

# Secrets From Great Writers!

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

The article "Lost in a Blizzard" is filled with amazing descriptions that create bold, vivid pictures in readers' minds. This activity will tell you one of Lauren Tarshis's description-writing secrets that will help you add punch to your own writing.

**Directions:** Read this passage from "Lost in a Blizzard," by Lauren Tarshis. Then rewrite the sentences below.

All morning, Walter Allen sat at his desk working on his arithmetic problems as his teacher walked around the room offering help, her skirts swishing and boots clicking against the worn wooden floorboards. After finishing each problem set, he took a tiny perfume bottle from his desk, removed the jewel-like lid, and poured a drop of water onto his writing slate. The bottle was Walter's prized possession. All of the other children kept small bottles of water and rags at their desks to wipe their slates clean. Nobody but Walter had a bottle that looked like it came from a pirate's treasure chest.

If you read the passage above closely, you can see how Lauren creates vivid, interesting pictures with language. Notice how she doesn't just tell us that the "teacher walks around the room," she describes the sights and sounds of the "skirts swishing and boots clicking," and the "worn wooden floorboards." She also uses great description to show us how the characters feel about these objects. Walter's perfume bottle is not a typical glass bottle. The "jewel-like lid" that seems to come from "a pirate's treasure chest" describes the beautiful object, but also lets us see just how precious Walter considers his bottle to be. Lauren layers her descriptions like a triple-decker cake—visual details, noises, impressions—so you get a wonderfully vivid picture with sights, sounds, and feelings. Use Lauren's trick to rewrite the sentences below.

**1.** The couple danced. (**Hint:** What dance did they do? Was it fast? Slow? Complicated? What were they wearing? What music was playing?)

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**2.** The puppy played fetch. (**Hint:** What did he look like? Who played with him? How did they feel? Did the puppy race, wriggle, wander?)

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**3.** The house was big.

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**4.** Skating was cold.

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**5.** The phone rang.

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