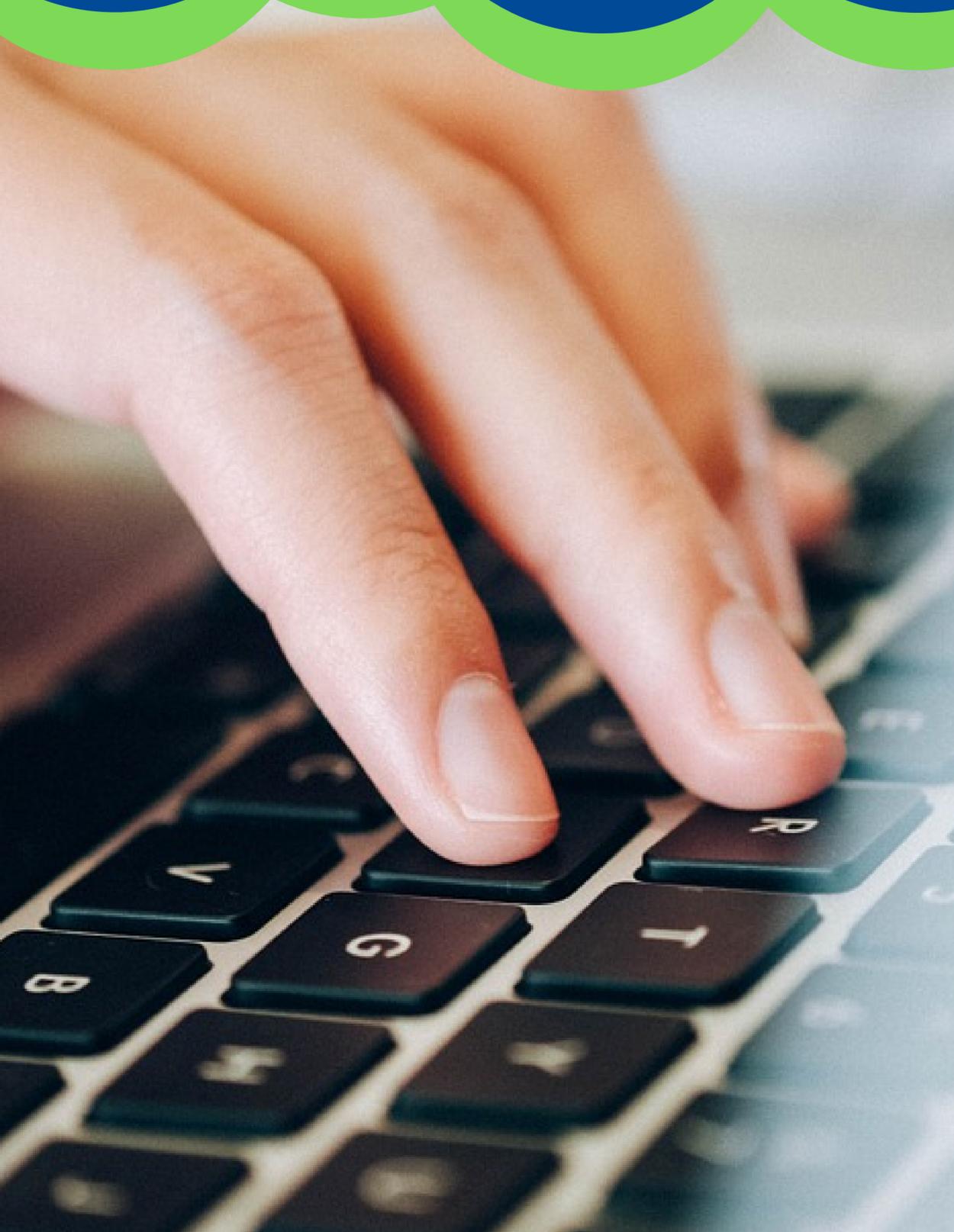


# Write It Out

## TOOLKITS FOR WRITERS



### SHORT STORY

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- 2. Key Story Components..... p. 3
- 3. Annotating Story Terms .....p. 4
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# Introduction

## THE KET YOUNG WRITERS CONTEST

For decades, young authors have turned to the KET Young Writers Contest to share their work. The contest, which seeks to celebrate creativity through writing and illustrating, runs annually each spring. As the needs of young writers, their parents, and their teachers change, so too does the contest. What once was a contest intended only for kindergarten, first, and second graders has blossomed to be inclusive of students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. And where once only illustrated stories were accepted, the contest has grown to encompass four separate categories: illustrated stories, short stories, poetry, and now - graphic novels. We invite students across the Commonwealth to share their stories, their poems, and their creativity.

This toolkit is designed to help introduce and spark creative story writing within the Short Story category.

For more information on the current Young Writers Contest, visit [KET.org/writerscontest](https://KET.org/writerscontest).

## ONCE UPON A TIME: THE SHORT STORY

Human beings are drawn to narrative; they want to listen to and tell stories. Even before humans could write they told stories verbally. Almost as long as we have had voices, we have used them to narrate in songs and tales. As writer Margaret Atwood explains "You're never going to kill storytelling because it's built in the human plan. We come with it." In *The Storytelling Animal*, Jonathan Gottschall observes that "We are, as a species, addicted to story. Even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up . . . telling itself stories."

