauty, noticed the web when he came with the pig’s breakfast. He noted how clearly it showed up and he noted how big and carefully built it was. Ant then he took another look and he saw something that made him set his pail down. There, in the center of the web, neatly woven in block letters, was a message. It said: **SOME PIG!***
- From: Charlotte’s Web by E.B. White, Scholastic, Inc. 1952, NY, NY

Read the passage above and think about the kinds of detail-generating questions the author would have to ask himself or herself in order to generate this type of detail. On the lines below, write your questions.

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**CHALLENGE:** Think about describing a spider web. Notice all of the details. Write an elaborative detail segment of the web. Make sure the reader will be able to visualize the whole object. Use the following questions to help generate specific detail.

- How big/small is the web?
- What does it remind you of?
- What color is the web?
- What kind of design is in the web?
- What shape?
- What other interesting elements do you see?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**ELABORATIVE DETAIL - MAKE-IT-YOUR-OWN TEMPLATE**

Select a passage of elaborative detail from a book you are reading, and write it on the lines below. The author uses elaborative detail to bring this ordinary character, setting or object to life and make it real. The sensory information allows the reader to see and experience this critical element right along with the main character.

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Now, think about the questions the author must have asked himself in order to compose this descriptive passage. Write the questions on the lines below.

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## FLIP THE SENTENCE SUBJECT! (1)

**REMEMBER:** In order for your writing to be interesting you must use good sentence variety. That means that each sentence should begin a bit differently. One way to break up a “broken record” of redundant sentence structure is by “flipping the sentence subject.”

**DIRECTIONS:** Look at the sample sentence revision. Then, try your hand at revising the other redundant sentences using this technique. Think of a better word than the helping verbs “was” or “were.”

**EXAMPLE:** *The swing set was in the corner of the playground.*  
*In the corner of the playground sat the swing set.*  
*In the corner of the school playground, sat the metal swing set.*

Now it’s your turn. Revise this sentence by “flipping the sentence” and using a more interesting verb. **BONUS:** Add several describing words for more interesting sentence variety.

1. *There was a slide on the playground.*

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2. *There was a climbing structure in the middle of the playground.*

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3. *There were monkey bars across the side of the playground.*

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4. *There was a fort on top of the climbing bars.*

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**BONUS:** Turn and talk with a partner and discuss what the sentences are describing. Then, discuss other items that would be found in the same setting. How would you include those items in the description and add sentence variety.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## FLIP THE SENTENCE SUBJECT! (2)

**REMEMBER:** In order for your writing to be interesting you must use good sentence variety. That means that each sentence should begin a bit differently. One way to break up a “broken record” of redundant sentence structure is by “flipping the sentence subject.”

**DIRECTIONS:** Look at the sample sentence revision. Then, try your hand at revising the other redundant sentences using this technique. Think of a better word than the helping verbs “was” or “were.”

**EXAMPLE:** *The hockey player wore a helmet.*  
*A helmet protected the hockey player’s head.*  
*A bright blue helmet with a chin strap protected the hockey player’s head.*

Now it’s your turn. Revise this sentence by “flipping the sentence” and using a more interesting verb. **BONUS:** Add several describing words for more interesting sentence variety.

1. *He wore hockey skates.*

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2. *He had a jersey on.*

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3. *He wore a helmet.*

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4. *He had a hockey stick.*

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**BONUS:** Turn and talk with a partner and discuss what the sentences are describing. Then, discuss other items that the character would have. How would you include those items in the description and add sentence variety.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## FLIP THE SENTENCE SUBJECT! (3)

**REMEMBER:** In order for your writing to be interesting you must use good sentence variety. That means that each sentence should begin a bit differently. One way to break up a “broken record” of redundant sentence structure is by “flipping the sentence subject.”

**DIRECTIONS:** Look at the sample sentence revision. Then, try your hand at revising the other redundant sentences using this technique. Think of a better word than the helping verbs “was” or “were.”

