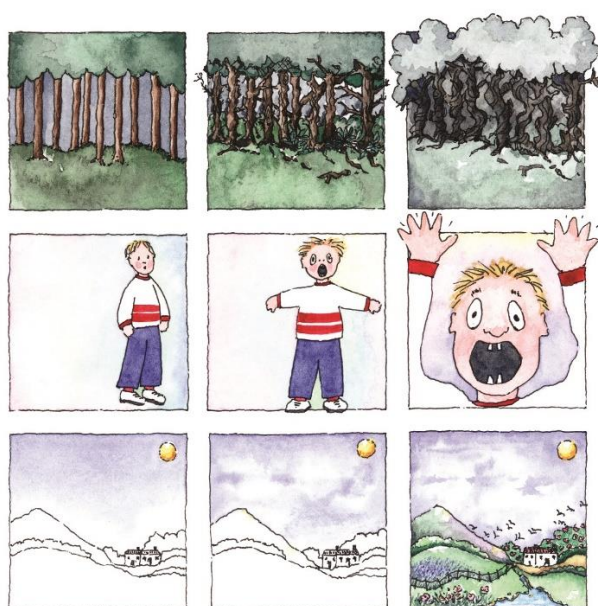


Descriptosaurus

Time Machine

Ideas and activities to help you run the
competition in schools



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

The Descriptosaurus Time Machine competition provides a great opportunity for encouraging your pupils to expand and experiment with descriptive language in order to develop their ability to add more depth and colour to their writing. It also offers cross curricular links, particularly with history, and the opportunity for pupils to research their chosen time period.

In this resource we provide you with lots of activities for incorporating the competition into teaching and learning, including ideas for warm up games, extension activities and planning tips and templates.

But first, let's remind ourselves why we teach descriptive writing...

Why is descriptive writing important?

The importance of young people being able to express their ideas using good descriptive language is widely accepted, not just for creative writing, but also for non-fiction. Developing descriptive language to communicate effectively is an essential tool across the curriculum. History is concerned not merely with dates and facts, but with describing and interpreting past events. In geography, pupils need to be able to describe the world around them. In science, they need to observe carefully and then be capable of describing what is happening in an experiment. In all areas of the curriculum, pupils need the vocabulary to enable them to describe and interpret. Additionally the new GCSE English examination includes a 40-mark creative writing question meaning that developing descriptive language and creative writing skills in Key Stages 2 and 3 is more important than ever.

To be able to describe effectively, we first need to be taught how to look and listen. We need to learn the vocabulary to use in order to express our ideas. We describe sights and events differently because we see and interpret things differently. To any situation or piece of writing we bring our own personality, experiences and imaginations. As educators, we need to open pupils' eyes to the world around them, stimulate their imaginations and sow the seeds of effects that can be achieved in their writing. With the vocabulary, knowledge and understanding of how to use language to achieve depth and colour in their writing, pupils will grow in confidence and motivation to experiment, find their 'voice' and develop their own style of writing.



Warming up to descriptive writing

Before pupils can start planning their competition entries, they'll need to develop a toolkit of the descriptive language and techniques at their disposal. Here are some examples of warm-up games you could play to develop pupil's vocabulary and get them geared up for descriptive writing.

Older pupils should of course already be familiar with descriptive language and techniques, but a little refresher will do no harm!

For all of these games you could give pupils access to cards with different descriptive words, connectives and phrases on them to act as a prompt.

Games for describing settings

"I spy..."

It's an oldie but a goodie! This version of "I Spy" can be played as individuals, pairs or small groups and is a fun way of improving pupils' vocabulary.

- Choose a setting, for example a forest, mountain, cave, beach, street, haunted house, etc.
- Ask the first pupil/group to select a noun associated with the setting, for example, "I spy with my little eye something beginning with B" (branch). The other pupils/groups have to guess.
- Either the first person/group to guess correctly can have the next turn, or it can be done by taking turns. Add a competitive edge to the game by allocating points to the individual or group that has the largest number of guesses before their noun is discovered.
- Extension – Add an adjective: This is played in the same way, but the object of the game is to guess two words: a noun and an adjective. For example: "I spy with my little eye something beginning with T T" (twisted trunk).