A **short story** is a tale, sometimes based on something true but mostly fictional, that is shorter than a novel that can be hundreds of pages; a short story is usually only a few pages in length and, in the case of **flash fiction** (or **short-short stories**), a page or less. Though different in length, novels and short stories share many of the same characteristics—check out the visual glossary for some of the main components of fiction, including short stories.

To discover more about short stories that also include illustrations, reference the KET Illustrated Story Creative Writing Toolkit!

## STORY STRUCTURE and Key Story Components

Fiction--a tale told in writing that is all or mostly "made up,"--comes in different lengths. Novels are usually 100 pages or more, short-short or short stories consist of one to a few pages, and **novellas** fall somewhere in between (shorter than a novel, longer than a short story). All are fiction, however, and as such have similar characteristics. These identifying elements can be thought of as a writer's bag of tricks, or tools, to help them create the story and tell it in an interesting, engaging way. How a story or novel is put together, the structure, consists of the following five elements: introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution (ending).

### DID YOU KNOW?

Scholars generally agree that the first modern short stories (as we recognize them today) were from American writers Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allen Poe.

### CHARACTER

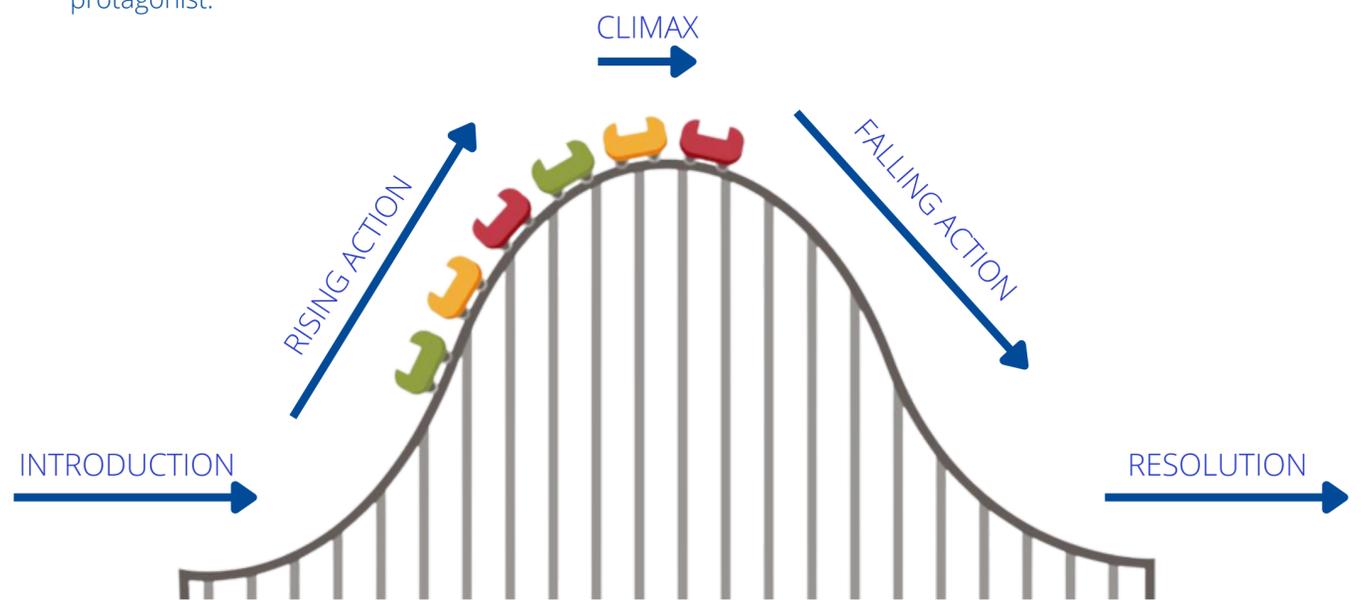
The person, place, or thing that populates a fictional story. A character can often be described as a **protagonist**, a "good guy," or an **antagonist**, one who causes trouble for the protagonist.

### SETTING

Where and often when (in time) a story takes place. Stories can have more than one setting.

### PLOT

The plot is what happens in a story, in the beginning, middle, and end. Often, the plot consists of **conflict**. This conflict, or struggle, is usually experienced by the main character.



#### Introduction

the beginning of a story where background information is usually provided, such as where a character lives, what they look like, etc.

#### Rising Action

the part of the story near the beginning that moves the plot toward the climax, or Big Moment.

#### Climax

when the tension of a story reaches its peak, the Big Moment, and the story begins to wind down toward the conclusion.

#### Falling Action

the part of the story that occurs after the climax that moves the story toward its conclusion.

#### Resolution

occurs after the climax of a story and moves the audience toward the story's end.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ACTIVITY

# Annotating Story Terms

DIRECTIONS: Annotate the following simple short story to identify important glossary terms.

UNDERLINE:

- the INTRODUCTION in **BLUE**
- the RISING ACTION in **GREEN**
- the CLIMAX in **RED**
- the FALLING ACTION in **ORANGE**
- the RESOLUTION in **YELLOW**

CIRCLE:

- the SETTING in **PURPLE**
- the PROTAGONIST in **BLACK**
- the ANTAGONIST in **BROWN**

Jeff the ~~Corgi~~ **Dinosaur**

Jeff the Corgi lives on Pleasant Street, a block from his school Lassie Memorial Elementary, with his Grandpa Henry.

Jeff loves looking at books about dinosaurs. He likes that no one calls dinosaurs “cute” and that they don’t have hearts around their tails.