**EXAMPLE:** *She had a backpack on her back.*

*A backpack was strapped on her back.*

*A large, brightly colored backpack was strapped on her back.*

Now it’s your turn. Revise this sentence by “flipping the sentence” and using a more interesting verb. **BONUS:** Add several describing words for more interesting sentence variety.

1. *The backpack had lots of pockets.*

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2. *It had pictures of my favorite character on it.*

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3. *It had straps.*

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4. *It had lots of space inside.*

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**BONUS:** Turn and talk with a partner and discuss what the sentences are describing. Then, discuss other items that would be in the backpack. How would you include those items in the description and add sentence variety.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## SHOWING RATHER THAN TELLING HOW CHARACTERS FEEL

Showing how a story character feels allows the reader to get to know that character better and to empathize with and relate to the character. Sometimes authors will simply tell how the character feels. This is not as entertaining or as powerful as “showing” those feelings. Read each pair of story segments below. Circle the example that SHOWS rather than TELLS.

1. Carmen was sad.

or....

Carmen hung her head. Her eyes filled with tears and her lip began to quiver.

2. Brooks was excited.

or...

Brooks jumped up and down with a huge smile on his face. His eyes were big and wide. He took off running around the bases, clapping high fives as he went.

3. Derek was cold.

or...

Derek stamped his feet and blew into his hands. His fingers were covered with his shirt and you could see his lips turning blue.

4. Hannah was bored.

or...

Hannah sat in the chair with her face pressed against the window staring at the rain. Her eyes were half closed as she pouted and slumped down further. Her voice was whining as she asked her mom to play a game.

**CHALLENGE: Turn and Talk:** Discuss with a partner each example of how the author “SHOWS” the emotion. Why is this more powerful than simply telling? Pantomime a feeling for your partner and guess each others.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## SHOWING OR TELLING?

Read each story segment below. If the author SHOWS the character's feelings, write an "S" in the blank. If the author just TELLS the character's feelings, write a "T" in the blank.

1. \_\_\_\_ I stared down at my shoes, afraid that if I looked up I might cry. My face was red and I wanted to hide inside my hoodie.
2. \_\_\_\_ Ryan took a deep breath, blew it out and tried to stop her shaking legs. She closed her eyes and plunged into the water from the high dive.
3. \_\_\_\_ Before I knew it I was boiling mad.
4. \_\_\_\_ Sebastian went into the room, and was sad when his best friend was nowhere to be found.
5. \_\_\_\_ Gabe grinned from ear to ear as he realized his best friend was on his team.
6. \_\_\_\_ Manuel stepped back and gasped as his friends hopped out from behind the furniture to yell, "Surprise!"
7. \_\_\_\_ When Angel realized he had completed the race with the fastest time, he was excited.
8. \_\_\_\_ Sweat dripped down Kiara's face and she wiped her brow with her sleeve. Her face was a bright shade of red and she was panting in the heat.
9. \_\_\_\_ I stopped in my tracks and peered into the bushes. My heart beat faster and I felt a shiver run down my spine.
10. \_\_\_\_ Zendaya was impatient as she waited at the crosswalk for the light to turn green.

**BONUS:** Go back to each "S" example. Write the feeling after the sentence. Go back to each "T" example. Show the feeling rather than telling. Write your revision after the sentence.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**BEFORE AND AFTER REVISION ACTIVITY (1) -  
ELABORATIVE DETAIL**

Read this description of how the character in a novel is feeling. It tells rather than shows. It is BORING!

**Joey was really shocked!**

Revise this by **SHOWING** rather than **TELLING**. Be sure to describe his facial expression, body language, and even any sounds he made.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**BEFORE AND AFTER REVISION ACTIVITY (2) -  
ELABORATIVE DETAIL**

Read this description of how the character in a novel is feeling. It tells rather than shows. It is BORING!