Tour guide

Ask pupils to draw a labelled map of a setting. They should think about whether there is:

- a river, lake, pond
- woods
- mountains.



Pupils then imagine that they are guiding someone who cannot see, for example, they might be blind-folded or partially sighted. They should describe the setting to their partner(s) using: To your left, right, in front, behind, above, below, in the distance, etc. Their partner(s) draws a basic, labelled map of the setting described. Pupils compare the map with that of their partner(s). Extension – additional details: Pupils can add further details to their scene. For example, are there animals? Trees, plants, crops? What is the weather like?

Games for describing characters

Character charades

This game is a brilliant way of encouraging pupils to think about different character traits and how these traits might affect their description of a particular character. It can be played individually, in pairs or in small groups.

- Give the pupil/group a card with a character trait of an appropriate level (for example, shocked, humorous or eccentric) and give them time to work out how they are going to act out their trait. To reveal their character they will need to use:
 - speech and tone of voice
 - expressions, eyes and mouth
 - arms, hands and fingers
 - movement around the room.
- Encourage the rest of the group/class to guess the word on the card. After a suitable number of guesses, the pupils can give clues or be asked questions. For example:
 - explain what they are doing - expressions and movement
 - describe what type of things the character does
 - give a synonym
 - reveal the first letter of the word.

Guess the portrait

- Collect a selection of portraits/pictures of people.
- Give each pair or group a selection of three or four numbered portraits. These could be taken from studies in history, science or geography. Alternatively use the portraits from the [Picture the Poet](#) resource. This three-year project by the National Literacy Trust in partnership with the National Portrait Gallery and Apples and Snakes, aimed to support the teaching of creative poetry writing at Key Stages 2 and 3.
- Pairs/groups then label the portraits with important details that will help to identify them.
- Using their notes, pupils describe the portrait to the rest of the class, who have to guess which of the numbered portraits is being described.

Extension:

- Each group can add extra detail to develop a class description of the portrait.
- Imagine the portrait is of a missing person and complete a missing person form (see Appendix 1) for the character in the portrait. In groups, pupils imagine what the character was like and what she/he did. Pupils could then write a paragraph describing their missing person.



Internalising the ingredients of descriptive writing

It is important to support pupils to internalise the ingredients of effective descriptive language. Here are a few ideas for activities that can build on the warm up games outlined in a previous section. The product of some of these activities could act as a prompt or stimulus for the Descriptosaurus Time Machine competition task.

Using traditional stories, myths or legends

Take a traditional tale, such as 'Red Riding Hood', in which the structure is already in place and get pupils to fill in the descriptive detail. Myths and legends can be used in much the same way, for example, the journey through the tunnel to meet the Minotaur.

Films

This is a great opportunity to develop pupils' visual literacy skills, using the moving image to improve creative writing. Watch an opening to a film which contains no dialogue and examine:

- how atmosphere and suspense are achieved, using aspects such as weather, light/dark and sound
- how body language and tone of a character is used to express their emotions.

The opening sequences of some of the Harry Potter films lend themselves well to this activity, as well as some war films such as Saving Private Ryan. (Note: Check the rating and content of films first as some might not be suitable for younger pupils.) There's also a brilliant scene about halfway through the animated film Monster House in which a haunted house comes to life...

Travel brochures

Collect (or ask pupils to collect) photos, postcards, leaflets, cuttings from newspapers, magazines and brochures. Pupils can then use these as inspiration for making a travel brochure or advertising pamphlet for:

- a holiday or excursion: for example an exciting adventure holiday, a relaxing beach holiday or a ghost-hunting expedition
- a particular place or part of the world.

Extension - Do you have any futuristic-looking pictures which could be used to advertise a time-travelling holiday or trip to another dimension?

