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# Capture your reader's interest and imagination

## Learning objective

- bring your writing to life with imaginative detail.

The poet John Keats said that when he watched a sparrow, he felt himself 'pick about the gravel' with the bird. In order to write well, you need to *imagine well*.

### Getting you thinking

What would it be like to be violently kidnapped and never see your home again? Read this account in the personal voice of Olaudah Equiano, an **Igbo** boy born in 1745 who was kidnapped and enslaved at the age of 11. Here, after months travelling as a prisoner, he reaches the sea.

The first object which **saluted** my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon **converted** to terror. When I was carried on board, I was immediately handled, and tossed up to see if I were sound by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. When I looked round the ship too, and saw a large furnace of copper boiling, and a multitude of black people chained together, every one of their **countenances** expressing **dejection** and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate, and, quite overpowered with horror and **anguish**, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted.

*The Interesting Narrative* by Olaudah Equiano

- 1 With a partner, pick out five details that help you to imagine Olaudah's suffering. Now join with another pair to compare and discuss your choices.



*Olaudah Equiano*

### Glossary

**Igbo:** group of people from the area that is now south-east Nigeria

**saluted:** met

**converted:** turned

**countenances:** faces

**dejection:** sadness or hopelessness

**anguish:** worry

## How does it work?

1.1

Olaudah describes what he could see so that his reader can experience it. He shares his feelings (the nouns: 'terror', 'horror', 'anguish') and expresses *how it seemed to him at the time* ('I had gotten into a world of bad spirits'). He also uses strong verbs ('overpowered', 'handled', 'tossed', 'chained').

## Now you try it

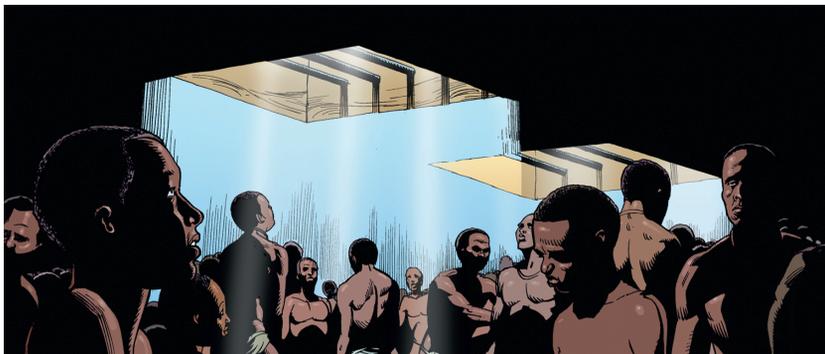
- 1 Imagine you have been kidnapped and taken prisoner on this slave ship. In your own voice, make notes on your experiences as you are taken on board and the ship sets sail into the unknown. Think about
  - a) what you can see (*the chains, the rats, other slaves*)
  - b) what you can hear (*the sailors yelling at you in a language you don't understand*)
  - c) what you can smell (*the suffocating smells of people cramped together*)
  - d) what your thoughts and feelings are (*fear, terror, misery?*).

### Top tip

Try to find strong nouns and powerful verbs that create a vivid picture of the scene. Describe the experience in a way that your reader can 'see' or sense.

## Apply your skills

- 2 Look at the picture of a slave ship below.
  - a) What do you think conditions were like for prisoners on these ships? Add these new details to your notes.
  - b) Turn your notes into a set of diary entries describing your experiences on the ship. Write them in a way that makes your reader see, hear and smell the atmosphere on board.



## Check your progress

### Some progress >>

I can use some imaginative detail in my writing.

### Good progress >>>

I can use the senses to capture my reader's imagination.

### Excellent progress >>>>

I can choose strong words to write and imagine in convincing detail.

Write imaginative, interesting and thoughtful texts

# Vary your sentence lengths and structures

## Learning objective

- think about varying sentence length and structure for effect.

A short simple sentence can give emphasis or deliver a shock or surprise in your writing. A longer sentence can build up tension and drama.

