

**THE LIVING DESCRIPTION – Charlotte’s Web**  
Using The Senses To Write Literary Description  
by: Susan Rose-Sudduth

In this creative writing activity, students embark upon an exciting journey of exploring tactile, aural, visual, and olfactory sensations through interaction with imagination that will engage their senses to write about real lived places and/or experiences. Students will analyze a passage from **Charlotte’s Web** that use sensory description and imagery to tell a story, developing an understanding of how the language used brings the scenes to life for the reader. Students will then have the opportunity to write or draw meaningful description that reflects something about themselves. By engaging the body’s senses and memories in learning, students are more deeply imprinted by course material and other learning outside of this class.

Target Audience: Grades 3-4  
Time: Approximately 20 minutes

Materials

- Pens and pencils
- Barn handouts, 1 per student
- Charlotte’s Web excerpt

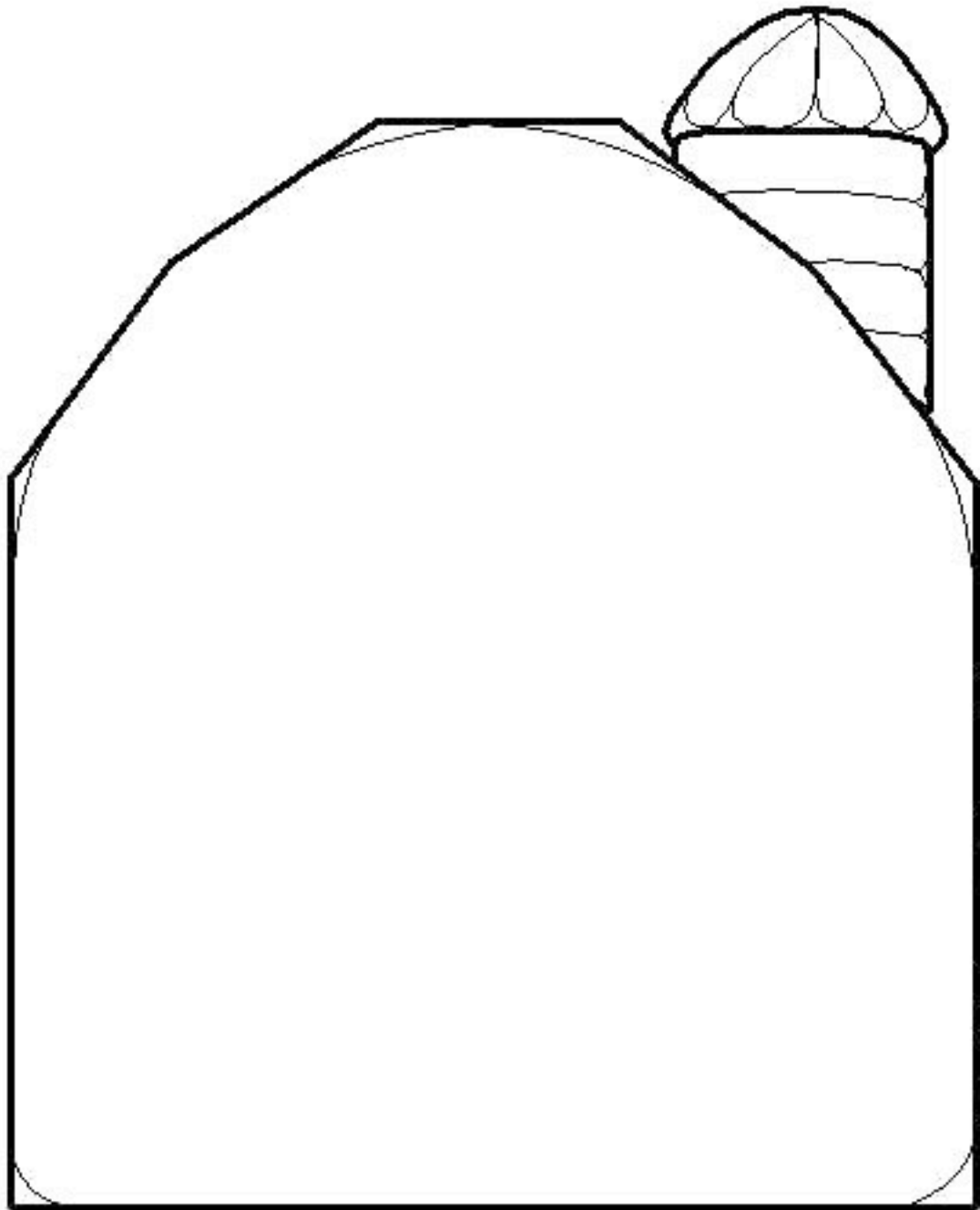
1. Read the following excerpt aloud to the class, or ask a student to read, from the beginning of Chapter 3 of *Charlotte’s Web* by E.B. White:

“The barn was very large. It was very old. It smelled of hay and it smelled of manure. It smelled of the perspiration of tired horses and the wonderful sweet breath of patient cows. It often had a sort of peaceful smell as though nothing bad could happen ever again in the world. It smelled of grain and of harness dressing and of axle grease and of rubber boots and of new rope. And whenever the cat was given a fish head to eat, the barn would smell of fish. But mostly it smelled of hay, for there was always hay in the great loft up overhead. And there was always hay being pitched down to the cows and the horses and the sheep.

“The barn was pleasantly warm in winter when the animals spent most of their time indoors, and it was pleasantly cool in summer when the big doors stood wide open to the breeze. The barn had stalls on the main floor for the work horses, tieups on the main floor for the cows, a sheepfold down below for the sheep, a pigpen down below for Wilbur, and it was full of all sorts of things that you find in barns: ladders, grindstones, pitch forks, monkey wrenches, scythes, lawn mowers, snow shovels, ax handles, milk pails, water buckets, empty grain sacks, and rusty rat traps. It was the kind of barn that swallows like to build their nests in. It was the kind of barn that children like to play in. And the whole thing was owned by Fern’s uncle, Mr. Homer L. Zuckerman.”

Ask your students: What senses does this passage provoke? How did the author give such a vivid description of how the barn smells? How would it be different if he had just told us the barn was smelly? The author’s use of nouns to describe the smell of the barn helps his reader feel like they are actually in the barn, experiencing the barn.

2. Hand out copies of the barn outline, attached, and instruct students to list or draw sensory descriptions inside the outline of the barn.



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