

## WRITING ABOUT DETAIL: EXAMPLE

Read the passage below and the example paragraph after it. This paragraph is a model for you to follow when you write about detail.

### PROMPT

In this passage from *Walden*, how does Henry David Thoreau use detail to compare ants to men?

*Walden* by Henry David Thoreau

"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 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...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.... "

"I was myself excited somewhat as if they had been men. The more you think of it, the less the difference. And certainly there is not the fight recorded in Concord history, at least, if in the history of America, that will bear a moment's comparison with this, whether for the numbers engaged in it, or for the patriotism and heroism displayed."

## PRE-WRITING WORKSHEET

1. Read the prompt carefully.
2. Identify tones. amazed, respectful
3. Identify author's purpose. To show how Thoreau uses detail to compare man to the ants, proving that both ants and man are heroic
4. What does the prompt ask you to do? To show how Thoreau uses detail to describe the ants' characteristics that are similar to man's characteristics
5. In response to the prompt, what major points can you discuss?
  - A. Loyalty important; ants are fighting over differences; black vs red; 2 reds to 1 black
  - B. Fighting is fierce and heroic; fighting to the death
6. Looking at these major points, what opinion can you form as a response to the prompt? This will be your topic sentence.

TS: In this excerpt from Walden, Thoreau uses detail to compare the heroism and tenacity of the battling ants to that of man.

\*\*\*The order in which you do number 5 and number 6 can be reversed if that will be easier for you.

\*\*On the following page, the format combines Pre-writing with the paragraph.

**The Battling Ants from *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau**

**PW: TONES** amazed, respectful

**PW: PURPOSE** To show how the author uses detail to compare man to the ants, proving they are both heroic

**PW: TOPIC SENTENCE (TS)** In this excerpt from *Walden*, Thoreau uses detail to compare the heroism and tenacity of the battling ants to that of man.

**PW: MAJOR POINT 1** Like man, the ants fight over differences, and both are courageously loyal to their own.

**ELABORATION 1:** Thoreau encounters the battle between "two races of ants...red...pitted against black," and often the red struggling in tandem, "two red...to one black."

**ELABORATION 2:** As the chips are "covered with combatants...fiercely contending with one another," so are the battlefields of history overspread with men of differences, also fighting to protect their own kind.

**PW: MAJOR POINT 2** Also like the ants, man willingly fights to the bitter end for his cause and his kind.

**ELABORATION 1:** "Having once got hold," man and ant are committed to the death, and "they never let go."

**ELABORATION 2:** As both man and ant courageously refuse to surrender, so are the battlefields of both "strewn with the dead and dying."

**CONCLUDING SENTENCE:** Loyalty, determination, and heroism are shared by man and ant, and, as Thoreau states, "The more you think of it, the less the difference."

## ASSIGNMENT 5: WRITING ABOUT DETAIL GROUP PRACTICE

### PROMPT

Read the passage below. Then in a well-organized paragraph, your group should discuss Twain's use of detail to describe his experience while learning to ride a bicycle. Use the Pre-writing Worksheet and the Paragraph format/rubric.

### *Taming the Bicycle* by Mark Twain

"I thought the matter over, and concluded I could do it. So I went down and bought a barrel of Pond's Extract and a bicycle. The Expert came home with me to instruct me. We chose the backyard, for sake of privacy, and went to work.

"Mine was not a full-grown bicycle, but only a colt—a fifty inch, with the pedals shortened up to forty-eight—and skittish, like any other colt. The Expert explained the thing's points briefly, then he got on its back and rode around a little, to show me how easy it was to do. He said that the dismounting was perhaps the hardest thing to learn....But he was in error there. He found, to his surprise and joy, that all he needed to do was get me on to the machine and stand out of the way; I could get off, myself. Although I was wholly inexperienced, I dismounted in the best time on record. He was on that side, shoving up the machine; we all came down with a crash, he at the bottom, I next, and the machine on top.

"We examined the machine, but it was not in the least injured. This was hardly believable. Yet the Expert assured me that it was true; in fact, the examination proved it. I was partly to realize, then, how admirably these things are constructed. We applied some Pond's Extract, and resumed. The Expert got on the *other* side to shove up this time; so the result was as before. The machine was not hurt. We oiled ourselves up again, and resumed. This time the Expert took up a sheltered position behind, but somehow or another we landed on him again.