**Travis was sad when his team lost the competition.**

Revise this by SHOWING rather than TELLING. Be sure to describe his facial expression, body language, and even any sounds he made.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**BEFORE AND AFTER REVISION ACTIVITY (3) -  
ELABORATIVE DETAIL**

Read this description of how the character in a novel is feeling. It tells rather than shows. It is BORING!

**Kiya was excited about her visit with Grandma.**

Revise this by SHOWING rather than TELLING. Be sure to describe her facial expression, body language, and even any sounds she made.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**BEFORE AND AFTER REVISION ACTIVITY (4) -  
ELABORATIVE DETAIL**

Read this description of how the character in a novel is feeling. It tells rather than shows. It is BORING!

**Elliot was tired from the long car ride.**

Revise this by **SHOWING** rather than **TELLING**. Be sure to describe his facial expression, body language, and even any sounds he made.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Joining the Crèche

Beneath the clear skies of Antarctica, a crowd of handsome black and white penguins gathered on a big, slick glacier and chattered amongst themselves. In the midst of the group, young Paulo Penguin stood close to his parents. They'd just fed him a fine, fishy meal and it was time for his nap. He was looking forward to cuddling up between his mom and dad, and resting in the warmth and safety of their presence.

Paulo yawned and felt an icy, refreshing breeze blow over his head. He looked out at the white icebergs floating in the deep, blue seas. How he loved his home here in this snowy land, where thousands of penguins lived and played together in harmony. He looked forward to the days when he could dive into the dark depths of the ocean to catch his own dinner. When he was ready, it would be great fun to slide on his belly along slippery, smooth ice with a group of friends — and he was almost ready. Paulo was no longer a tiny chick. He was growing up.

He called for his parents to let them know he was ready for his nap, just as he'd done since he was the tiniest of chicks. But today he was surprised by his mother's reply.

"Today, you'll nap with the crèche." She said.

The crèche? He knew that he was destined to join the crèche soon, but today? Were his parents sure he was ready? Joining the loud, squawking, frolicking group of young penguins in the crèche seemed like such a big step, exciting and scary at the same time. It looked like it might be fun, but Paulo had to wonder if it was safe. After all, there was only one adult penguin in charge of the entire crèche while parents wandered off in search of food.

In the blink of an eye, his mind was filled with images of danger: a black and white whale suddenly rearing his toothy head from the water and snatching up a snack of tender, young penguin, or the great big bird called the skua soaring down from the sky to feast on him. He shuddered at the thought.

(continued)

Moments later, his thoughts took another turn. Paulo was eager to make friends with the other growing chicks, but what if no other penguin wanted to be his friend? Imagining himself alone in the crowded crèche filled his heart with panic. Also, what if his parents couldn't recognize him in the group? It was possible, he feared, since all penguins looked so much alike.

Just then, his mother hopped over. It was like she could read his mind. "You'll be fine, Paulo" she assured him. "More than fine. You'll have fun."

"Are you sure?" Paulo wailed, wringing his flippers with worry. For a moment, he wished that he was a newborn penguin chick once again, tucked safely in the shadow of his parents.

His mom nodded and the two hopped off to join the crèche. After his mom said goodbye, a tall adult penguin directed him toward a huddle of sleeping chicks. Still nervous, he didn't think he'd be able to sleep, but in no time at all, he was peacefully slumbering in the middle of the crowd, his head resting on the fluffy, gray feathers of another young penguin. It was almost as cozy as sleeping between his mom and dad. Paulo woke up feeling rested and frisky. So did the other penguins! Putting a pleasant smile on his beak, Paulo introduced himself to another friendly penguin and the two of them hopped off to find some fun in a nearby cove. Other penguins joined them as they belly flopped into the water and splashed around happily, while the alert adult penguin looked over them. Paulo knew she'd squawk an alert if any dangerous animals came close, so he felt safe. He was having so much fun, he didn't realize that it had grown late.

When Paulo saw other penguin parents arrive to pick up their young for the night, he suddenly missed his own dynamic black and white duo. Surely his mom and dad would be here soon, he thought. He told himself not to worry, but as the minutes ticked by, it was hard not to. Were his parents having trouble finding him in this crowd? Had they confused him with another penguin chick? As the minutes went by, he wondered if they'd simply forgotten about him.