Advert for a hero/heroine

This task requires pupils to produce a job advertisement for a hero and heroine. Challenge them to describe the task and the characteristics required to secure the job. They should also include a description of the setting and the perils likely to be encountered.

This task could be linked to a historical topic. For example, joining an expedition to search for an Egyptian tomb. It can also be linked to a study of legends, where pupils can first analyse the personality and abilities of the hero/heroine in the legend and use this information to develop their advertisement.

Extension - Write a Curriculum Vitae and an accompanying letter asking to be considered for the expedition, task or job.

S/C-I-R (Setting: Character-Interaction-Reaction)

Effective writing:

- describes the setting
- moves the characters through the setting
- describes the character's reaction to what they see or the events in which they are involved.

A number of examples of S/C-I-R are included in Appendix 2. The paragraphs in this section are examples of:

- how to combine a description of a setting, a character's movements and feelings
- how to combine sentences, phrases and clauses by altering the structure, length and openers for impact and flow.

The individual sentences are examples of the type of writing that is often produced by pupils in their first draft. To demonstrate and practise the editing process:

- cut up the individual sentences
- sequence the sentences
- discuss the impact and flow of the combined sentences. How can it be improved? For example:
 - what sentences can be combined?
 - what words are repeated and can be omitted?
 - what fronted adverbials can be used?



The Time Machine

The key to successful writing set in different time periods and worlds is to entertain and inform your reader by opening the door to those worlds. As well as telling a story, it should act as a tour guide to that period in history or a world in the future, blending fact and fiction, to breathe life into the period – what it actually was like, or would be like, to live there. Above all, it must take the reader on a gripping journey, with colourful, interesting characters. Description and detail will make the place and people come alive.

Writing in the past

The competition provides a great opportunity not only for your pupils to expand and experiment with descriptive language, but also to combine knowledge acquired in history, science, geography, technology and literature and to use it as a platform to write for a purpose.

Historical fiction is more accessible to pupils than a textbook. In a textbook, the past is described as a collection of people, places, artefacts and events. Historical fiction enables pupils to:

- imagine taking part in the events of the past
- consider the reaction of characters to those events
- think about history as more than just a time-line of events
- develop a connection with the people from the past
- acquire a purpose and enthusiasm for researching people, places and events in history.

It can also be used as a tool to search for historical accuracy and evaluate the narrative for bias. It gives pupils a purpose and enthusiasm for researching people, places and events in history; and for immersing themselves in that period.

Whilst they might choose to write a historically accurate account of a real event or person for their competition entry, pupils could also produce a piece of historical fiction, set in a specific era but containing fictional characters or events.

Examples of historical fiction for children and young adults:

- *Over the Line* by Tom Palmer
- *The Machine Gunners* by Robert Westall
- *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak
- *The Girl in the Blue Coat* by Monica Hess
- *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens
- *The Secret Garden* by Francis Hodgson Burnett
- *Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell
- *The Prince and the Pauper* by Mark Twain
- *Goodnight Mr Tom* by Michelle Magorian
- *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* by John Boyne



Writing in the future

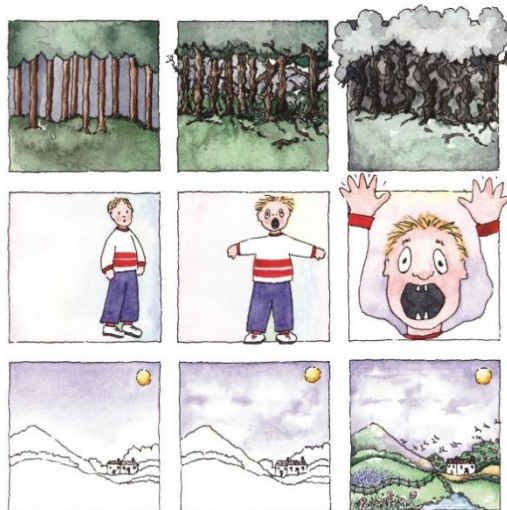
These stories can explore the impact that science and technology, new discoveries and scientific developments might have on the future. They could be set in the future, space, a different world or maybe a different dimension. Pupils might wish to consider the following:

- Is the story going to be based entirely in the future?
- Does it take place in two worlds? For example, time travel, a time slip?
- How might they travel to the future and back?
- What will they encounter? For example, characters, clothing, animals and plants.