At school during recess, Jeff pretends to be a Stegosaurus. Jane, a poodle, laughs at him, “Dogs can’t be dinosaurs! Plus, dinosaurs are extinct!” Jeff is sad. He looks in the mirror and now can’t see himself as a dinosaur.

Jeff tells Grandpa Henry what happened at school. Grandpa has a magic book that can turn Jeff into a dinosaur, but only if Jeff believes it will work.

Grandpa’s book is a costume catalog. A week later, Jeff puts on his stegosaurus costume and finally feels like a dinosaur. His imagination makes him one too! He goes to school to show Jane that dinosaurs can exist! Now everyone dresses like their favorite things!



ACTIVITY

# Literacy Elements

In addition to basic story structures, authors often use additional elements to enhance their stories and engage their readers.

Elements such as:

**METAPHOR**   **ALLITERATION**   **ASSONANCE**   **SYMBOLISM**   **NARRATOR**  
among others.

Within PBS LearningMedia, a free repository of classroom-ready digital resources, are videos to help students understand and visualize these types of literacy elements, whether as a review or for new knowledge acquisition. See *Literacy Elements* or *Literary Analysis*, for example.



Identify the tools being used in the following paragraph.

My small black poodle, Sweetie, is twelve years old, and her tiny foot falls click slower on the floor these days, but her round brown eyes still look at me like a best friend and that's what she is. In fact, Sweetie has been my dog as long as I can remember because my parents adopted her right after I was born. "Sydney, please bring Sweetie in for her bath!" My mom always gives the dog a bath before she goes to the vet. Sweetie is lying under the maple tree, the old one that lost branches in the last ice storm but was still able to send out shiny green leaves this spring. When I call out her name, Sweetie gets up and walks toward me, moving slowly but her tail wagging as fast as a new pup.

**SYMBOLISM**  
when a writer uses one thing as a "symbol" to represent something else, which can add deeper meaning to a literary work. In our paragraph about the dog Sweetie, the maple tree is a symbol of the aging dog.

**NARRATOR**  
the person from whose point of view a story is told. A first-person narrator is one who uses "I" and "me" as they tell the story as in: *The first time I saw a giraffe was the same day my grandad came to visit.*

**ALLITERATION**  
the repetition of similar consonant sounds at the beginning of words as in the phrase **f**resh **f**ruit.

**ASSONANCE**  
the repetition of similar vowel sounds in words as in the phrase:  
full of **oo**l **oo**ks.

**METAPHOR**  
a comparison of at least two things, as in: *The kitten's eyes are sparkling blue pools.* (Eyes are compared to pools.)  
\*This is similar to a **simile**, which is also a comparison but one using the words "like" or "as" as in: *The kitten's eyes are like sparkling blue pools.*

KEY

# Literacy Elements

Identify the tools being used in the following paragraph.

My small black poodle, Sweetie, is twelve years old, and her tiny foot falls click slower on the floor these days, but her round brown

ALLITERATION

ASSONANCE

eyes still look at me like a best friend and that's what she is. In fact,

Sweetie has been my dog as long as I can remember because my

NARRATOR

parents adopted her right after I was born. "Sydney, please bring

Sweetie in for her bath!" My mom always gives the dog a bath

before she goes to the vet. Sweetie is lying under the maple tree,

the old one that lost branches in the last ice storm but was still

SYMBOLISM

able to send out shiny green leaves this spring. When I call out her

name, Sweetie gets up and walks toward me, moving slowly but

her tail wagging as fast as a new pup.

SIMILE

ACTIVITY

# Short-Short Story

Writing stories doesn't have to take a lot of time. On the contrary, authors can often create engaging, suspenseful stories in just a few sentences. Try creating short-short stories with your students. While a seemingly simple task, many of the same story aspects – setting, introduction, rising action, climax – are still included in this shortened story version. Authors must be purposeful in their choices – both what to include and what to leave out.

Take a look at these examples.

*introduction*  
After a long walk in the woods, I nestled down into  
*setting* my warm sleeping bag, ready to sleep under the  
stars. A far-off growl, *rising action* menacing, began to grow closer  
and closer until *climax* giant claws ripped through the side of  
my tent.

*introduction*  
Jack was enjoying his daily walk in the woods and *setting*  
decided to go down a different path than usual; as he  
did, it felt cooler, like swimming through a cold spot  
*rising action*  
in a lake. Ahead he saw a little girl crying; she looked  
up at Jack and said, "Can you help me find my *conflict*  
mommy?" Jack said, "Sure I can," and put his hand on  
the girl's shoulder then became so scared - He.  
*climax*  
Couldn't. Move. His hand went through the girl! The  
*resolution*  
little ghost ran away, laughing.

After allowing students to analyze these stories, invite them to create their own short-short story. Can they create a meaningful, cohesive story in 5 sentences? 3 sentences? What about a two-sentence story?

As students complete their short-short stories, ask them to trade stories with a partner. Can they identify the story aspects in their partner's work?

STUDENT HANDOUT

# Short-Short Story

Can you identify the following in each short-short story?

- Introduction (including setting)
- Rising Action
- Conflict
- Climax
- Resolution

After a long walk in the woods, I nestled down into my warm sleeping bag, ready to sleep under the stars. A far-off growl, menacing, began to grow closer and closer until giant claws ripped through the side of my tent.