(continued)

Suddenly an unmistakable call rang out, the shrill caw of his dad! He let out a shriek of joy and hopped over to his father, who was waving a wing in the distance.

“I had a great time,” he said.

“I knew you would,” his dad declared and together the two penguins headed home.

Later, Paulo remembered what a good time he’d had in the crèche and couldn’t wait to go back tomorrow. He’d been safe, he’d made friends, and his dad had easily singled him out of the crowd. There’d been no need for his worries. From now on, he decided, he’d welcome all new experiences, even if they were scary at first. Facing new challenges would definitely help him grow into the bold and brave penguin he hoped to be one day.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## LITERARY ANALYSIS TASK: ELABORATIVE DETAIL - SETTING

You've read the story Joining the Crèche. Find phrases and sentences that describe something critical to the story. Write an essay to explain how elaborative detail brings a story to life. Be sure to include evidence from the story to support your ideas.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Is this a narrative or informational assignment?

Your teacher will walk you through the following **STEPS**:

1. Together as a class, read, annotate, analyze, and summarize the story.
2. Fill in the following:
  - Who is the main **point of view character**? \_\_\_\_\_
  - What is the **setting**? \_\_\_\_\_
  - What is the main character's **motivation**? (What does she/he **want**?) \_\_\_\_\_
  - What is the **conflict**? (Who or what stands in the way of the main character's motivation?) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Fill in the summarizing framework that outlines the **plot**.

*This story is about* \_\_\_\_\_ .  
*The problem / adventure / experience* \_\_\_\_\_ .  
*The problem was solved, experience or adventure concluded when* \_\_\_\_\_ .

- What is the **theme**? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Consider the assignment:
    - Where is the story set?
    - How does the main character feel about the setting?
    - What words, phrases and sentences does the author use to describe something critical to the story?
    - Why did the author choose these words and phrases?
    - How does description bring a story to life?

(continued)

4. Your teacher will MODEL this process with you. You may use the sentence starters to help you cite examples in the source text.

**SENTENCE STARTERS:**

- The reader discovers that\_\_\_\_\_.
- The setting was \_\_\_\_\_
- This made me feel \_\_\_\_\_.
- The author chose this because \_\_\_\_\_.
- We see that\_\_\_\_\_.
- The author reveals\_\_\_\_\_.
- In this story\_\_\_\_\_.
- The reader feels this when\_\_\_\_\_.
- In the story, evidence suggests that\_\_\_\_\_.
- It isn't long before we discover\_\_\_\_\_.
- Through the text we learn that\_\_\_\_\_.
- In paragraph \_\_\_\_\_ we see that \_\_\_\_\_.
- We know this because \_\_\_\_\_.
- We see this when\_\_\_\_\_.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## NARRATIVE EXTENSION TASK: ELABORATIVE DETAIL - SETTING

In the story Joining the Crèche, the author described the setting as “clear skies with a refreshing breeze.” This makes the reader feel that Antarctica is an enjoyable environment. Write a new elaborative detail segment about this setting, but now make the setting less enjoyable – cold, dark and more dangerous.

**THINK ABOUT IT:** Based on the story Joining the Crèche. How would the description change if the mood were different?

Here are a list of possible detail-generating questions to use to write your elaborative detail segment:

- What color was the sky?
- What kind/color clouds?
- How did the waves look? How did the water move?
- What was the land like? What kind of trees/plants grew there?
- What kind of icebergs?
- What kind of animals were there?
- What kind of smells were in the air?
- How did the day make you feel?
- Any others that you can think of...

### SENTENCE STARTERS:

- The sky was \_\_\_\_.
- Looking up I saw \_\_\_\_\_
- The sea \_\_\_\_\_.
- Icebergs, the color of \_\_\_\_\_.
- I noticed\_\_\_\_\_.