
SECTION THREE

Narration

Skills of Narration

Narration tells a story. The story is presented as a connected series of events, usually in chronological order. The events may have occurred exactly as depicted, or they may be partly or wholly imaginary. In any case, a narrative always answers the question, "What happened?" The following narrative tells what happened one ill-fated night to one of Mark Twain's friends.

38 Mark Twain in *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*

It was back in those far-distant days that Jim Wolf came to us. He was from Shelbyville, a hamlet thirty or forty miles back in the country, and he brought all his native sweetness and gentleness and simplicities with him. He was approaching seventeen, a grave and slender lad, trustful, honest, honorable, a creature to love and cling to. And he was incredibly bashful. He was with us a good while, but he could never conquer that peculiarity; he could not be at ease in the presence of any woman, not even in my good and gentle mother's; and as to speaking to any girl, it was wholly impossible.

It is to this kind that untoward * things happen. My sister gave a "candy-pull" on a winter's night. I was too young to be of the company and Jim was too diffident. I was sent up to bed early and Jim followed of his own

* untoward; unhucky, inconvenient.

motion. His room was in the new part of the house and his window looked out on the roof of the L annex. That roof was six inches deep in snow and the snow had an ice crust upon it which was as slick as glass. Out of the comb of the roof projected a short chimney, a common resort for sentimental cats on moonlight nights—and this was a moonlight night. Down at the eaves, below the chimney, a canopy of dead vines spread away to some posts, making a cozy shelter, and after an hour or two the rollicking crowd of young ladies and gentlemen grouped themselves in its shade, with their saucers of liquid and piping-hot candy disposed about on the frozen ground to cool. There was joyous chaffing and joking and laughter—peal upon peal of it.

About this time a couple of old disreputable tomcats got up on the chimney and started a heated argument about something; also about this time I gave up trying to get to sleep and went visiting to Jim's room. He was awake and fuming about the cats and their intolerable yowling. I asked him, mockingly, why he didn't climb out and drive them away. He was nettled and said overboldly that for two cents he would.

It was a rash remark and was probably repented of before it was fairly out of his mouth. But it was too late—he was committed. I knew him; and I knew he would rather break his neck than back down if I egged him on judiciously.

"Oh, of course you would! Who's doubting it?"

It galled him and he burst out, with sharp irritation,

"Maybe you doubt it!"

"If Oh no! I shouldn't think of such a thing. You are always doing wonderful things, with your mouth."

He was in a passion now. He snatched on his yarn socks and began to raise the window, saying in a voice quivering with anger:

"You think I dasn't—you do! Think what you blame please. I don't care what you think. I'll show you!"

The window made him rage; it wouldn't stay up.

I said, "Never mind, I'll hold it."

Indeed, I would have done anything to help. I was only a boy and was already in a radiant heaven of anticipation. He climbed carefully out, clung to the window-

sill until his feet were safely placed, then began to pick his perilous way on all fours along the glassy comb, a foot and a hand on each side of it. I believe I enjoy it now as much as I did then; yet it is nearly fifty years ago. The frosty breeze flapped his short shirt about his lean legs; the crystal roof shone like polished marble in the intense glory of the moon; the unconscious cats sat erect upon the chimney, alertly watching each other, lashing their tails, and pouring out their hollow grievances; and slowly and cautiously Jim crept on, flapping as he went, the gay and frolicsome young creatures under the vine canopy unaware, and outraging these solemnities with their misplaced laughter. Every time Jim shipped I had a hope; but always on he crept and disappointed it. At last he was within reaching distance.

He paused, raised himself carefully up, measured his distance deliberately, then made a frantic grab at the nearest cat—and missed it. Of course he lost his balance. His heels flew up, he struck on his back, and like a rocket he darted down the roof feet first, crashed through the dead vines and landed in a sitting position in fourteen saucers of red-hot candy in the midst of all that party—and dressed as *he* was—this lad who could not look a girl in the face with his clothes on. There was a wild scramble and a storm of shrieks and Jim fled up the stairs, dripping broken crockery all the way.

The Writer's Craft

SELECTING KEY EVENTS

Stories written about true experiences require the writer to select the events he includes. He makes this selection in an attempt to tell an effective story, a story with a point. The point of Mark Twain's narrative is to tell a humorous story about Jim Wolf's escapade on the night of the candy-pull. From all of the events that undoubtedly took place that night, Mark Twain selected and included just the pertinent events. The following are the key events in his narrative:

Jim Wolf arrives at Mark Twain's house (lines 1-2)

Twain is sent to bed early and Jim goes too (lines 15-16)

The young men and women gather under the canopy of vines to wait for the candy to cool (lines 24-28)

Two tomcats begin yowling on the chimney (lines 30-32)
Jim makes his boast and Twain urges him to act (lines 35-57)

Jim crosses the roof (lines 57-72)
Jim slips, crashes through the vines, and disrupts the party (lines 73-82)
Jim flees up the stairs (lines 82-83)

In lines 24-25 Twain says that "after an hour or two" the young people gathered under the canopy of vines, but he does not discuss the events that occurred during this "hour or two." He also does not tell how the tomcats got on the chimney or what happened to them after Jim fell. Why do you think Twain omitted these events?

USING NARRATIVE DETAILS

The key events in Twain's narrative could be presented in a brief summary. This summary would still be narration, but it would lack the rich detail of Twain's story. Here is such a summary:

One winter's night, when Jim Wolf was staying at our house, my sister gave a "candy-pull." Jim and I went to bed early. After an hour or two, the noise from the party, plus the yowling of a couple of cats out on the roof, was too much for me. I went visiting Jim and found him complaining about the cats. I urged him to crawl out on the roof and drive them away. He boasted that "for two cents" he would, and I gounded him into carrying out the boast. It might have worked out all right had the roof not been so slippery and Jim not so anxious. He almost grabbed one of the cats, but lost his balance instead, and fell off the roof, right into the middle of my sister's party. Amid a storm of shrieks, he fled up the stairs.

In this summary you learn all of the important facts about Jim Wolf's embarrassing experience. But the interest is gone. *Narrative details* are essential if Jim is to seem alive, and the events are to seem real and vivid. Here are examples of some of the different kinds of details in Twain's narrative:

Details that reveal character:

I asked him, mockingly, why he didn't climb out and drive them away. (lines 35-36)

The window made him rage; it wouldn't stay up. (line 53)

I said, "Never mind, I'll hold it." (line 54)

... this lad who could not look a girl in the face with his clothes on. (lines 80-81)

Details that make actions specific:

... slowly and cautiously Jim crept on, flapping as he went. . . . (lines 67-68)

He paused, raised himself carefully up, measured his distance deliberately, then made a frantic grab at the nearest cut—and missed it. (lines 73-75)

... like a rocket he darted down the roof feet first, crashed through the dead vines and landed in a sitting position in fourteen saucers of red-hot candy. . . . (lines 76-79)

Details that offer explanations or reasons:

It is to this kind that untoward things happen. (line 12)

I was too young to be of the company and Jim was too diffident. (lines 13-14)

I knew him; and I knew he would rather break his neck than back down if I egged him on judiciously. (lines 40-42)

Find other details in this narrative that make the events vivid and help to make the experience seem real.

USING DIALOGUE

Dialogue, or direct quotation of a speaker, serves a number of purposes in a narrative. It helps to convey action and to foretell events. It also helps to reveal character, either of the speaker or of the person spoken to. What function does the dialogue in lines 43-54 serve? Do you think Twain's story would have been as interesting if it had contained no dialogue? Why or why not? Would it have been as interesting if it had been written entirely in dialogue? Explain.

USING DESCRIPTION IN NARRATION

Since narration is concerned with events, the writer concentrates on the action rather than on descriptions of persons, places, and things. There are times, however, when some description is necessary if the reader is to picture the action and understand the events fully. Below is a list of the people, places, and things that Twain describes in his narrative. Look back at the descriptions Twain gives and explain why they are important to the narrative.