---

Jack was enjoying his daily walk in the woods and decided to go down a different path than usual; as he did, it felt cooler, like swimming through a cold spot in a lake. Ahead he saw a little girl crying; she looked up at Jack and said, "Can you help me find my mommy?" Jack said, "Sure I can," and put his hand on the girl's shoulder then became so scared - He. Couldn't. Move. His hand went through the girl! The little ghost ran away, laughing.

ACTIVITY

# Spinning a Fable

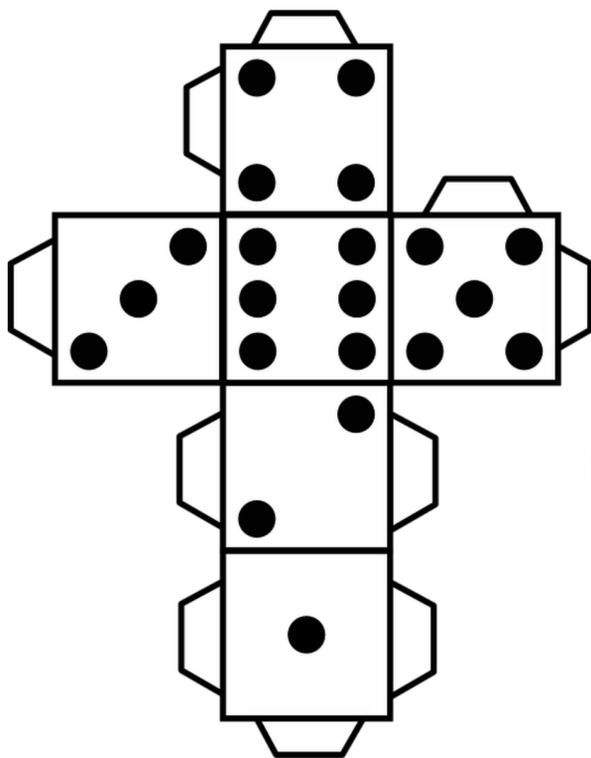
Some short stories can be categorized as **fables**. A fable usually has animals as characters and always ends with a **moral**. A moral is a short lesson on good and bad behavior that instructs on how to behave well. Not all stories need to end with morals but most fables do.

Early learners may benefit from visual examples of fables. In PBS LearningMedia, a free repository of classroom-ready resources such examples exist. Search for *Between the Lions*, a program geared toward early reading and phonics skills, where you will find *Little Big Mouse* and *The Ants and the Grasshopper*.



As you read and study fables with students, invite them to design their own fables using the following spinner.

Creating the spinner: Cut out each of the four circles. Stack the circles in numerical order, with circle 1 on top. Insert a brad, or a paper clip, through the center of the stack. The stack should hold together but each layer be able to spin independently.



**FABLE SPINNER**

DIRECTIONS:  
Roll the die to select one option from each level.  
Align your selections below.