Whilst they might not include all of this information in their competition entry, considering these questions will help them plan their work.

Examples of dystopian fiction/books set in the future for children and young adults:

- *Robot Girl* by Malorie Blackman
- *Tomorrow, When the War Began* (and series sequels) by John Marsden
- The *Gone* series by Michael Grant
- *Maggot Moon* by Sally Gardner
- *The Knife of Never Letting Go* by Patrick Ness
- *Z for Zachariah* by Robert C O'Brien
- *Uglies* (and series sequels) by Scott Westerfield
- *1984* by George Orwell
- *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* by Jules Verne
- *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury



The competition task

Now that pupils are ready to write their competition entries, they need, of course, to start by organising their ideas and planning their work. Whether writing in the past, present or future, they could use planning sheets (see Appendix 3 for examples) and mind maps to collate words and phrases to answer the following questions:

- When? The past, present or future? Atmosphere – time of year or day, weather
- Who? Appearance, personality, and emotions – expressions, voice, body language
- Where? The senses – sights, sounds, smell, touch

Pupils might also find it useful to complete action frames. Action frames are designed to assist pupils' description in a piece of their writing, either at the planning stage or as an editing exercise. An example of an action frame from *The Silver Sword* by Ian Serraillier has been included in Appendix 4. This can be discussed, completed as a model or used as a template for pupils' own texts. Pupils should:

- Divide the plan into 'action frames'. For example, Edek was woken up, looked out of window, hid.
- Divide the action frame into a series of clips and answer the following questions:
 - What is happening? (Sights, sounds, smells)
 - What is the character doing? What are the other characters doing?
 - How does the character feel? If you were watching the clip in a film, how would you know?

The task itself...

The competition task has deliberately been made very flexible. Your pupils' entries can be either a piece of creative writing or a non-fiction description set in a particular time period. This could be past, present or future so it's easy for you to integrate it into a current unit your class are working through.

Alternatively you may wish to give your pupils free rein to choose what they want to write about, which may be the route to take if you are running the competition with a creative writing club for instance. We encourage pupils to research their chosen time period so that their writing contains accurate period detail as well as exciting and descriptive language.

However you decide to run the Descriptosaurus Time Machine challenge in your school, we hope that you and your pupils enjoy taking part and that the competition, together with the activity ideas outlined in this resource, supports you to open your pupils' minds to the power of effective descriptive writing.

Like this resource? National Literacy Trust Network members can access hundreds of downloadable resources to support literacy in schools, including PowerPoints for literacy leaders to deliver to staff on developing effective teaching of vocabulary. Plus members get 30% off books in the Descriptosaurus series, and other publications, with Browns Books for Students. Join now.

Appendix 1

MISSING PERSON TEMPLATE

MISSING PERSON'S REPORT

MISSING PERSON:

Name:

Nickname:

Relatives:

Race:

Height:

Hair:

Eyes:

Sex:

Any distinguishing features:

Any known problems:

Hat:

Coat:

Shirt:

Trousers:

Skirt/dress:

Shoes:

Age:

Date of Birth:

Scars/Tattoos:

Last Seen By:

Last Seen Location:

Address:

Additional Information:

Appendix 2

S/c-i-r examples

Suddenly, there was a distant rumble like thunder, which grew louder, and the ground beneath her feet started to shake. Above her, stones cracked and exploded, sending fragments in every direction. It was as if the mountain itself was being shaken. She couldn't stay upright, and was thrown violently backwards, teetering precariously on the edge of the path. For a dreadful moment, she was hanging in the air, her legs flailing and her eyes widening in fear as she lunged with her right hand. Her heart raced as she felt her hand beginning to slip, her frozen fingers scrabbling as her body swung perilously over the drop. Her shoulders were burning. She was losing her grip. Her fingers slid towards the edge.