Jim Wolf (lines 1-11)

the roof outside Jim's window (lines 17-22)

the scene beneath the eaves (lines 22-29)

the view as Jim crawls across the roof (lines 62-70)

"Who is telling the story?" is a question the writer must answer before he begins to write, because it has an effect on the way he selects and arranges his material. If the story is told from the *first-person participant* point of view, as in the Mark Twain selection, the author is a character in the story. He participates in the action and depicts it from close range. He is able to inject his own opinions, explanations, and judgments. Find at least three places where Twain expresses his own opinions in this model narrative.

Now You Try It

Select one of the following assignments:

1. Write a narrative (500-750 words) depicting a sequence of events which lead to a dramatic conclusion. Base your story on a personal experience: one that interested you and is likely to interest your readers. Before starting to write, outline the narrative by listing the key events in chronological order.
2. Think about an important decision you had to make recently. Recall the sequence of events leading up to this decision. After listing the key events in chronological order, compose a narrative (500-750 words) showing how and why you made the decision that you did.

LESSON

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Selecting Key Events

Every narrative is composed of a sequence of events. Of course, a writer cannot include every single event that has occurred in an experience. Instead, he must select those events that (1) move the action forward, (2) provide turning points or a conclusion for the action, (3) give insight into people in the story, and (4) help to create a desired emotional effect. An event which serves one or more of these functions is called a *key event*. Look for the key events in the following narrative.

39 Burl Ives in *Wayfaring Stranger*

[1] When I was in about the sixth grade at school, our two-year high school, which was in another building, decided to put on a play.

[2] The play was put on in the Odd Fellows Hall over the brick mercantile store in the center of our town. We made the scenery, the girls made the costumes, and everybody turned out for the amateur theatricals. People from other towns came to see them, and before we knew it, we were putting on plays in the neighboring towns, Willow Hill, Yale, St. Marie, Rose Hill, and others.

[3] Between the acts I played the banjo, cracked jokes, and sang minstrel songs and the old ballads. Because of my extensive theatrical commitments I saved money and bought from Oliver Ditson in Boston a makeup box which had

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greasepaint, eyebrow pencils, and all kinds of makeup equipment.

[4] One night after our week's theatrical season was over and forgotten, I began to experiment with makeup. I sat before the glass and made myself up as a Chinese with a wig and queue.* Then I made myself up as old men with various kinds of whiskers. One of these I liked very much. I really looked like a very old man with whiskers.

[5] In an old trunk in my father's bedroom, there was a cape and hat, such as gamblers on the Mississippi River used during the turn of the century. This hat and cape had belonged to my father's brother who was the black sheep of the family. He had actually been a Mississippi gambler, and it was said that his body lay unfound at the river's bottom.

[6] I took the cape and hat out of the old trunk and put them on. With my whiskers and gray makeup on, with a cane in my right hand and in a stooped position I walked toward the restaurant. As I came to the corner to turn toward the restaurant, I met Ide Chatman, a neighbor woman. I walked slowly past her and I saw that she was mighty curious, that she did not recognize me. She went on toward home, looking back over her shoulders at one whom she supposed a stranger in town.

[7] I went up past the restaurant but stayed far enough away so that the people in the restaurant saw only the outline of an old man with a cane, a cape, and a tall hat.

[8] When I had moved from the light into the darkness, I ripped off the cape and hat, flew home, and took off the makeup. Then I ran back as fast as I could to the restaurant. The place was buzzing with excitement. Ide Chatman had come in and reported what she had seen on the street. Several of the loafers had seen the old man as he passed in front of the restaurant. I knew in a moment that I was not suspected, so, I said, "Why, I saw him not two or three minutes ago as I came up. He was going toward the church."

[9] That night people who had not locked their doors in years locked them. Children waited to walk home with their parents, and there was an air of mystery around the town. During the day drummers would come to the town taking orders for goods, and occasionally visitors would come to

* queue: a pigtail.

some family, but everyone who came into town was accounted for. The appearance of this stranger was curious and everyone was afraid down in his heart of the mysterious old man.

[10] After a couple of weeks he was forgotten and I thought it time he should make another appearance. It was in the spring of the year, and the roads were muddy, and it was difficult for anybody to get into or out of town. Horseback and carriage were the only practical ways of travel; the roads were impassable to automobiles. Thus the town had fewer visitors than at other times of the year.

[11] It was a beautiful moonlight night when an old man with a cape, tall hat, and cane again moved slowly down the street in Hunt City. Vanquis people passed him, and he walked on, saying nothing. Ten minutes later, after shedding my disguise, I went into the restaurant again, and this time the intensity of the excitement was even greater. People ran into the restaurant to report that they had seen him in various other parts of town where he had not been. Ide Chatman reported that she had seen him walking across the road and that as she went toward him all at once there was a flash and a puff of smoke and he was no more.

[12] Again fear gripped this little town. I fell in with their attitude and soon was not sure but that there was another old man and that actually there was something to be afraid of. For many weeks various people came in to tell of having seen the strange old man at one place or another in the town. One person said he had seen him sitting on the steeple of the church, balancing himself and then fading away.

[13] Summer came and the old man had been forgotten except as a legend. Then one night, feeling the need of a little excitement, I put on my costume again and ventured into the streets. Four young men were coming toward me and I thought, should I give ground or should I walk directly past them? I pulled the hat down over my face, bent on the cane, and walked by the four frightened young men. I kept walking and they stopped. One of them said, "Let's catch the old —"

[14] They started walking after me. I started walking a little faster and I realized that they intended to catch me. Also I sensed their fear. I turned, with my cape in the same

hand as my cane, and lifted them both high in the air. The young men stopped for a second, then flew in terror down the street. I ran and disrobed, then hurried into the restaurant and reported that I had seen him.

[15] The town was abuzz and again he was reported many times and in many places by various people. One woman said that she had seen him in her back yard and that he had looked up at her and his eyes were afire, that his face was pale, that stringy hair hung down from under his tall hat, and that he had no lips, only a pair of teeth.

[16] During all of this I became very fearful lest I should be caught and I did not appear again in this outfit for a very long time. Then I could not resist and again I appeared on the street as the old man.

[17] The last time I appeared was in the fall of the year. There was a vacant lot down one of the streets where we boys had made beds in the tall Jimson weeds. The weeds had grown eight feet high and through them we had made tunnels.

[18] It happened that on the night when the old man appeared there was a group of men and boys in the street. Somebody said, "Let's get him." All at once they came at me, fifteen or twenty men and boys, running as fast as they could go. I came to the weed patch which was next to an implement building. I went through a hole in the fence into the Jimson weed patch, threw off my cape and hat, and escaped.

[19] They did not see where I had gone because I had faded into the dark shadow of the implement building. Some of the men said, as they cut back to the restaurant, that as the old man flew down the street his feet had not touched the ground and as he had come to the implement building he had raised in flight and they had seen him soar into the sky.

[20] I was so excited at all of these stories and at all of the wonderful things which were manufactured in the minds of the people that I felt I wanted to tell somebody that I was the old man. But there was no one to tell. I couldn't let this get out. It had to be my secret but I was bursting to tell someone. I thought of telling my father but realized that the consequences might not be pleasant.

[21] So again in two weeks the old man appeared on the

street and this time was chased into the weed patch by five or six men, one of them Frank Ives. After I had crawled into the weed patch a little distance, I took off the cape and hat and threw them into the thick weeds some distance. Then I went back by tunnel and joined those who were seeking the old man.

[22] I started down the street ahead of the men who had been seeking the old man and my father said, "Burl, are you going home?"

[23] I said, "Yes, I think I will."

[24] He said, "Wait, I will come with you."

[25] As we neared our house, from underneath his coat he pulled out a cape, a hat, and a cane, and said, "Did you ever see these before?"

[26] And I said, "Yes, they were Uncle John's."

[27] He said, "Yes, they were."

