

Teacher's notes

Descriptive writing with Storybird

Summary

Language level	B1+
Age	Primary 9+, Secondary, Adult
Length of lesson	Preparation: 15 minutes In class: 30–45 minutes
Language objectives	– to use artwork in Storybird to write a description for a story that includes interesting verbs, adverbs, adjectives and simile
Additional objectives	– to use language creatively – to work collaboratively to review, comment on and edit work as part of the writing process

Rationale

Storytelling is a great way for learners to practise their descriptive writing, and Storybird provides a visual element to engage their imagination and creativity. In this lesson, learners use artwork to inspire them to write interesting descriptions, which is an important part of creating a longer story. Learners develop their knowledge and use of features of descriptive writing. They also work with their classmates to review each other's work before editing and publishing their final version.

Materials

- PC, laptop or tablet for the teacher and all learners, in class and at home
- Interactive whiteboard or projector
- Internet access
- Teacher and student accounts for Storybird
- Student invitations to access Storybird
- Guide: [*How to set creative writing assignments in Storybird*](#)
- Student's handout: [*How to complete your assignment in Storybird*](#)
- Paper
- Coloured pencils

Preparation

1. Use the guide: [*How to set creative writing assignments in Storybird*](#) to help you to:
 - sign up for a [Storybird](#) account
 - create your class
 - print off login invitation cards for your learners.

Set the assignment. You can copy and paste the name and description below into the assignment page in Storybird.

Name	Creative writing assignment: Setting a scene and character descriptions
Description	<p>You are going to choose an image and describe the setting and character(s) in it in a creative and interesting way. Try to include a variety of verbs, adverbs, adjectives and at least one simile.</p> <p>Think about these questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can you see/smell/hear? • How can you describe the colours? • What is interesting about the character's appearance/personality? • Can you compare parts of the image to anything? • How does the character feel?
Media/ image	<p>Find an artist whose images you think would work well with your learners, e.g. bluedogrose.</p> <p>Then choose an image to use for the warmer task, e.g. riding with rabbits and add this image to the assignment in the box provided.</p>

Artwork	Click <i>Use a specific artist</i> and add the link to the artist you chose previously in the box, e.g. bluedogrose .
Format	Select <i>Picture Book (multi-page)</i> .
Due date	Set a submission date and then click <i>Save assignment</i> .

2. Prepare your own description of the image. These examples are for the artwork [riding with rabbits](#).

for B1+ learners

Alice was a quiet, gentle girl who lived alone in the mountains. At night, while most people were sleeping, Alice and her rabbit friends played happily together. She wore a red coat, blue mittens, stripy tights and purple shoes. Alice wasn't lonely, but her eyes were sad. Her lips were like the petals of a rose and her skin was as white as the snow on the ground. It was a dark, cold night and the moon was hiding behind the clouds. Alice sat on her old, wooden sledge. The rabbits knew where she wanted to go ...

for B2+ learners

Alice was a quiet, gentle girl who lived alone in the mountains. Her only friends were the animals who came out at night, when the moon shone brightly in the sky. She wore a thick, red, winter coat and blue, fluffy mittens. To keep her legs warm, she had pink and white stripy tights, and on her feet she wore purple leather shoes. Alice wasn't lonely, but her eyes were heavy and sad. Her lips were like the petals of a rose – soft and velvety red – and her skin was as white as the snow that lay softly on the ground. As the rabbits pulled the old, wooden sledge her grandmother had given her, Alice sat as still as a statue, gently holding the smallest bunny in her arms. The icy breeze whistled in the trees while the cotton wool clouds drifted through the sky.

3. Share the Student's handout: [How to complete your assignment in Storybird](#) electronically, or print one copy for each learner.

Procedure

Warmer

1. Put learners in pairs and seat them so that one is facing the board and one has their back to it. Give learners with their backs to the board a piece of paper and some colouring pencils. Explain that the learners facing the board will see a picture to describe to their partner. The learner with their back to the board must draw what they hear in as much detail as possible. Set a time limit of 5 minutes and then display your chosen image on the board, for example [riding with rabbits](#).
2. Monitor the task, making a note of any good examples of descriptive language that you hear.
3. After 5 minutes, tell the learners to put down their pencils and get the learners who did the drawing to compare their pictures with the original image. Discuss with the whole class whose is the most accurate and why. Discuss the importance of descriptive writing in storytelling.

Language focus

4. Write the language you made a note of during the warmer task on the board and elicit further good examples of descriptive language. Ask learners with more accurate pictures how their partner described it so well. Depending on how much the learners provide, you may want to add your own ideas or show and discuss your example description with learners.
5. Draw learners' attention to the descriptive language and elicit the parts of speech (interesting verbs, adverbs, adjectives). Elicit what a [simile](#) is, show them a few examples (either ones they provided themselves or your own) and elicit at least one more example from the learners. The main learning objective is to use descriptive language, so don't overwhelm learners with wordy explanations or lots of information about narrative tenses, relative clauses, punctuation, etc. This might inhibit their creativity.

Main task

6. Show learners the Student's handout: [How to complete your assignment in Storybird](#) and tell them that they will follow the instructions to complete the assignment. You could go through the assignment description with the class to make sure everyone knows what to do.

7. Explain that learners have 15 minutes to choose another image and describe the scenery and character(s). To save their work, they will have to add a cover and title, but explain that they can change these later and to concentrate more on the description for now.
8. Monitor and provide support as required (see FAQs below).
9. After 15 minutes, ask learners to save their storybooks. These will now be accessible in the *Gallery* section when they log in. Use the IWB/projector to show learners how to view and comment on each other's work. Show your own example and ask for constructive comments using the sentence starters such as:

I really like the way you ... (e.g. described the weather).

To improve your description you could ... (e.g. add one more simile).

Homework

10. Set a time limit for learners to review each other's descriptions in the gallery by writing one thing they like and one thing that could be improved about each one (in larger classes, allocate learners at least three stories to review). For this, provide sentence stems, such as:

I really like the way you ... (e.g. described the weather).

To improve your description you could ... (e.g. add one more simile).

11. Check the reviews and add your own comments to each learner's description. See the guide: [How to set creative writing assignments in Storybird](#) for instructions on how to do this.

12. After the time limit when everyone has completed their reviews, each learner reads the reviews of their description and edits it, based on the comments.

Follow-up task

13. When all the descriptions have been edited and finalised, learners can develop their stories further. Writing a complete story is not a short process, so do this in stages, having a particular focus for each stage. For instance, you might want to think about narrative tenses and language for structuring a story. At each stage, encourage peer reviewing and editing to develop your learners' writing skills. And remember, learners/parents can buy a downloadable or professionally printed version of their book. You could have a class vote on whose is the best and have the winner's storybook printed as their prize.

FAQs

How can I help my learners think of interesting verbs/adverbs/adjectives?

You could provide word banks of adjectives, verbs and adverbs at an appropriate level for your learners. You could also provide them with a thesaurus or direct them to an online version.

My learners are spending too long looking for images and not concentrating on their writing – how can I help them?

If learners haven't chosen a picture within 3–5 minutes, choose one for them. By choosing a particular artist when you set up your assignment (see Preparation Step 2), you will automatically limit the number of images learners can choose from and they will also have images which are similar in style to the one you used in the warmer task.

Some of my learners really struggle with creative writing and don't know where to start – how can I support them?

This activity will have different outcomes for different learners – more confident writers will automatically produce more than less confident ones. To support less confident writers, you could choose another picture in advance and produce a writing frame for learners to insert their own adjectives, adverbs, verbs and similes.