Suddenly, there was a distant rumble like thunder.
It grew louder and the ground beneath her feet started to shake.
Above her, stones cracked and exploded.
Fragments were sent in every direction.
It was as if the mountain itself was being shaken.
She couldn't stay upright.
She was thrown violently backwards.
She teetered precariously on the edge of the path.
For a dreadful moment she was hanging in the air.
Her legs were flailing and her eyes widened in fear.
She lunged with her right hand.
Her heart raced as she felt her hand beginning to slip.
Her frozen fingers scrabbled as her body swung perilously over the drop.
Her shoulders were burning, and she was losing her grip with her fingers.
She was sliding towards the edge.

There was not a bit of shelter to be found. No rock or tree, nothing but an unending glare. It was like walking through the cinders of a barbecue. He knew his epic struggle was coming to an end. He was tantalisingly close, but his body was weakening with every step.

Finally, unable to walk another step, he slumped on the floor, and lay corpse-like, his head was swimming, his skin scorched.

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Finally, he was unable to walk another step.

He slumped on the floor and lay corpse-like.

His head was swimming.

His skin was scorched.

Robert pushed his way through until the dark house loomed above him. In front of the manor, was a strange, bare patch, where nothing grew, not even weeds. Suddenly, he remembered that this was where a young girl had been pushed to her death by the Roundheads during the civil war, hundreds of years ago.

Robert pushed his way through.

The dark house loomed above him.

In front of the manor, was a strange, bare patch.

Nothing grew, not even weeds.

Suddenly, he remembered that this was where a young girl had died hundreds of years ago.

She had been pushed to her death by the Roundheads during the civil war.

With her left arm outstretched, Kitty pointed frantically at the castle wall, urging her troops carrying the long ladders and poles to sprint forward. When the last ladder had passed, Kitty gritted her teeth and pelted after them. Immediately, there was a twang from hundreds of bowstring losing their arrows, and a black deadly hail arced up into the air. Kitty opened her mouth to scream a warning, but before she could make a sound more and more of her men fell to the ground in front of her.

For a moment, Kitty froze. She didn't know which way to run. Her eyes darted from side to side in desperation, searching for cover. She gripped her shield tighter and kept running, stumbling over bodies to get to the base of the castle.

It was as if everything was happening in slow motion as she watched an arrow whistling towards her. A silent scream erupted inside her head, urging her to take cover. At the last moment, Kitty ducked into a defensive crouch, and lifted her shield above her head. Only seconds later, she heard a series of thuds as arrow after arrow pierced her shield.

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She urged her troops carrying the long ladders and poles to sprint forward.
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At the last moment, Kitty ducked into a defensive crouch.
She lifted her shield above her head.
Only seconds later, she heard a series of thuds.
Arrow after arrow had pierced her shield.

Appendix 3

Planning sheets

Setting

Sights	
Sounds	
Smell	
Touch	
Taste	
Time of day and weather	

Setting and society

Rulers/leaders	
Laws	
Religion	
Diseases	
Transport	
Climate	
Food	
Drink	
Entertainment	
Settlements	

Character: Appearance

Height	
Weight	
Shape	
Hair	
Face	
Eyes	
Mouth	
Teeth	
Clothes	

Character: Personality

Emotion	
Voice	
Expressions	
Eyes	
Movement	

Creature

Size and shape	
Colour and covering	
Head	
Eyes	
Arms, legs, wings and tail	
Smell and sound	
Movement	
Habitat	
Ability and weapons	

Appendix 4

Action frames

Example of an action frame from *The Silver Sword* by Ian Serrailier

Plot Summary:

Joseph Balicki is arrested by the Germans and taken to a prison camp in Poland. He manages to escape from the camp and returns to Warsaw.

He discovers that his wife has been taken to a labour camp, and his house has been blown up and his three children have not been seen since.