[28] He took the costume and put it back in the trunk which had belonged to my uncle, then came back to me and said, "Let's take a walk."

[29] We walked what seemed to be a very long time down the streets, and finally he said, "You might have been killed, pulling a trick like that."

[30] I said, "Yes."

[31] Then he said, "If the old man never appears again, I will tell no one. It will be our secret."

[32] We stopped and looked directly into each other's eyes and Frank Ives held out his right hand to his son. Until this day it has remained our secret.

The Writer's Craft

1. The first key event in Burl Ives's narrative occurs in paragraphs 6-9. This event is the first appearance of the strange old man. How do paragraphs 1-5 set the stage for this event?

2. How many excursions into town did Ives make with the cape, hat, and cane? Is each of these ventures a key event in the narrative? Why? Over how long a period of time did these events occur?

3. Notice that every appearance of Ives as the old man is followed by an account of the reactions of the townspeople. Is the behavior of these people important in the narrative? Why?

4. Transitions indicate that the events in this story are in chronological order: "One night after our week's theatrical season" (para-

graph 4): "After a couple of weeks" (paragraph 10). Find other transitions in this narrative that indicate chronological order.

5. Each key event in a narrative is part of a sequence of events, and this sequence should reach a clear-cut conclusion. Does Ives's narrative reach such a conclusion? Is Burt Ives's encounter with his father a key event in the narrative? Why?

Now You Try It

Select one of the following assignments:

1. Write a narrative in which you tell about an adventure or a remarkable experience you had as the result of a decision to act on your own. Before starting to write, select the key events you will include in your narrative.
2. Write a first-person narrative in which you show, through a sequence of key events, that "Practical Jokes Are Not Always Funny."
3. Mark Twain writes in his *Autobiography*: "All my life I have been the easy prey of the cheap adventure." In his narrative, Burt Ives demonstrates how he was such "easy prey." Write a narrative about a situation in your own life that reveals how such an idea could be applied to you. Select the key events before writing.

LESSON **13**
Using Narrative Details

A good narrative includes details which give the reader an interesting and complete view of an experience. To see the difference narrative details can make, compare the following brief narrative with Mary Ellen Chase's model narrative. Both cover the same events, but the model contains narrative details.

On one of my first walks in Chicago, I lingered on a drawbridge. The bridge rose while I was on it. I managed to hold on until the operators saw me and brought the bridge back down. Two policemen led me back to the street and asked why I had disregarded the warning signals. After a few more questions, they let me go.

40 *Mary Ellen Chase in A Goodly Fellowship*

I had lived all of my twenty-two years in the country and in the most countrified country at that. The college which I attended was a country college, situated in a small town, the nearest city being the inconsiderable one of Bangor. I knew nothing of great cities and their ways, and had I not been so eager to enjoy my new freedom to its limit and to learn all that I could about my new surroundings, I should have felt terrified by Chicago, its dirt, its uproar, and its frenzied rush.

Strange and frightening as everything seemed to me, however, I determined upon leaving Mr. Clark's office

on Van Buren Street to walk to the Bible Institute. I was impelled to do so by a variety of desires: to make my next letter home as dramatic and as interesting as possible; to see what Chicago was really like; to avoid another streetcar since in the first I had felt extremely self-conscious and ill at ease; and above all else to postpone as long as possible my reentry into the Bible Institute. Even with my suitcase the distance did not seem long to me when the impatient doorman at Steinway Hall had explained to me with many pointings of a scornful finger the requisite blocks west and the turn northward.

I reached Dearborn Street with no disaster and turned northward. The day was warm, and I took my time, seemingly the only person, I thought, on the street who was not in a hurry. There was and still is, unless I am mistaken, a bridge on Dearborn Street which crosses the Chicago River. The structure of this bridge meant nothing to me, but I lingered thereon, being fascinated by the filthy water of the river and by a peculiar craft coming upstream. This struck me, I remember, as odd since there was obviously no way by which it might proceed beyond the bridge. I walked on slowly, studying the steady progress of the boat, when I was startled by the blowing of whistles and the apparent haste of everyone but me. Whether I was hidden by the iron uprights of the bridge from the sight of the men responsible for its manipulation, I do not know; but by the time I had come to my senses and was hurrying to reach the other side, I felt to my horror the solid boards beneath my feet begin to rise in the air and to place me and my suitcase in an ever-increasingly precarious position at an angle of some forty-five degrees.

Terrified as I was at this angle, which, I surmised, must steadily increase toward ninety degrees, I had sense enough now to realize quickly the connection between the bridge and the boat. Since the bridge had parted in its middle and was rising in the air to allow the passage of the boat, I knew that it was destined to come down again. I had not come to Chicago to meet my death, and I instantly decided upon the only way to avoid it. I wedged my suitcase between two of the iron

supports which met at an angle and somehow cast myself upon it with my arms clinging to whatever there was to cling to. I would hold on, I determined, with all my strength until the bridge once again assumed its normal position, when I would extricate myself and walk off with what dignity I could muster.

But by the time my decisions were made and I was placed in my desperate position, the men in charge of this curious feat of engineering had spotted me. There were shouts, more blowing of whistles, the gathering of a crowd on the nearer bank of the river. The boat backed downstream; the bridge began to descend. I felt it slowly dropping backward behind me. It clanged and bumped into position; and I was lifted to my feet by two policemen who had run onto the bridge from the nearer pavement.

Once on the street I found myself the center of a strange assortment of men and women, many with foreign faces, who, used to such bridges as this, had been awaiting its normal behavior in order to cross the river. I instantly recognized that my courage in the face of danger meant nothing whatever to them. They thought I was either mad or senseless and were curiously waiting to discover which.

The bigger policeman, who had not relinquished his hold upon me, began at once to question me.

"Young woman," he screamed, "are you tired of life? Just what do you mean by not heeding signals?"

I explained as best I could, while the crowd increased and I wanted terribly to die, that I had never before seen such a bridge and that I had not understood the connection between the signals and myself.

"Will you kindly tell us," asked the other policeman, who still held my suitcase, looking upon it occasionally with disdain and scorn, "who you are and where on earth you hail from?"

I strove to hold back my nervous tears as I gave my name and the state of my kindly engendered, which at that moment I devoutly wished I had never left.

The crowd howled with unkind amusement and repeated the howl when, upon further harsh inquiry, I was obliged to tell where I was staying in the city. I thought

for some terrible moments that I was not to be allowed to proceed on my way unattended by the law; but my obvious innocence and the sight of my tears apparently convinced the policemen that I was truthful, if a fool, and they at last let me go.

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The Writer's Craft

1. Narrative details help to make the difference between a brief summary and a full-scale narrative like Mary Ellen Chase's. These details may specify actions, provide reasons for actions, add interest, help to reveal character, or create atmosphere. Most narrative details, in fact, serve more than one of these purposes. What are the purposes of the following details in Mary Ellen Chase's narrative?

I knew nothing of great cities and their ways (line 5)

I walked on slowly, studying the steady progress of the boat . . . (lines 34-35)

I had not come to Chicago to meet my death, and I instantly decided upon the only way to avoid it. (lines 51-53)

There were shouts, more blowing of whistles, the gathering of a crowd . . . (lines 62-64)

"Young woman," he screamed, "are you tired of life?" (line 80)

2. Narrative details give substance to the key events in a narrative. Notice, for example, the first *event* in Mary Ellen Chase's narrative, her decision to walk to the Bible Institute. The sentences in lines 10-22 give details which help the reader to understand what is happening and why, and to gain insight into Miss Chase's character. Her wish to make her next letter home dramatic, her desire to find out about Chicago, her feelings about streetcars and about the Bible Institute—these thoughts and others are included as narrative details.

Find the details which lend interest and substance to the following events in Miss Chase's narrative. Determine the purpose, or purposes, of each of the details.