**1**

My:  
protagonist  
antagonist  
moral

**2**

PROTAGONIST

writer's choice:  
pick a favorite  
animal or  
insect

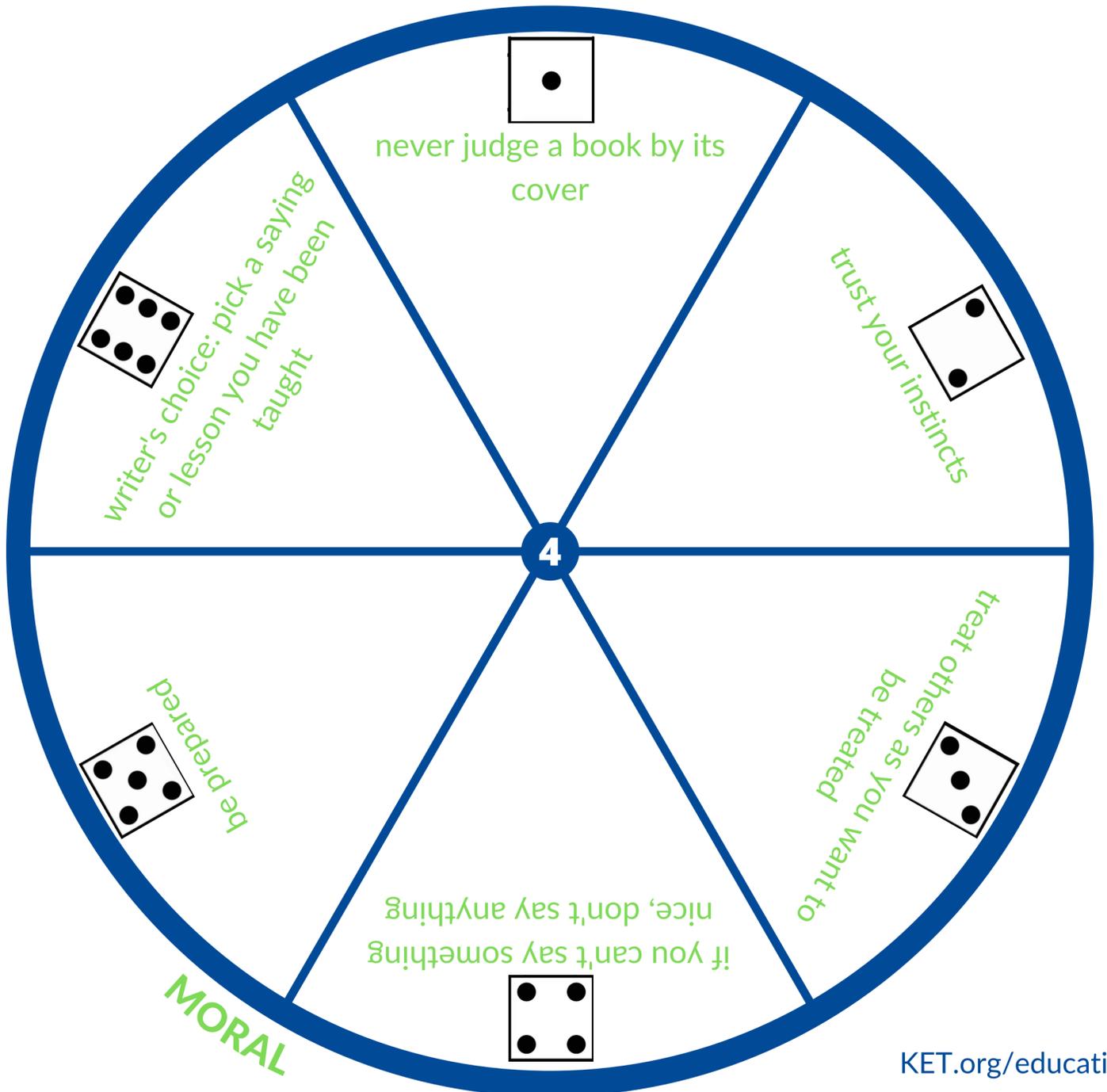
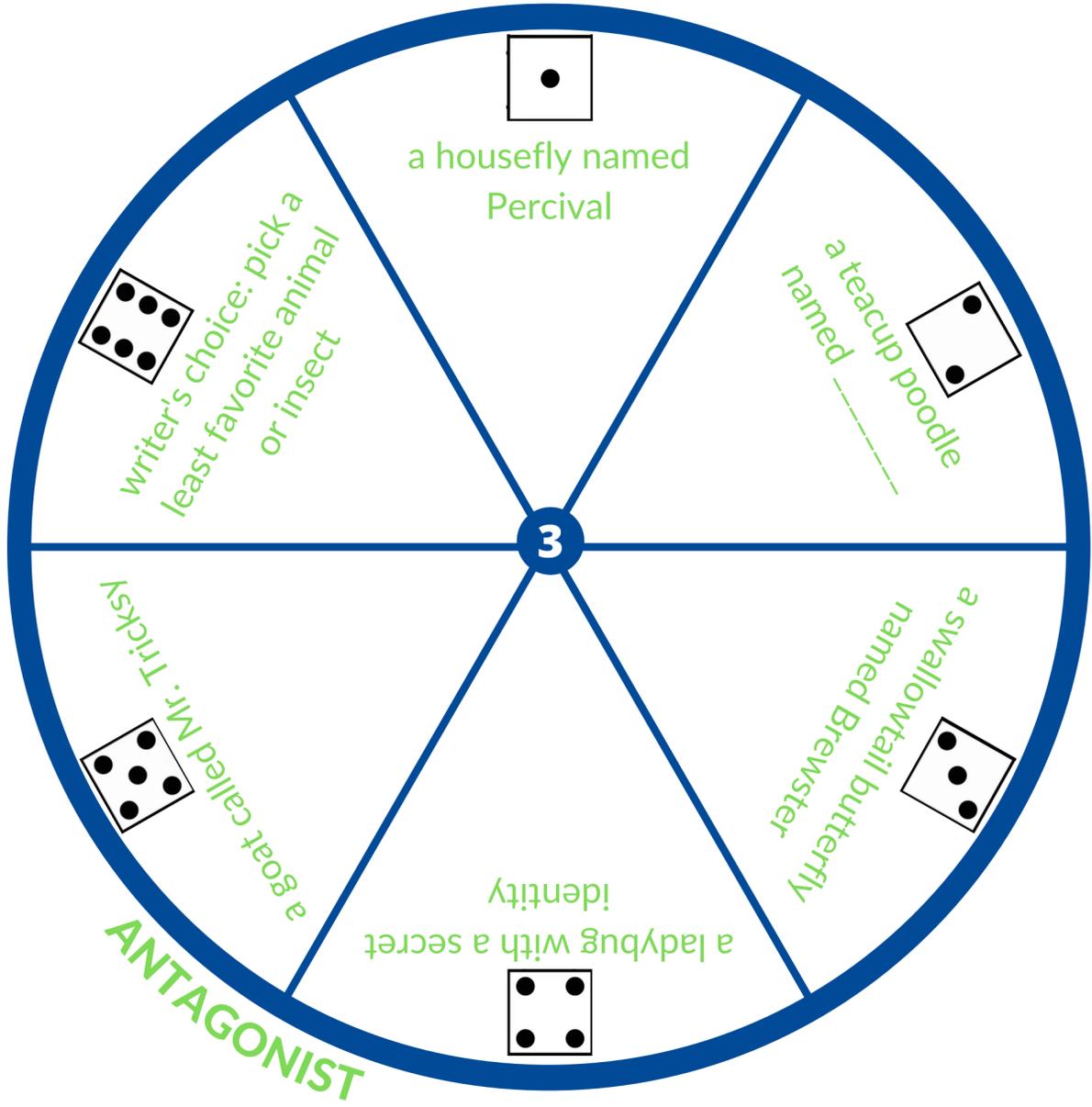
a dung beetle  
named Betty

a slug named Jaxon

a Luna moth  
named \_\_\_\_\_

a praying mantis  
named Ryan

a spider who lives  
in an athletic  
shoe box



ACTIVITY

# What's Going On?!

Authors take inspiration from a near infinite number of places for their creations, but one common thread is found in art. Throughout history authors and artists have thrived upon a symbiotic relationship; authors find inspiration in great works of art and artists find inspiration in great works of literature.