He is unable to find his family so escapes to Switzerland, but not before he meets Jan and entrusts him with a paper-knife in the shape of a silver sword to give to his children if he finds them, together with instructions to go to Switzerland.

Jan eventually meets Joseph's children, and together they make a dangerous journey through the occupied countries to Switzerland, where the family is reunited.

ACTION FRAME A: Chapter 6: The Night of the Storm Troopers - Joseph's wife is arrested.

1. Edek is woken by the storm troopers entering the house.
2. Bedroom door is locked.
3. Recovers rifle from the attic.
4. Edek's mother is taken away in a Nazi van.

ACTION FRAME B: Adapting the story

1. Edek is woken
2. Looks out of the window
3. Storm troopers break into the house.
4. Bedroom door is locked.
5. Hides in the attic.
6. Storm troopers break down the bedroom door.
7. Troopers search Edek's room
8. Troopers leave and take Edek's mother with them.

The Night of the Stormtroopers detailed action frame

Events/Ideas	Think about...
Edek is woken.	<p>In the middle of the night, Edek's eyes flew open in the darkness. Suddenly, he was wide awake and too tense to breathe. This was no dream. They had taken his father and were now coming for the rest of the family.</p> <p>WHAT WOKE EDEK?</p> <p><i>Think of sounds. Crunch of wheels. Screech of brakes, etc. Thudding boots.</i></p>
Edek looks out of the window.	<p>In a split second, he realised what was happening.</p> <p>DESCRIBE EDEK'S MOVEMENTS TO THE WINDOW.</p> <p><i>For example: Crouching on all fours, Edek manoeuvred around the bedroom towards the window. Slowly, he lifted his head above the sill and peered out from behind the curtain. He knew he would never forget what he saw through that window.</i></p>

	<p>Pressing his ear to the door, he listened as the soldiers rampaged through the house.</p> <p>WHAT COULD HE HEAR?</p> <p>HOW DID HE FEEL?</p> <p>For example: The sound of his own breathing was almost deafening in the silence. He knew he had to move quickly. Time was running out. In the ceiling was a trapdoor that led to the attic. He knew he couldn't afford to wait any longer.</p>
Hides in the attic.	<p>DESCRIBE HOW HE MOVED ACROSS THE ROOM AND CLIMBED THE LADDER:</p> <p>For example, did he keep glancing over his shoulder towards the door?</p>

	<p>WHAT IS IN THE ATTIC? WHERE CAN HE HIDE?</p> <p>DESCRIBE THE DARK AND SHADOWS, SOUNDS, SMELLS</p> <p>For example: Above him, the wind whined through the gaps in the roof, whilst below he could hear...</p> <p>DESCRIBE THE SOUNDS THAT HE COULD HEAR OUTSIDE HIS ROOM. WHAT WAS HE THINKING?</p> <p>Example: He heard the thundering of boots on the stairs, furniture being overturned, smashing glass and pottery, and above all the raised voices and shouts of the soldiers.</p>
<p>Soldiers break into his room</p>	<p>DESCRIBE THE SOLDIERS BREAKING DOWN THE DOOR. EDEK IS ABOVE THEM. THE SOLDIERS MOVE ACROSS THE ROOM. THEN EDEK REALISES THAT THEY HAVE SPOTTED THE TRAPDOOR.</p>

	<p>WHAT DOES HE DO? HOW DOES HE FEEL?</p> <p>Then a bang as a boot thudded into his door and sent it crashing into the wall. They were in his room!</p> <p>Any minute they would find the trap door.</p> <p>A pool of light leaked from a gap in the floor. As quietly as he could, Edek slipped further into the shadows and flattened himself against the wall.</p>
Search Edek's room and the attic	<p>DESCRIBE THE ATTIC DOOR CREAKING OPEN AND LIGHT FROM A TORCH FLICKERING AROUND THE ROOM.</p> <p>WHAT DOES EDEK DO? HOW DOES HE FEEL?</p> <p>The light lingers on where he is hiding for a moment.</p>