Miss Chase walks to the bridge and starts across it. (lines 23-36)

The bridge rises. (lines 37-59)

The bridge is lowered. (lines 60-69)

Miss Chase returns to the street. (lines 70-77)

Policemen question her. (lines 78-95)

She is released. (lines 95-100)

Now You Try It

Select one of the following assignments:

1. Encounters with obstacles—other people, drawbridges, and so on—provide material for interesting narratives. In such contests the key events are usually easy to determine, but narrative details must then be added if the material is not to sound like a mere summary. Think of an encounter you had in school, at home, or on a trip that would make an interesting narrative. Using the Mary Ellen Chase model for guidance, write a narrative in which you show exactly what happened.

2. Strong emotion is an element in many narratives. Bewilderment is the emotion Miss Chase's narrative emphasizes. In others the principal emotion may be amusement, frustration, boredom, or anxiety. Select one of these emotions, or a different one, or perhaps a range of emotions, and develop a narrative that shows, with narrative details, how the emotion arose and what its consequences were.

LESSON **14**

Using Dialogue

In narration a writer wants the reader to see and hear the events that are taking place. One of the ways he brings events to life for the reader is through the use of direct conversation, or *dialogue*. Notice John Updike's use of dialogue in the following narrative.

41 John Updike in "Pigeon Feathers"

... His parents tried to think of ways to entertain him.
 "David, I have a job for you to do," his mother said one evening at the table.
 "What?"
 "If you're going to take that tone, perhaps we'd better not talk."
 "What tone? I didn't take any tone."
 "Your grandmother thinks there are too many pigeons in the barn."
 "Why?" David turned to look at his grandmother, but she sat there staring at the burning lamp with her usual expression of bewilderment.
 Mother shouted, "Mom, he wants to know why!"
 Grandmom made a jerky, irritable motion with her bad hands, as if generating the force for utterance, and said, "They foul the furniture."
 "That's right," Mother said. "She's afraid for that old Olinger furniture that we'll never use. David, she's been

after me for a month about those poor pigeons. She wants you to shoot them."

"I don't want to kill anything especially," David said. Daddy said, "The kid's like you are, Elsie. He's too good for this world. Kill or be killed, that's my motto."

His mother said loudly, "Mother, he doesn't want to do it."

"Not?" The old lady's eyes distended as if in horror, and her claw descended slowly to her lap.

"Oh, I'll do it, I'll do it tomorrow," David snapped, and a pleasant crisp taste entered his mouth with the decision.

"And I had thought, when Boyer's men made the hay, it would be better if the barn doesn't look like a rookery," his mother added needlessly.

The Writer's Craft

1. Suppose John Updike had not used dialogue and simply written:

David's mother asked him to shoot the pigeons in the barn. His father and grandmother agreed that the pigeons should be killed. At first David said he didn't want to kill them, but then he changed his mind and said he would.

Does this summary have the interest and force of Updike's narrative with its dialogue? Does it reveal the personalities of the members of David's family? Does it show the conflicts among them?

2. Dialogue can tell the reader a great deal about the person who is speaking. Do the words used by Updike's speakers help to indicate their attitudes and personalities? From the way they speak, how would you characterize David? Father? Mother? Grandmother?

DIALOGUE TAGS

When a writer uses dialogue, he must make clear to the reader who is speaking. In line 3, Updike writes,

"David, I have a job for you to do," his mother said . . .

The italicized words are the dialogue tag. You will notice, however, that dialogue tags are not used every time someone speaks. There are, for example, four speeches in lines 5-10 and none has a dialogue tag. Why are dialogue tags unnecessary in these lines?

When a tag is necessary, the verb *said* is usually adequate. There are times, however, when a writer wishes to show precisely how the speaker's words were uttered. He can do this with specific verbs (*shouted* — line 14), with adverbs modifying the verb *said* (*said loudly* — line 25), or with a combination of specific verbs and adverbs (*added needlessly* — line 34).

Here is another model in which dialogue is used effectively. Notice how the dialogue helps to move the action forward and to reveal character.

42 James Reid Parker in "The First Day"

When young Dr. Sargent arrived at the college to assume his duties as a member of the faculty, he reversed a life-long custom. Now that he was well equipped with the suitable degrees, tokens of graduate study, he was about to address a class. Hitherto he had always been among those addressed.

The college had given him an office, with a nice desk and three chairs upholstered in green leather, near his lecture room. Sitting in one of the green chairs, Sargent nervously fiddled with his notes for the first day. He had the academic equivalent of stagefright. Strange lumps were forming in his throat, and there was a hollow feeling in the pit of his stomach. His watch said five minutes to nine — five minutes before his first college class. The students would be freshmen, as new to the routine as himself.

A warning bell rang. In a moment the corridor was crowded with young men going in and out of lecture rooms and professors' offices. It was vital and alive, an artery rushing with blood. Sargent opened the door, looked out at the melange* of faces and forms, and instantly drew back. For one final minute he enjoyed the delicious security of hiding behind the frosted glass. Then he opened the door again and slipped into the corridor.

The crowd was moving more slowly at the entrance to his lecture room. The men dropped their cigarettes on the

* melange, mixture.

floor, and crushed them. Sargent drew rapid, solacing gusts of smoke from his own, and finally relinquished it. Somebody took his arm.

"Who is this guy Sargent?" asked a voice. "What do you know about him?"

"Not very much," said Sargent weakly.

The young man had edged forward to exchange confidences in the few brief seconds before Calvary. He was a pleasant-looking chap, with hair cut so close that it stood upright. He must have noticed Sargent's air of helplessness, because he adopted him at once.

"When we get inside," said the young man, "let's get seats in the last row. That's the best way to do."

"Is it?" responded Sargent.

"Sure," said the young man. "Just do the way I do. Suppose he turns out to be a pain in the neck. We'll be all right if we get in the last row, the first day. Of course, maybe he'll have a special seating arrangement. Some do and some don't. This used to be my brother's college — that's how I know a good deal about the way they do things."

Young Dr. Sargent looked at his friend with the upright hair, and suddenly remembered that his own college life was only three or four years behind him, after all. It had been much like this.

"Suppose he *doesn't* turn out to be a pain in the neck," he offered hopefully. "What do we do then?"

"If he's all right, we might as well move up front after today," said the young man. "You can hear better."

They were inside the lecture room now. Instructing Sargent to follow, the protector dashed to the last row with a haste born of experience. In any classroom the last row commands a certain popularity. Sargent tried to establish himself as inconspicuously as possible on the platform. This was difficult. He pretended to busy himself with checking over his notes. Presently, without looking up from the lectern, he called the roll. He didn't want to discover who the young man was.

But Sargent was forced to look up when the roll was finished, and the hypnotic power of morbid curiosity drew his eyes to the last row. His guardian's head was buried in a notebook.

"Gentlemen," Sargent began, "This — er — is my first day

as a member of the faculty, and — er — if you are in any way nervous about attending a college class for the first time, you can't possibly — um — be as nervous as I am.”
Then tension relaxed. He had said the right thing.

The Writer's Craft

1. Few narratives are written entirely in dialogue. Instead, the writer uses dialogue in appropriate places and for a particular purpose, often to dramatize an event. He presents other sections of the narrative without dialogue. He always tries to achieve a pleasing balance between sections of dialogue and sections of straight narration, since too much dialogue can be monotonous. Notice how this process of alternation is used in Parker's narrative. Do you find it effective?
2. In dialogue, differences in levels of usage can tell the reader something about the education, intelligence, and background of various speakers. Why is dialogue often a more satisfactory way than straight narration to tell readers that a character in the story is, for example, immature, illiterate, or pompous?
3. Dialogue looks easier to write than it actually is. It is not, first of all, talk for talk's sake. Nor is it usually a word-for-word transcript of ordinary conversation, for talk in real life tends to be either rambling or cryptic. Good dialogue is carefully selected and edited speech. Why is it important to be selective in choosing dialogue for a narrative? Why may actual conversation have to be edited for use in a narrative? Why may it be desirable to add some dialogue that did not really occur in the events you are writing about?

