

Introductory Lesson

Learning Targets:

- I will understand that good creative writers rely more on showing or imagery than telling.
 - I can identify examples of showing in James Wright's poem "A Blessing" and can explain how this imagery helps me understand his meaning.
1. **Focus lesson:** Most of us probably know that good writers use description to help readers make better mental pictures of setting, characters, and action. Today, we are going to consider two different types of description. We will call one type showing. The term that writers often use for showing is imagery. Showing and imagery, then, refer to the same type of description. The other type of description is telling.

Let's take a look at two examples of description. Both examples are intended to reveal something about the main character, Sarah:

Example #1

Sarah was mad as she walked up to her teacher. "No one even told me that we were having a test today. I just got back from our family vacation, and now I have to take this test? This is not fair!" Sarah said angrily.

Example #2

Sarah marched up to her teacher. "No one even told me that we were having a test today. I just got back from our family vacation, and now I have to take this test? This is not fair!" Sarah turned her back to the teacher and slammed the door.

In the first example, the writer interprets—or tells us—Sarah's attitude. "Sarah was mad" and "Sarah said angrily" tell us how Sarah acts and speaks. As readers, the writer comes right out and interprets Sarah's attitude for us.

In the second example, the writer shows us Sarah's attitude. "Sarah marched up" and "Sarah turned her back to the teacher and slammed the door" show us just how angry she really is. The writer doesn't come right out and tell us Sarah is angry but relies upon imagery to reveal her attitude. We can make a mental picture of someone marching up to the teacher. When people march like this, they are usually upset about something; they are often "on a mission"! And when a student turns her back on a teacher and slams the door, we can see just how angry she actually is. In short, the writer doesn't have to tell us that Sarah is angry because she has already shown us.

Another thing to think about is this: when writers show or use imagery, they appeal to one or more of our five senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching). We can see—and even hear—Sarah marching up to the teacher's desk. And we can definitely hear her anger when she says, "This is not fair!" and slams the door. When readers are invited to use their senses, they can more directly experience what the characters are experiencing.

2. **Whole group guided instruction:** Let's take a look at two more examples, and you can help me decide which one is showing and which one is telling.

Example #1

My grandmother's house was really old and needed repair. When we drove up last summer, my mother said sadly, "This is the house I grew up in. Oh, it looks so bad!"

Example #2

My grandmother's house sat on a corner lot, hidden by waist-high weeds and a row of ten cedar bushes. When we parked in front of her house, my mother said, "This is the house I grew up in. We used to spend so many summer nights on the porch swing with our friends, drinking root beer and laughing about the boy next door. You can't even see the front porch now."

Let's look more closely at these phrases from example #1: "really old and needed repair" and "it looks so bad!" Do you think the writer is telling or showing here? How do you know? (Students should be able to identify these phrases as examples of telling in which the writer interprets for us)

Now, let's consider these phrases from example #2: "hidden by waist-high weeds and a row of ten cedar bushes" and "You can't even see the front porch now". Do you think the writer is telling or showing here? How do you know? (Students should be able to identify these phrases as good examples of showing in which the writer does NOT interpret for us but rather helps us **see** the house; from this imagery (picture), *we can infer that the house is old, worn down, and needing repairs.*

3. **"A Blessing":** you will pass out copies of this poem, read the poem aloud, and establish partners for collaborative work
4. **Collaborative work:** After hearing the poem read aloud, students will work with partners to read this poem more closely. Using the guiding questions in the text boxes in the right margin, students will talk with their partners and be prepared to share their thinking with the whole group.

You may want to stop after the first group of lines and ask partners to share with the class. To proceed, you could stop after each group of lines, or you could let partners work collaboratively through the rest of the poem and reserve sharing for the end. Identifying examples of showing is one goal for this lesson, but just as important is determining how these examples reveal the poet's meaning. This is clearly a more challenging cognitive task for most students, and they may or may not be able to come to this meaning on their own. I would suggest that you let them try, and then you can follow with either affirmation of their conclusions OR guided instruction to lead them more purposefully to Wright's meaning.

5. **Independent work:** Students will demonstrate their understanding of how they can draw meaning from a writer's imagery/showing by using the following paragraph frame to record their insights.

Paragraph Frame

In the poem, "A Blessing," James Wright uses imagery to help readers understand that _____
_____. One of the first good examples of imagery
occurs when he writes, "_____." He appeals to our
sense(s) of _____ here, and we can infer that _____
_____.

Another effective example of imagery follows when he writes "_____
_____". Wright shows us by appealing to our sense(s) of _____.

At this point in the poem, we may infer that _____
_____.

Finally, in the last lines, he writes, "_____
_____." Here Wright suggests that
his experience with the ponies _____
_____.