## Getting you thinking

*The Old Curiosity Shop* was amazingly popular in Victorian times. People wept when they read about the death of its child heroine, Little Nell.

She was dead. No sleep so beautiful and calm, so free from trace of pain, so fair to look upon. She seemed a creature fresh from the hand of God, and waiting for the breath of life, not one who had lived and suffered death. [...]

She was dead. Dear, gentle, patient, noble Nell was dead. [...]

Where were the traces of her early cares, her sufferings, and fatigues? All gone. Sorrow was indeed dead in her, but peace and perfect happiness were born; imaged in her tranquil beauty and profound repose.

She was dead, and past all help, or need of it.

*The Old Curiosity Shop* by Charles Dickens

- 1 Why do you think readers responded so emotionally to Nell's death. Is it just the 'facts' of what happens, or is it something to do with *how* it is written?

## How does it work?

This passage is built around a repeated short, simple sentence that has great force ('She was dead'). Dickens extends this simple sentence by adding adjectives to create an extended noun phrase ('Dear, gentle, patient, noble Nell'). He also uses patterns of three.

## Now you try it

- 2 Extend these short sentences by adding three adjectives to each.
  - a) My \_\_\_\_ grandfather fell and broke his hip.
  - b) The \_\_\_\_ dog was in dire need of a bath.
  - c) The \_\_\_\_ car was abandoned in a field.



Longer sentences can give the reader more information and build drama in a story.

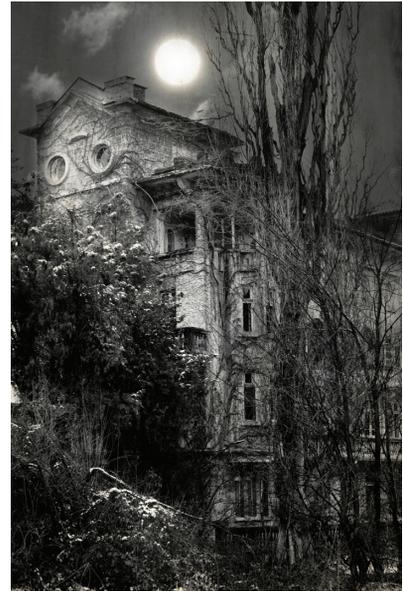
- 3 Look at these simple sentences. Add another longer sentence that tells you more about the first. For example: 'Bolt won again! He took the gold medal in the 200m final!'
- a) At last the weather broke. It...
  - b) We had won the lottery! We....
  - c) The dictator was dead! At last....
  - d) The holidays were here. We....

### Apply your skills

Read this extract from another story by Charles Dickens. It describes a creepy house.

It was a **solitary** house, standing in a neglected garden. It was uninhabited, but had, within a year or two, been cheaply repaired to make it **habitable**; I say cheaply, because the work had been done in a surface manner, and was already decaying as to the paint and plaster. [...] It was much too closely and heavily shadowed by trees, and, in particular, there were six tall poplars before the front windows, which were excessively **melancholy**. It was easy to see that it was an avoided house – a house that nobody would take. And the natural **inference** was that it had the reputation of being a haunted house.

*The Haunted House* by Charles Dickens



**Glossary**

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**solitary:** lonely or by itself

**habitable:** suitable to live in

**melancholy:** sad or depressing

**inference:** conclusion

- 4 Imagine that you explore this house. You find something shocking in an upstairs room.
- a) Use long sentences to describe crossing the garden, pushing open the front door, exploring the downstairs rooms, climbing the stairs and then forcing open a locked bedroom.
  - b) Use very short sentences to reveal what is in the mysterious room.
  - c) Follow these with extended short sentences to add extra detail.

**Check your progress**

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**Some progress** >>

I can sometimes vary the length and structure of sentences.

**Good progress** >>>

I can vary my sentences to give them force and clarity.

**Excellent progress** >>>>

I can use varied sentences for effect and to add extra detail.