Now You Try It

Select one of the following assignments:

1. Using Updike's characters in Model 41, write a narrative which contains the next day's conversation at the dinner table. Decide whether or not David has killed the pigeons. Have the father bring up the subject and the mother be willing to forget it. The grandmother may remain the same.
2. Write a narrative using one of the following situations or one of your own choice. Use dialogue to help in developing the situation and in characterizing the people involved.

- a. A mother and daughter prepare for a weekend guest.
- b. An inquisitive youngster pesters a stranger at a ball game.
- c. A shopper discovers that she has been shortchanged, when she returns to the counter, the clerk remembers neither her nor the merchandise.
- d. A boy tries to explain something about automobiles to a person who has almost no knowledge of cars and little apparent interest in them.
- e. Two girls discover they have been dating the same boy.
- f. Two boys discover they have been dating the same girl.

LESSON **15**

Using Description in a Narrative

When you write narration, you write about events. These events are the vital elements of your narrative, and anything else you include should help to make the events clear and vivid. Narrative details serve this purpose. So does dialogue. Still another way to add clarity and vividness to your narrative is through the use of descriptive details. Notice Edwin Way Teale's use of descriptive details in the following narrative.

43 Edwin Way Teale in *The Lost Woods*

A back-country road was carrying us south, carrying us through a snow-filled landscape and under the sullen gray of a December sky. Minute by minute, the long chain of the Indiana dunes receded behind us. Ahead, beyond the bobbing ears of the horses, I could catch glimpses of the blue-white, faraway ridges of the Val-paraiso moraine.*

Our low bobbed tilted and pitched over the frozen ruts. Beside me, my bearded grandfather clung to the black strips of the taut reins and braced himself with felt-booted feet widespread. At every lurch, my own short, six-year-old legs, dangling below the seat, gyrated wildly like the tail of an off-balance cat.

* moraine: glacial land formation.

We had left Lone Oak, my grandfather's dune-country farm, that winter morning, to drive to a distant woods. In the late weeks of autumn, my grandfather had been busy there, felling trees and cutting firewood. He was going after a load of this wood and he was taking me along. At first, we drove through familiar country — past Cunder's big red barn, the weed lot and the school house. Then we swung south and crossed the right-of-way of the Pere Marquette railroad. Beyond, we journeyed into a world that was, for me, new and unexplored. The road ran on and on. We seemed traversing vast distances while the smell of coming snow filled the air.

Eventually, I remember, we swung off the road into a kind of lane. The fences soon disappeared and we rode out into open country, onto a wide, undulating sea of whiteness with here and there the island of a bush-clump. As we progressed, a ribbon of runner-tracks and hoofmarks steadily unrolled, lengthened, and followed us across the snow.

Winter trees, gray and silent, began to rise around us. They were old trees, gnarled and twisted. We came to a frozen stream and turned to follow its bank. The bobbed, from time to time, would rear suddenly and then plunge downward as a front runner rode over a low stump or hidden log. Each time the sled seat soared and dropped away, I clung grimly to my place or clawed wildly at my grandfather's overcoat. He observed with a chuckle:

"Takes a good driver 't hit all th' stumps."

Then, while the snow slipped backward beneath the runners and the great trees of that sember woods closed around us, we rode on in silence. As we advanced, the trees grew steadily thicker; the woods more dark and lonely. In a small clearing, my grandfather pulled up beside a series of low, snow-covered walls. Around us were great white mounds that looked like igloos. The walls were the corded stovewood; the igloos were the snow-clad piles of discarded branches.

Wisps of steam curled up from the sides of the heated horses and my grandfather threw blankets over their backs before he bent to the work of tossing stovewood

into the lumber-wagon bed of the hobsled. The hollow
thump and crash of the frozen sticks reverberated
through the still woods.

I soon tired of helping and wandered about, small as
an atom, among the great trees — oak and beech, hickory
and ash and sycamore. An air of strangeness and mystery
enveloped the dark woods. I peered timidly down
gloomily aisles between the trees. Branches rubbed to-
gether in the breeze with sudden shrieks or mournful
wailings and the cawing of a distant crow echoed dis-
mally. I was at once enchanted and fearful. Each time I
followed one of the corridors away from the clearing, I
hurried back to be reassured by the sight of my bundled-
up grandfather stooping and rising as he picked up the
cordwood and tossed it into the sled.

He stopped from time to time to point out special
trees. In the hollow of one great beech, he had found
two quarts of shelled nuts stored away by a squirrel. In
another tree, with a gaping rectangular hole chopped
in its upper trunk, the owner of the woods had obtained
several milk pails full of dark honey made by a wild
swarm of bees. Still another hollow tree had a story to
tell. It was an immense sycamore by the stream-bank.
Its interior, smoke-blackened and cavernous, was filled
with a damp and acrid odor. One autumn night, there,
hunters had treed and smoked out a raccoon.

There were other exciting discoveries: the holes of
owls and woodpeckers; the massed brown leaves
of squirrel-nests high in the bare branches; the tracks of
small wild animals that wound about among the trees,
that crisscrossed on the ice, that linked together the
great mounds of the discarded branches. In one place,
the wing feathers of an owl had left their imprint on
the snow; and there, the trail of some small animal had
ended and there, on the white surface, were tiny drops
of red. From the dark mouth of a burrow, under the far
bank of the frozen stream, tracks led away over the ice.
I longed to follow them around a distant bend in the
stream. But the reaches beyond, forbidding under the
still tenseness of the ominous sky, slowed my steps to a
standstill. However, my mind and imagination were
racing.

Behind and beyond the silence and inactivity of the
woods, there was a sense of action stilled by our pres-
ence; of standing in a charmed circle where all life
paused, enchanted, until we passed on. I had the feeling
that animals would appear, their interrupted revels and
battles would recommence with our departure. My
imagination invested the woods with a fearful and de-
licious atmosphere of secrecy and wildness. It left me
with an endless curiosity about this lonely tract and all
of its inhabitants.

After nearly half an hour had gone by, my grand-
father's long sled was full and he called me back to the
seat. As we rode away, I looked back as long as I could
see the trees, watching to the last the gloomy woods,
under its gloomy sky, which had made such a profound
impression on me. All the way home, I was silent, busy
with my own speculations.

The Writer's Craft

1. Since Teale is telling a story in this selection, the events that
take place are of primary importance. What are the key events in the
narrative?

2. Descriptive details help to create atmosphere. They also make
the experience visual for the reader. Find the specific details in the
model that describe each of the following:

grandfather at the ruins (lines 9-11)

Teale beside him (lines 11-13)

the open country (lines 29-31)

the trail left by the sleigh (lines 31-33)

the horses (lines 53-54)

There are many other scenes and objects in this passage which are
made vivid through the use of descriptive details. Point out at least
five of these scenes and objects, and indicate the specific details that
describe them.

WORD CHOICE: CONVEYING SENSORY IMPRESSIONS

In this selection Teale creates vivid sensory impressions. Which
words in the sentences on the following page are especially effective in
helping to create these impressions? To which of the senses do the
details in these sentences appeal?

A back-country road was carrying us south, carrying us through a snow-filled landscape and under the sullen gray of a December sky.

. . . the long chain of the Indiana dunes receded behind us. At every hunch, my own short, six-year-old legs, dangling below the seat, gyrated wildly like the tail of an off-balance cat.

. . . we rode out into open country, onto a wide, undulating sea of whiteness with here and there the island of a bush-cump.

As we progressed, a ribbon of runner-tracks and hoofmarks steadily unrolled, lengthened, and followed us across the snow.

They were old trees, gnarled and twisted.

The hollow thump and crash of the frozen sticks reverberated through the still woods.

I peered timidly down gloomy aisles between the trees. Branches rubbed together in the breeze with sudden shrieks or mournful wailings and the cawing of a distant crow echoed dismally.