"He was full of surprised admiration; said it was abnormal. She was all right, not a scratch on her, not a timber started anywhere. I said it was wonderful, while we were greasing up, but he said that when I came to know these steel spider-webs I would realize that nothing but dynamite could cripple them. Then he limped out to position, and we resumed once more. This time the Expert took up the position of short-stop, and got a man to shove up behind. We got up a handsome speed, and presently traversed a brick, and I went out over the top of the tiller and landed, head down, on the instructor's back, and saw the machine fluttering in the air between me and the sun. It was well it came down on us, for that broke the fall, and it was not injured.

"Five days later, I got out and was carried down to the hospital, and found the Expert doing pretty fairly. In a few more days I was quite sound. I attribute this to my prudence in always dismounting on something soft. Some recommend a feather bed, but I think an Expert is better."

## ASSIGNMENT 7: DETAIL ASSESSMENT

### PART 1

#### PROMPT

Read the following passage. Explain how the author uses detail to explain the social structure of the Natchez.

*Myths That Hide the American Indian* by Oliver La Farge

"...The Natchez of Mississippi had a true king, and a curious, elaborate social system. The king had absolute power and was known as the Sun. No ordinary man could speak to him except from a distance, shouting and making obeisances. When he went out, he was carried on a litter, as the royal and sacred foot could not be allowed to touch the ground. The Natchez nation was divided into two groups, or moieties: the aristocracy and the common people. The higher group was subdivided into Suns (the royal family), Nobles, and Honored Ones. The common people were known simply as Stinkers. A Stinker could marry anyone he pleased, but all the aristocrats had to marry out of their moiety, that is, marry Stinkers. When a female aristocrat married a Stinker man, her children belonged to her class; thus, when a Sun woman married a Stinker, her children were Suns. The children of the men, however, were lowered one class, so that the children of a Sun man, even of the Sun himself, became Nobles, while the children of an Honored One became lowly Stinkers.

"This system in time, if nothing intervened, would lead to an overwhelming preponderance of aristocrats. The Natchez, however, for all their...civilization, their temples, their fine crafts and arts, were chronically warlike. Those captives they did not torture to death they adopted, thus constantly replenishing the supply of Stinkers (a foreigner could become nothing else, but his grandchildren, if his son struck a royal fancy, might be Suns)."

### PART 11

Read the following passages and answer the questions about them.

1. *A Journal of the Plague Year* by Daniel Defoe

"I heard one infected creature who, running out of his bed in his shirt in the anguish and agony of his swellings, of which he had three upon him, got his shoes on and went to put on his coat; but the nurse resisted, and snatching the coat from her, he threw her down, ran over her, ran downstairs and into the street, directly to the Thames in his shirt, the nurse running after him, and, being a good swimmer, swam quite over the river; and the tide being coming in, as they call it (that is, running

westward) he reached the land not till he came out about the Falcon stairs, where landing, and finding no people there, naked as he was, for a good while, when, it being by that time high water, he takes the river again, and swam back to the Stillyard, landed, ran up the streets again to his own house, knocking at the door, went up the stairs and into his bed again; and that this terrible experiment cured him of the plague, that is to say, that the violent motion of his arms and legs stretched the parts where the swellings he had upon him were, that is to say, under his arms and his groin, and caused them to ripen and break; and that the cold of the water abated the fever in his blood...."

A. TONES

B. PURPOSE

C. Name one diction word (word with connotation) in this passage which means "taking."

2. *I Will Fight No More Forever* by Chief Joseph

"Tell General Howard I know his heart. What he told me before, I have in my heart. I am tired of fighting. Our chiefs are killed. Looking Glass is dead. Toohoolhoolzote is dead. The old men are all dead. It is the young men who say yes and no. He who led on the young men is dead. It is cold and we have no blankets. The little children are freezing to death. My people, some of them, have run away to the hills and have no blankets, no food; no one knows where they are—perhaps freezing to death. I want to have time to look for my children and see how many I can find. Maybe I shall find them among the dead. Hear me, my chiefs. I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever."

A. TONES

B. PURPOSE

C. Explain what you think that Chief Joseph means when he says that "...my heart is sick and sad."