Explore this relationship by offering students various forms and styles of art as points of inspirations for stories. Perhaps a faculty art teacher would like to collaborate, offering art from a certain artist or style, depending on what students are studying currently in that class.

As students view the art, encourage them to first ask questions. These questions can be documented in a great variety of ways - either through pencil and paper or digitally.

**For example:**



**Is that a dragon!?**

**Who is the character wearing the cape? (and why is he wearing a cape?)**

**What is the owl carrying in its beak?**

**What animal is at the man's feet?**

**What is the green creature sitting on? Is he protecting something?**

**Where do the steps lead?**

Using their list of questions as a story map, encourage students to start laying out their story basics by answering their own questions. Students may not need to answer every question in order to create their story, but will need to include elements of story structure when answering, such as what conflict might occur.

**Is that a dragon!?**

**YES - it's a dragon!**

**Who is the character wearing the cape? (and why is he wearing a cape?)**

**The man is a THIEF coming to steal Dragon's gold.**

**What is the owl carrying in its beak?**

**A potion from the Wood Fairies that will make the man forget this magical woods and leave forever.**

**What animal is at the man's feet?**

**What is the green creature sitting on? Is he protecting something?**

**It's an egg, his son, and heir to his dragon throne and fortune.**

**Where do the steps lead?**

**The dragon's lair, filled to the brim with gold and treasures.**

Through the answers to their own questions, students should have a rough story outline and can now expand and create a short story based on art!

ACTIVITY

# Roll-A-Story

Continue to stretch students' creative powers in writing and creating by exploring new writing topics. One way to accomplish this is to use a Roll-A-Story activity.

For each column, students roll a die (or use a random number generator, or strips of numbered paper...). The corresponding cell is the element they should include in their story. Once all four elements have been chosen, brainstorming and drafting can begin!

|   | MAIN CHARACTER             | TIME SETTING           | PHYSICAL SETTING          | SOURCE OF CONFLICT |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
|    | a bus driver               | the year you were born | the Pacific Ocean         | a velvet pillow    |
|   | a fish                     | next week              | a country in Africa       | a photograph       |
|  | Bigfoot                    | 1933                   | a New York City apartment | a duck             |
|  | a woman from the year 2132 | the Paleozoic era      | the Grand Canyon          | a misunderstanding |
|  | a hairless cat             | 1982                   | Lovely Street             | peanut butter      |
|  | a 100-year old man         | today                  | in or near Lake Superior  | a winter hat       |

Use the premade example above with students, or involve them in the creation using the provided template.

TEMPLATE

# Roll-A-Story

|   | MAIN CHARACTER | TIME SETTING | PHYSICAL SETTING | SOURCE OF CONFLICT |
|---|----------------|--------------|------------------|--------------------|
|  |                |              |                  |                    |
|  |                |              |                  |                    |
|  |                |              |                  |                    |
|  |                |              |                  |                    |
|  |                |              |                  |                    |
|  |                |              |                  |                    |

ACTIVITY

# Creating Characters

Short stories tend to focus on a smaller cast of characters than longer novels, but those characters should still be believable in terms of their actions and how they react to external and internal situations.

Consider the following character:

**KHALID** - anxious and afraid of the unknown, has a few close friends but prefers to spend time alone

Next, consider the following situation:

The new kid, whose family has just moved into the creepy old house at the end of the street, decides to throw a Halloween party, inviting the entire school.

How might Khalid react to this situation?

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If Khalid's reaction doesn't align with the character traits, preferences, or thought processes you've already described about Khalid, your readers will be left confused and lost. Sending mixed signals about characters may make your readers disengage, and in turn lose interest in your story. This doesn't mean that characters cannot surprise the reader and step out of their comfort zones, but generally people -and in turn characters- behave according to their character traits. When characters do change, it's often slowly through the course of the story arc, seldom does the change happen suddenly.

How might these characters react to each situation?

**KIM** - does not like conflict or to be the center of attention, has a twin brother, Liam, who stutters

While at the county fair, Kim and Liam get in line to buy cotton candy; a tall girl standing behind them overhears Liam stuttering and starts mocking him. Kim's brother stops talking and gets tears in his eyes while the tall girl laughs.

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**BEATRICE** - very intelligent and studious, is usually first to answer the teacher's questions and not shy except about dancing, which she loves to do but only in the privacy of her own room

Beatrice's sixth grade class has been asked to teach a short exercise class to the 3rd graders and this term they are going to teach dance. Beatrice's mom has taken her to the local dance school for lessons for two months, and her private teacher has taught her many beginning ballet moves. The teacher asks, "Does anyone know some dances they can help teach the younger students?"

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Trade with a partner and discuss. Defend your position.