But the reaches beyond, forbidding under the still tenseness of the ominous sky, slowed my steps to a standstill.

Now You Try It

Select one of the following assignments:

1. Think of a tradition, custom, routine, or ritual that is important in your home. Write a narrative based on one particular observance of it. Use all the narrative skills. Select the key events; use narrative details; use dialogue; and include description.
2. Recall a place, like Teale's lonely woods, that impressed you profoundly. Write a narrative in which you arrange your material much as Teale did. First tell about the journey to the place; then describe what you see and do there; and conclude with your departure.

LESSON
16
Point of View

Before writing a narrative, you must decide upon the point of view from which you will tell the story. If you wish to write as a participant in the action, you will use the *first-person participant* point of view. If you wish to write as someone present but not participating in the action, you will write from a *first-person observer* point of view. You may also write impersonally, or omnisciently, presenting the action from a point completely outside the story. In that case you will write from a *third-person omniscient* point of view.

FIRST-PERSON PARTICIPANT The following narrative is based upon William O. Douglas' recollection of a childhood experience. Notice that Douglas writes from the point of view of a participant in the events. Since he is a participant, he naturally refers to himself with the first-person "I."

44 William O. Douglas in *Of Men and Mountains*

[1] The night was pitch-black. A soft, warm southwest wind was blowing over the ridges of the Cascades. Spring was coming to the Yakima Valley. I felt it in the air. It was after midnight. The houses of Yakima were dark. Only the flickering street lights marked the way. We had just arrived by train from California. Father was up ahead with the suitcases, walking with giant strides. Mother came next, with

a lad of a few months in her arms. My sister and I brought up the rear.

[2] There were strange noises among the occasional trees and shrubs that we passed. There were creepy sounds coming from the grass and from the irrigation ditch that ran along the sidewalk. I wondered if they were from snakes or lizards or the dread tarantula that I had been taught to fear in California! Maybe snakes were sticking out their forked tongues as they used to do under the steps of the house in Estrella! Maybe a tarantula would lie in wait and drop off a tree and get me when I passed! Maybe lizards in Yakima were giant lizards! And then there were the dread rattlesnakes that Mother spoke of with fear and trembling. Did they gulp young boys alive, like the snakes in the picture books that could swallow a whole sheep? Was the rustle in the grass the rustle of a rattler? These were alarming thoughts to a boy of five.

[3] I looked anxiously over my shoulder. The trees and bushes with the strange noises in them seemed to take the form of monsters with long arms. I ran to catch up. Then, by the time I had once more looked furtively over my shoulder at the shapeless pursuing forms of the darkness, I discovered that I was far behind again. Why did Father walk so fast? I ran again to catch up. And so, block after block, I alternately lagged behind and ran, fearful of being lost and swallowed up in the night or grabbed by some demon of the dark.

[4] Father walked west from the Northern Pacific railroad station up Yakima Avenue. At Fifth Avenue he turned north, looking in the darkness for the house where our relatives, the Pettis, lived. He apparently did not have their exact address, or having it, was not able to read the house numbers in the dark. He stopped several times to arouse a household, only to find he had picked the wrong place.

[5] At one house he had hardly entered the yard before the two great dogs came racing around opposite sides of the house, barking and snarling. I was frozen with fear. But Father did not hesitate or pause. He continued on his way, speaking to the dogs in a voice that was firm and that to the dogs as well as to me seemed to have the authority of the highest law behind it. The dogs became silent and trotted out to investigate us. They circled and sniffed me,

putting their noses right into my face. I can still feel their hot, stinking breath. To me they seemed to be real demons of the darkness that had come to hold me for ransom. I wanted to scream. But the crisis was quickly passed. Father was soon back. He dismissed the dogs with ease, resumed his search, and presently found the house we wanted. A friendly door soon closed on all the strange noises and on the dangers of the outer darkness.

The Writer's Craft

1. Who are the participants in this narrative? Through whose eyes are the events seen and interpreted? Point to specific sentences which show that the point of view is first-person participant.
2. If this narrative had been written by Douglas' father, would it be substantially different? Why? Would the story be worth telling from the father's point of view? Why or why not?
3. One possible disadvantage of the first-person participant point of view is that it does not allow the writer to tell what is going on in the minds of other participants. Do you think this is a disadvantage in the Douglas narrative? Explain.

WORD CHOICE: CONVEYING EMOTION

Douglas' use of vivid words and phrases helps to convey the fright of the five-year-old narrator. Notice the italicized words in the following sentences:

The night was *pitch-black*.

There were *creepy* sounds coming from the grass and from the irrigation ditch that ran along the sidewalk.

I was *frozen with fear*.

Compare the sentences above with the following sentences:

The night was *very dark*.

There were *odd* sounds coming from the grass and from the irrigation ditch that ran along the sidewalk.

I was *dread*.

Do the sentences in the second group convey the narrator's emotions as well as those in the first group do? Find at least three other instances in the model where vivid words and phrases convey the narrator's emotion.

Now You Try It

Select one of the following assignments:

1. Begin as William O. Douglas does: "The night was pitch-black." Using the first-person participant point of view, develop a situation that created a sense of crisis in you. Increase the suspense by imagining what could happen — or telling what did happen — in such a place, at such a time. Show how the crisis or sense of crisis passed.
2. Write a narrative in which you show how a decision you made or an action you took led to an unexpected result. Use the first-person participant point of view.

45 Henry David Thoreau in *Walden*

FIRST-PERSON OBSERVER In the following narrative, Thoreau writes from the point of view of a first-person observer.

One day when I went out to my woodpile, or rather my pile of stumps, I observed two large ants, the one red, the other much larger, nearly half an inch long, and black, fiercely contending with one another. Having once got hold they never let go, but struggled and wrestled and rolled on the chips incessantly. Looking farther, I was surprised to find that the chips were covered with such combatants, that it was not a *duellum*, but a *bellum*, a war between two races of ants, the red always pitted against the black, and frequently two red ones to one black. The legions of these Myrmidons * covered all the hills and vales in my wood-yard, and the ground was already strewn with the dead and dying, both red and black. It was the only battle which I have ever witnessed, the only battlefield I ever trod while the battle was raging, intestine war, the red republicans on the one hand, and the black imperialists on the other. On every side they were engaged in deadly combat, yet without any noise that I could hear, and human soldiers never fought so resolutely. I watched a couple that were fast locked in each other's embraces, in a little sunny valley amid the chips, now at noonday prepared to fight

* Myrmidons: followers of Achilles in the Trojan War.
° intestine: destructive to both sides.

till the sun went down, or life went out. The smaller red champion had fastened himself like a vise to his adversary's front, and through all the tumblings on that field never for an instant ceased to gnaw at one of his feelers near the root, having already caused the other to go by the board, while the stronger black one dashed him from side to side, and, as I saw on looking nearer, had already divested him of several of his members. They fought with more pertinacity than bulldogs. Neither manifested the least disposition to retreat. It was evident that their battle cry was "Conquer or die." In the meanwhile there came along a single red ant on the hillside of this valley, evidently full of excitement, who either had dispatched his foe, or had not yet taken part in the battle; probably the latter, for he had lost none of his limbs; whose mother had charged him to return with his shield or upon it. Or perchance he was some Achilles, * who had nourished his wrath apart, and had now come to avenge or rescue his Patroclus. ° He saw this unequal combat from afar — for the blacks were nearly twice the size of the red — he drew near with rapid pace till he stood on his guard within half an inch of the combatants; then, watching his opportunity, he sprang upon the black warrior, and commenced his operations near the root of his right foreleg, leaving the foe to select among his own members, so there were three united for life, as if a new kind of attraction had been invented which put all other locks and cements to shame. I should not have wondered by this time to find that they had their respective musical bands stationed on some eminent chip, and playing their national airs the while, to excite the slow and cheer the dying combatants. I was myself excited somewhat even as if they had been men. The more you think of it, the less the difference.

