

Secrets From Great Writers!

THIS MONTH'S SECRET: HOW TO WRITE A GREAT DESCRIPTION

The article "Everything Turned to Dust" is filled with amazing descriptions that create bold, vivid pictures in readers' minds. This activity will tell you one of Arthur Goldwag's description-writing secrets so you can add punch to your own writing.

Directions: Read the passage below, from "Everything Turned to Dust," by Arthur Goldwag. Then rewrite the sentences below.

It was a sweltering Sunday in April, 1935, in Pampas, Texas, and 11-year-old Lisa Smathers and her father walked home from church. A hot wind whipped around them, and they knew a big storm was on its way. What worried them most was the birds—geese, ducks, swallows, and sparrows, thousands and thousands of them, honking and quacking and twittering across the sky, frantically winging their way south. And then a towering wall of blackness rose above the northern horizon.

If you read the passage above closely, you can see how great Arthur Goldwag is at writing descriptions. Notice how he doesn't just say a "flock of birds," he names a few different types. And these birds don't just "chirp and go south." They honk and quack and twitter as they "wing" their way south. Arthur breaks his image apart like pieces of a puzzle and describes each separate segment—the birds, their cries—to create a wonderfully vivid image for you. Use Arthur's trick to rewrite the sentences below.

1. The dogs went crazy. (Hint: What kinds of dogs? What did their barks sound like? Were they running? Leaping? Nipping?)

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2. The crowd cheered. (Hint: Who was in the crowd? What did their clapping sound like? Were they hooting, shrieking, booing?)

3. The octopus was ugly.

4. The game was boring.

5. The sundae was delicious.