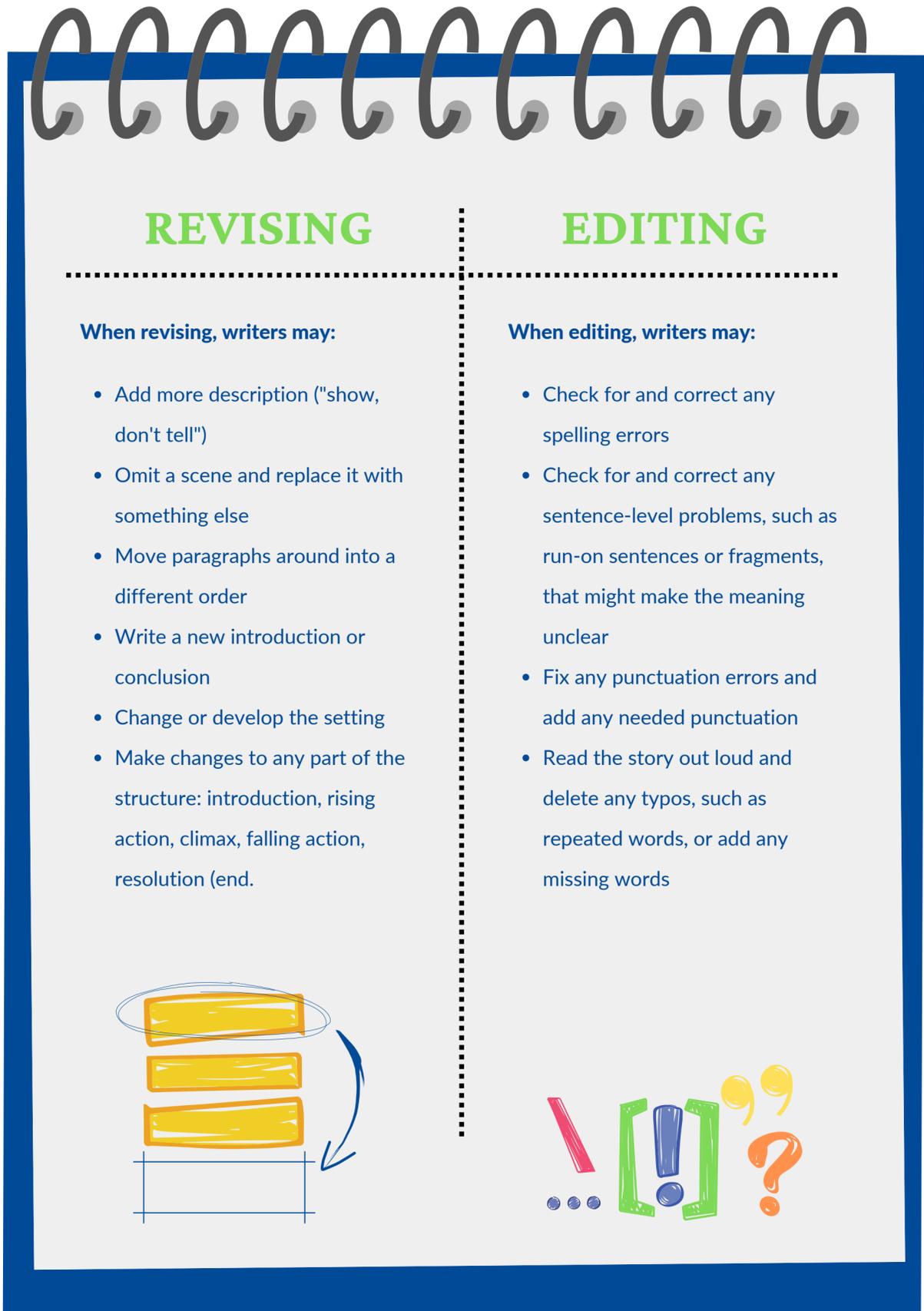
REFERENCE

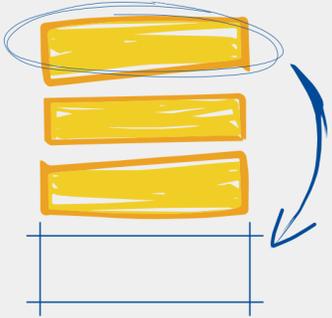
# Revising Vs Editing

Often, revising and editing get lumped together into a single step in the writing process, but the two involve very different tasks to improve writing.

**Revising** is making significant changes to the ideas, in this case the narrative.

**Editing** is the fine tuning of sentences, such as spelling and punctuation, and is usually done after the writer is content with the story itself.



| REVISING  | EDITING   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>When revising, writers may:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Add more description ("show, don't tell")</li><li>• Omit a scene and replace it with something else</li><li>• Move paragraphs around into a different order</li><li>• Write a new introduction or conclusion</li><li>• Change or develop the setting</li><li>• Make changes to any part of the structure: introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution (end).</li></ul>  | <p><b>When editing, writers may:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Check for and correct any spelling errors</li><li>• Check for and correct any sentence-level problems, such as run-on sentences or fragments, that might make the meaning unclear</li><li>• Fix any punctuation errors and add any needed punctuation</li><li>• Read the story out loud and delete any typos, such as repeated words, or add any missing words</li></ul>  |

## ACTIVITY

# Revising: Adding Detail

During revision, authors often return to their writing to add more detail - to "show, not tell."

Look at the following example.

Sweetie is lying under the maple tree that is old but still  
alive. When I call out her name, Sweetie gets up and walks  
toward me, moving slowly but her tail wagging.