* Achilles: the Greek hero of Homer's *Iliad*.
° Patroclus: Achilles' friend.

The Writer's Craft

1. Why is first-person observer the logical point of view for Thoreau to have used in this narrative?
2. Suppose that ants were able to write and that one wrote the story of this battle from a participant's point of view. Writing as a par-

participant, could the ant have described as much of the scene and the action as Thoreau did? Why? What, then, is one advantage of writing from an observer's point of view rather than a participant's point of view?

3. When writing from the point of view of an observer, the writer does not enter the minds of the participants in the action. He does not know exactly what they are thinking or why they are doing what they are doing. The writer can, however, make certain suppositions on the basis of the participants' appearance and their actions. Where in this narrative does Thoreau interpret the behavior of the ants? How does he make it plain that this is sheer conjecture on his part?

Now You Try It

Write a narrative about an occurrence in nature which you have observed: a fish struggling on the end of a line, a dog fighting with another animal, a bird building its nest, a seagull catching its food, or something similar you have seen. Write from the point of view of a first-person observer, and remember to select key events and supply narrative details. You can, of course, make judgments and express your opinions about the action.

THIRD-PERSON OMNISCIENT The following narrative does not involve an "I." The writer is not a participant in the action, nor does he observe the action with his own eyes. Instead, he stands outside the story, apparently knowing the thoughts and feelings of another person. The point of view is third-person omniscient.

46 J. Donald Adams in *Copey of Harvard*

[1] As a small boy, Charles had often been attracted by some bright red berries which grew beside the fence outside the house of an old lady "with corkscrew curls," he remembered, who lived down the street from the Copeland home. One day as the boy came by, the blinds were drawn, and the opportunity to indulge his longing seemed at hand. He plucked a berry and ate it, but its taste was bitter, and he took no more. As he was about to turn away, the blinds of a window flew open, the old lady leaned out and cried,

"Now, you naughty boy, you have found your reward. Those berries are deadly poison, which I keep especially for naughty boys. Tomorrow you will be dead!"

[2] Charles's heart leaped in his breast. Reflecting on how sad a fate it was to die when his life had scarcely begun, he hurried, panic-stricken, to his home. There he found his brother Lowell in the hall, and poured out the dreadful story, begging his brother's forgiveness for all the injuries he had done him, exacting a promise that he would attend the funeral, and telling him of certain prized possessions he would leave to him. Charles then kissed his brother, who was by this time in tears, told him he would see him once more, and went out of the house. In the garden he found his father, and told him all that had happened. His father, he remembered, seemed to smile, took him by the hand, and led him back to the scene of his crime. Quivering before the old lady, Charles implored her forgiveness and begged her to give him something which would forestall his imminent end. She exacted his eager promise that never again would he molest her property, whereupon she produced a gundrop and plopped it in his mouth. Thus comforted, he took his father's hand and left for home.

The Writer's Craft

1. In this narrative there is no "I" who tells the story. Instead, the writer is an all-knowing, or *omniscient*, person. He seems to know what Charles is thinking as well as doing. Point out places where the writer reports on Charles's thought.

2. The omniscient writer may look at his material from the point of view of one or more participants. In this narrative, Adams limits his view pretty much to the mind of Charles, although he could have reported on the thoughts of other participants. Why do you think Adams considered it unnecessary to enter the minds of the father and the old lady?

3. The third-person omniscient point of view gives the writer an opportunity to call attention to whatever details he wishes. It allows him to make interpretations and draw conclusions. It permits him to know things that one or more of the participants did not know. In this selection, for example, the author knows that the old lady's antidote for the "poison" was a gundrop. Did Charles know that?

Now You Try It

Select one of the following assignments:

1. Rewrite the J. Donald Adams narrative, telling it from Charles's point of view as first-person participant.
2. Select an important episode in the life of a national figure — a political leader or a sports hero, for instance — and write the episode from the third-person omniscient point of view. You should do research to clarify the important facts, but many of the narrative details you include will be your own.

NARRATION

Sentence Skills

VARIETY IN THE SIMPLE SENTENCE

38 Mark Twain in *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*
(page 89)

1. A simple sentence is a sentence having one independent clause and no subordinate clauses. There are many devices by which information and structural variety can be added to sentences without using subordinate clauses. Notice the variety in these short, simple sentences from Mark Twain's *Autobiography*:

My sister gave a "candy-pull" on a winter's night.

He was in a passion now.

Indeed, I would have done anything to help.

In the first sentence, a prepositional phrase (*on a winter's night*) modifies the verb *gave* and adds information to the main clause. In the second, a prepositional phrase (*in a passion*) is used as a predicate adjective. In the third, a conjunctive adverb (*indeed*) is used to start the sentence, and an infinitive (*to help*) is used to end it. These are only a few of the many grammatical elements used in constructing simple sentences.

Short, simple sentences, like those above, serve a number of useful purposes. They state ideas simply and directly. They emphasize important aspects of the subject matter. When used sparingly with other types of sentences, they provide a change of pace and add pleasing rhythm to a composition.

2. The following simple sentences use two common but important devices for achieving sentence variety: the appositive and the compound predicate.

Simple sentences with appositives:

He was approaching seventeen, a grave and slender lad, trustful, honest, honorable, a creature to love and cling to.

Out of the comb of the roof projected a short chimney, a common resort for sentimental cats on moonlight nights —

There was joyous chaffing and joking and laughter — peal upon peal of it.

Simple sentences with compound predicates:

He was awake and fuming about the cats and their intolerable yowling.

I was only a boy and was already in a radiant heaven of anticipation.

He paused, raised himself carefully up, measured his dis-
tance deliberately, then made a frantic grab at the nearest
cat — and missed it.

In your own writing you can make good use of appositives and
compound predicates to achieve sentence variety.

EXERCISE The following paragraph contains too many sen-
tences of the same length. Rewrite the paragraph, retaining a
few of these short, simple sentences but combining the others
by using *appositives* and *compound predicates*. Do not add sub-
ordinate clauses. Be sure your revised paragraph reads well.

Tom Billings was a tall boy from Boonesville. He had a
habit of creating disturbances. He was ridiculed by the
seniors. He was ignored by the juniors and sophomores.
He was feared by the freshmen. He had the reputation of
being a bully. One day he stalked into the cafeteria. He
pushed into line ahead of a group of timid freshmen. He
took a tray from the smallest one. One of the others began
to protest mildly. This was a boy named Frank Dobson.
Tom turned to argue. His loud voice carried across the
cafeteria. It attracted the attention of most of the other
students there. For some reason, Tom suddenly took a step
backward. It was a short but fatal step. Not seeing an
overturned chair, he stumbled over it. He fell to the floor.
All of those watching laughed at Tom's look of pained sur-
prise.

COORDINATION IN THE COMPOUND SENTENCE

39 *Burl Ives in Wagfaring Stranger* (page 95)

A compound sentence is a sentence having two or more in-
dependent clauses but no subordinate clauses. Like simple sen-
tences, the compound sentence can be long or short, well con-
structed or poorly constructed. Examine the following compound
sentences from the *Burl Ives* selection:

We made the scenery, the girls made the costumes, and
everybody turned out for the amateur theatricals.

Children waited to walk home with their parents, and there
was an air of mystery around the town.

It was in the spring of the year, and the roads were muddy,
and it was difficult for anybody to get into or out of town.

Horseback and carriage were the only practical ways of
travel; the roads were impassable to automobiles.

Various people passed him, and he walked on, saying
nothing.

Ten minutes later, after shedding my disguise, I went into
the restaurant again, and this time the intensity of the excite-
ment was even greater.

I kept walking and they stopped.

All of these sentences are compound sentences. Refer to them
in answering the following questions:

1. What is the minimum number of independent clauses which
a compound sentence must have?
2. Can a compound sentence have more than this minimum
number of independent clauses?
3. Do prepositional phrases have any bearing upon whether a
sentence is simple, compound, or complex?
4. Do infinitive phrases have any bearing upon whether a sen-
tence is simple, compound, or complex?
5. Do participial phrases have any bearing upon whether a sen-
tence is simple, compound, or complex?
6. Are the independent clauses in a compound sentence always
joined by a coordinating conjunction (*and*, *but*, *or*)? If not,
what else may they be joined by?

