

"Show, Don't Tell"

Name _____ Date _____

"Show, Don't Tell" means to describe something for your readers instead of telling them something too obvious. For instance, here is a sentence that just tells:

The boy was very frightened.

There's no wondering about it: you have been told the boy was frightened. But notice the difference when the writer **shows** the reader what frightened *looks like*:

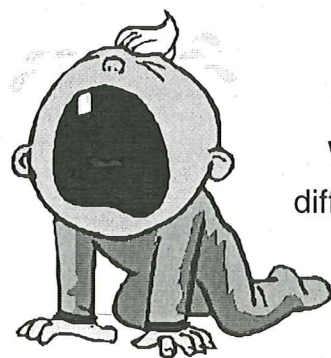


The boy screeched in terror and threw his hands up to protect himself. Even though his legs felt like they had turned to jelly, he jumped to his feet and tried to get out of the monster's reach.

You don't have to tell your readers the boy was frightened. When they read your description of his reactions, they get the picture on their own. This type of descriptive writing makes reading much more fun. Readers like to picture the scene in their own minds. As a writer, you can help them do this by painting a word picture of what the scene looks like. Or, you can describe how a character's body reacts to a specific emotion or situation.

Here's another example. A kid who doesn't know how to "Show, Don't Tell" might write about a crying baby like this:

The baby was crying really hard.



That's obvious. But what does a crying baby look like? What was the baby doing to let you know she was upset? Notice the difference when the writer describes the scene:

The baby let out a howl that could wake the dead. Tears poured from her eyes and her face turned beet red. She pounded her little fists on the floor and threw her toys across the room. I knew we were in for a long, long afternoon.

This time, the writer paints a word picture that describes the crying baby much better than the obvious statement above. In narrative or expository writing, don't just *tell* your readers something they don't have to think about. *Show them*. Describe what is going on, someone's physical reaction to an emotional situation, or a sequence of events.

Practicing "Show, Don't Tell"

Name _____ Date _____

Don't be too obvious when you write. That's kind of like explaining a joke after you tell it. People like to "get it" on their own.

Be creative. Paint word pictures. Describe the action that is going on or a character's emotional reaction. What does his body do? How does he move? How does he respond?

Look at the following pictures. Describe the scene as if your reader cannot see what's going on. "Show, Don't Tell."

Too obvious: The kids were disrespectful to the teacher.

"Show, Don't Tell" _____



Too obvious: The iguana got away.

"Show, Don't Tell" _____