While the sentences in the excerpt are good writing, more detail would enhance the reader's experience and understanding. To know when to add additional detail, authors ask specific questions.

- What details might bring a setting to life and make readers "see" it?
- Instead of using adjectives like "happy" or "sad," how can I describe a character's actions to show how he/she is feeling?
- Where could I build suspense by adding more description to a short scene?
- Does the conclusion end too quickly? What else should happen before the story is over?
- etc.

In this example, how could the author further describe the wagging of Sweetie's tail? (Often, authors will brainstorm several options, then choose the one that fits the story best.)

...moving slowly but her tail wagging **wildly**.

...moving slowly but her tail wagging **as fast as a new pup**.

...moving slowly but her tail wagging **as though caught in a  
windstorm**.

They also look at their writing for statements that simply **tell**, and consider how they could **show** that moment instead. Examine the following edit:

Sweetie is lying under the maple tree ~~that is old but still~~  
~~alive~~. **that her grandmother planted as a child, bare limbs**  
**popping out between clusters of green.**

Notice how the new phrase describes the tree instead of just says straight out that the tree is a survivor; it is usually better to describe rather than "tell" so that readers can enjoy the subtle details for themselves rather than being instructed on what something means.

ACTIVITY

# Revising: Adding Detail

Read the following excerpt from a story.

Jules couldn't sleep. She was afraid. After convincing her parents that she could stay at the house alone while they went out, she had celebrated by watching a funny movie and things had been fine. She'd pretended she was an adult and the house was hers, doing more fun things until she got tired. Now she was lying in her bed listening to the weird noises in the house. Suddenly there was light coming into her bedroom! Oh, it's just her parents' car pulling up out front--what a relief!

Identify one area that could use additional detail. **UNDERLINE** it. Then, brainstorm three additions that would improve this part.

---

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---

**DRAW A STAR** next to the addition that you feel best fits the story.

Identify one area in the excerpt that simply "tells." **CIRCLE** it. How might you re-write this area to "show" readers more detail?

REFERENCE

# Writers Helping Writers

Most writers have trusted friends who read their writing before they send it out to publishers. An outside reader is a fresh pair of eyes to read the story and give a different perspective on what needs to be changed, kept the same, or developed.

Encourage students to share their writing with classmates. Have writers ask the following questions of their readers:

Without looking back, what do you like best about the story? What was most memorable?

This type of question allows the reader to encourage and build up the writer, celebrating what the writer did well in the writing.

What would you like to hear more about?

Questions like this allow the writer to see where the story might benefit from additional detail and description.

Who are the protagonist and antagonist?

Responses to this type of question allow the writer to judge the depth of his or her character descriptions. If the reader is confused or questioning who is who, more detail is needed to show and describe the characters, their traits, and their motivations.

How would you describe the conflict?

Writers can determine how well they've described tension and built suspense by hearing readers' responses to this question. If the conflict is unclear, revision is necessary.

ACTIVITY

# Grammar Races

Often, seeing others mistakes is easier than seeing our own. Recognizing our own errors -in writing and in life- takes time and practice. Get students up, active, and competitive by introducing grammar races to practice this needed skill.

The idea is simple: sentences with grammatical mistakes are displayed or projected on the board and student teams must race to be the first to correct the errors.

**TIP:** To avoid space conflict, it's preferable to display the same sentence as many times as you have teams. (Three competing student teams? You'll need the sentence displayed 3 times.)

Use student examples from writing pieces, social media posts, or the examples below to get started.

Tony seen the adventure movie three times.

Mary taught her dog a trick he can now roll over!

It was supposed to rain today, however it is bright and sunny.

Because it's Jane's birthday. Her mother bought flowers.

The dog lost it's collar.

Hour house is gray with an orange door.

Harry told dr. Martin he had a headache and stuffy nose.

The teacher put to books on the table.

Milo was so hungry that he ate four eggs toast and pancakes for breakfast.

KEY

# Grammar Races

VERB ERROR

Tony ~~seen~~ <sup>saw</sup> the adventure movie three times.

RUN ON SENTENCE

Mary taught her dog a trick; he can now roll over!  
~~OR ...trick. He ...~~

COMMA SPLICE

It was supposed to rain today; however, it is bright and sunny.

SENTENCE FRAGMENT

Because it's Jane's birthday; her mother bought flowers.

USAGE ERROR

The dog lost ~~it's~~ <sup>its</sup> collar.

USAGE ERROR

~~Our~~ <sup>Our</sup> house is gray with an orange door.

CAPITALIZATION ERROR

Harry told ~~dr.~~ <sup>Dr.</sup> Martin he had a headache and stuffy nose.

USAGE ERROR

The teacher put ~~to~~ <sup>two</sup> books on the table.

MISSING COMMAS IN A SERIES

Milo was so hungry that he ate four eggs, toast, and pancakes for breakfast.

SHORT STORY

## Additional Links



PBS LearningMedia ([KET.pbslearningmedia.org](http://KET.pbslearningmedia.org)) is a free repository of classroom-ready digital resources that spans grade and content levels. Easily searchable, find video clips, documents, support materials, even interactives that engage learners and elevate lessons. Favorite resources can even be curated into personalized folders.

Start your own search, or dive in with this selection of resources curated by KET Education Consultant Lynn Shaffer:

[bit.ly/KETShortStory](https://bit.ly/KETShortStory)



# KET

## EDUCATION

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