In using a compound sentence, the writer implies that the
ideas in the independent clauses are of approximately equal im-
portance. He also suggests that the ideas are closely related. A
good compound sentence therefore contains two or more closely
related ideas of approximately equal importance.

EXERCISE If the following pairs of sentences contain related
ideas of approximately equal importance, combine them into a
good compound sentence by using a suitable coordinating con-
junction (*and*, *but*, *or*). If the two sentences will not make an
effective compound sentence, write *No*.

1. The movie received excellent reviews. It was a failure at the
box office.

2. Stalin's real name was Dzhugashvili. He ruled Russia from 1924 to 1953.
3. I drank about a pint of grape juice. My father drank the rest.
4. You must learn the difference between a participle and a gerund. You will lose points on the final exam.
5. Our star basketball player is Joe Block. He is six feet two inches tall.
6. Frank was elected president of the student council last week. He immediately sought to put his program into effect.
7. Mr. Jones would like to take a long vacation. His business will not permit it.
8. She took her driver's test last Thursday. She is an excellent debater.
9. I must go to bed early tonight. I will oversleep tomorrow morning.
10. Whitman's *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd* is considered a great elegy. Many people prefer his other tribute to Lincoln, "O Captain! My Captain."

SUBORDINATION IN THE COMPLEX SENTENCE

44 William O. Douglas in *Of Men and Mountains* (page 117)

Complex sentences are sentences containing one independent clause and one or more subordinate clauses. A subordinate clause is a group of words containing a subject and a predicate. Even though a subordinate clause has both a subject and a predicate, it cannot function as a sentence. Instead, it does the job of an adjective, adverb, or noun within a sentence. If the clause modifies a noun or pronoun, it is an *adjective clause*. If it modifies a verb, an adjective, or an adverb, it is an *adverb clause*. If it serves the same purpose as a one-word noun, it is a *noun clause*. There are four subordinate clauses in the following passage from the Douglas selection:

There were creepy sounds coming from the grass and from the irrigation ditch that ran along the sidewalk. I wondered if they were from snakes or lizards or the dread *tarantula* that I had been taught to fear in California! Maybe snakes were sticking out their forked tongues as they used to do under the steps of the house in Estrella!

There are two adjective clauses in this passage. Which ones are they? Which clause is an adverb clause? Which is a noun clause?

By changing the words slightly, each subordinate clause in the passage can be made into an independent clause:

There were creepy sounds coming from the grass and from the irrigation ditch. The ditch ran along the sidewalk. I wondered about the sounds. Were they from snakes or lizards or the dread tarantula? I had been taught to fear these creatures in California. Maybe snakes were sticking out their forked tongues. They used to do this under the steps of the house in Estrella!

Compare this rewritten version with Douglas' original. What does your comparison tell you about the value of using subordinate clauses?

* exercise Rewrite the following paragraph, combining the numbered groups of sentences into single complex sentences. Use both adjective and adverb clauses.

(1) I was in the eighth grade. I had a friend, Bob Wilson. He was an avid stamp collector. (2) Bob received stamps from a small company. This company specialized in unusual items. (3) The company would offer Bob something like "The World's Smallest Hexagonal Stamp with a Portrait of Augustus Caesar." They were asking fifty cents for it. (4) Bob had no use for such a stamp. He would buy it. (5) One day I decided to cure him of buying such trash. This was after I had seen him waste many dollars. (6) I took an ordinary five-cent stamp. I had brought it at the post office. (7) I cut it into eight pieces. I mounted the pieces on a sheet of paper and mailed them to him. (8) Beside one of the tiny corner pieces of the stamp I wrote, "World's Rarest Triangular Stamp." This in a sense was true. There was no other stamp in the world just like it. (9) Beside another piece I had written, "Here is an Unusual Stamp. It Contains Nothing But a Picture of Washington's Eye." (10) The price for all eight stamps was \$5.25. I set the price. (11) Bob was not amused by my trick. He did stop buying worthless stamps.

VARIETY IN SENTENCE TYPES

46 J. Donald Adams in *Copsey of Harvard* (page 122)

A simple sentence has one independent clause. A compound sentence has two or more independent clauses but no subordinate clauses. A complex sentence has one or more subordinate clauses.

It is possible, of course, to write a sentence which has two or more independent clauses as well as one or more subordinate clauses. Here is an example:

John Santo, who coaches Tech's basketball team, has an excellent squad this year, but he will not speculate about his team's chances for the title.

This sentence has two independent clauses: (1) *John Santo has an excellent squad this year;* (2) *he will not speculate about his team's chances for the title.* It also has one subordinate clause: *who coaches Tech's basketball team.* Since it has elements of both a compound and a complex sentence, it is called a *compound-complex* sentence, the fourth basic sentence type.

Ordinarily writers use all four types of sentences in their compositions. The following extract from the Adams selection shows how a writer combines these sentence types.

One day as the boy came by, the blinds were drawn, and the opportunity to indulge his longing seemed at hand. (compound-complex sentence) He plucked a berry and ate it, but his taste was bitter, and he took no more. (compound sentence) As he was about to turn away, the blinds of a window flew open, the old lady leaned out and cried, "Now, you naughty boy, you have found your reward. (compound-complex sentence) Those berries are deadly poison, which I keep especially for naughty boys. (complex sentence with adjective clause) Tomorrow you will be dead!" (simple sentence)

Charles's heart leaped in his breast. (simple sentence) Reflecting on how sad a fate it was to die when his life had scarcely begun, he hurried, panic-stricken, to his home. (complex sentence with noun clause and adverb clause) There he found his brother Lowell in the hall, and poured out the dreadful story, begging forgiveness for all the injuries he had done him, exacting a promise that he would attend his funeral, and telling him of certain prized possessions he would leave to him. (complex sentence with three adjective clauses)

Notice how the first paragraph would read if all of the sentences had been written as simple sentences:

One day the boy came by. The blinds were drawn. The opportunity to indulge his longing seemed at hand. He plucked a berry and ate it. Its taste was bitter. He took no more. He was about to turn away. The blinds of a window flew open. The old lady leaned out and cried, "Now, you

naughty boy, you have found your reward. Those berries are deadly poison. I keep them especially for naughty boys. Tomorrow you will be dead!"

Do you find that the rewritten paragraph sounds choppy and childish? What, then, is gained by combining simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences in a composition?

■ EXERCISE Rewrite the following paragraph, combining each numbered group of sentences into the kind of sentence indicated in brackets.

(1) On September 6, 1901, the people were in a gala mood. They were attending the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo. [simple sentence with participial phrase] (2) By nightfall many of them would have seen President McKinley. They would have shaken hands with him. [simple sentence with compound predicate] (3) Exposition officials had designated their Temple of Music as the place. McKinley's reception would be held in it. [complex sentence with adjective clause] (4) At four o'clock the door of the music hall was opened. People began to file in. [compound sentence] (5) Everyone was intent upon seeing the President. No one noticed a thin, little man with a vacant stare. He was standing in the reception line. [compound-complex sentence with adjective clause] (6) The man was Leon Czolgosz. He was a crazed anarchist, twenty-eight years old. [simple sentence with appositive] (7) Czolgosz advanced in the reception line. He wrapped his hand in a large white handkerchief. [complex sentence with adverb clause] (8) Czolgosz stepped up to the President. He extended his hand. He fired his concealed revolver twice. [simple sentence with compound predicate] (9) McKinley was mortally wounded. His face showed neither pain nor fear, only astonishment. [compound sentence] (10) Some of the guards began striking the assassin. McKinley said weakly, "Don't let them hurt him." [complex sentence with adverb clause]