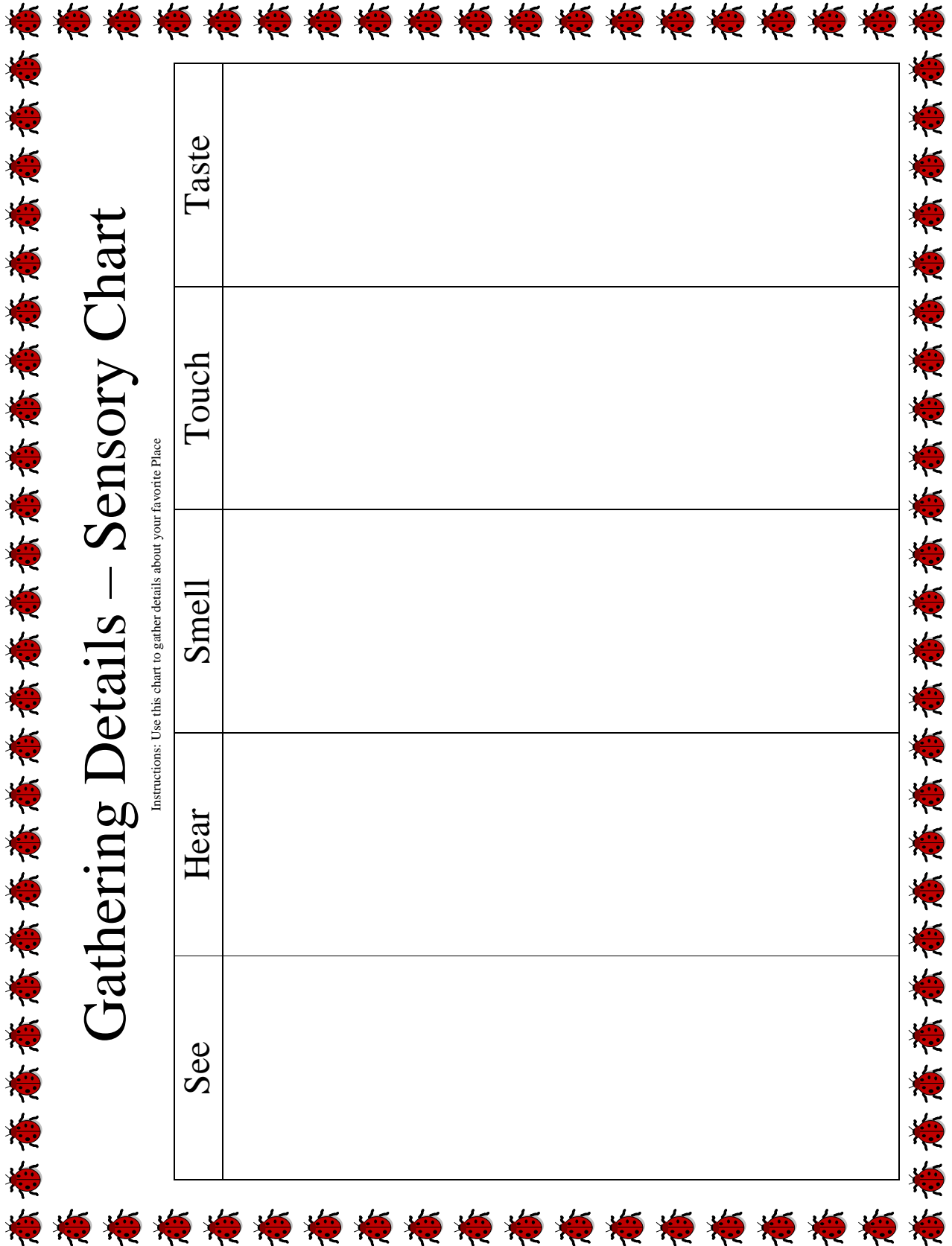

Writing: Descriptive Essay

What is a Descriptive Essay?

A descriptive essay is an essay which illustrates a scene. Often, such an essay describes a place, not an event or story, and creates a new way of seeing or thinking about the place you are describing. Descriptive essays are full of specific, concrete, sensory details, which create vivid images in the reader’s mind and relate to a variety of senses. They use an interesting and appropriate title.

How to write a descriptive essay

Start by choosing a favorite part of the earth—perhaps a place you have visited or a place in or near your home. Visit the place again if you can and use a five-senses chart, such as the one below, to record as much detail about the place as possible, so that when you write, others can “see” and “visit” the place in their imagination as they read your description. Use many specific verbs and concrete nouns as you write. Read some sample essays (included in this packet) and use the rubric at the end of the packet to evaluate your writing.



Gathering Details – Sensory Chart

Instructions: Use this chart to gather details about your favorite Place

See	Hear	Smell	Touch	Taste

My Favorite Place

By Mereht Gibbons

Period 7

Orange = Active verbs (36)

Blue = “Be” passive verb (7)

Hint: Use as many active verbs as you can.
Avoid the “be” verb when you can

When I **need** a little solitude and want to **get away** from a world where social status and artificial beauty **rule**, and grade point average **directs** your future, I **grab** a snack and **escape** behind my bedroom door and into the little nook that **waits** there. When we **moved** into the house, I **lined** it with a few pillows and all my old stuffed animals, who I could never **get rid** of. I **tacked** tons of pictures and quotes, and old papers from my childhood on the walls to **inspire** me. This **is** where I go to **read**, **write**, or just **think**.

Sometimes, in the early morning, I **wake up**, and **sit** nestled in the pillows and toys with a notebook and a pencil, or my journal, and **write**. The early morning light **filters** through my sheer yellow curtains enough so that I don't **need** a flashlight, but they don't **let** the sun in, because **it's** too lively for my purpose. My stuffed friends **look** at me encouragingly as I **pour** my inner self onto the page. If I look around, I can **see** my plain white door **shielding** me from the evil of my unmade bed, and my socked foot **poking** out of the soft blue and white blanket my step mom, Debbie **made** me for Christmas last year.

My snack **is** usually a peanut—butter sandwich and a jam—jar of milk, which I **am** very careful not to **spill**. When I've really **left** the world behind, I even **feel** guilty for **eating** in front of my stuffed animals, and might **offer** them a few bites, but they never **accept**. They only **smile** at me as if to **say**, “Don't worry, we've already **eaten**.”

It's only a small place, but **it's** my nest of creativity, and I know there's no more comforting place in the world to me.

Here's a nice, short explanation that ties the essay together and tells why

Trenton Anderson

T. White

ENG. 1010-065

September 7, 2004

Name and class

info identifies the

An appropriate title

gets your attention

An Evening in My Backyard

Watching a 14-month-old child try to do somersaults on the lawn while dressed only in a diaper is quite entertaining. First she bends over to place her disproportionately sized head on the grass while trying to steady herself with her barely long enough arms. Next she rocks herself back and forth trying to get enough momentum to push her white-diapered bottom up over her head. Finally, she pushes off and tumbles to one side, ending up on her back with her legs kicking in the air giggling with glee before pushing herself to her feet to try again. While sitting in the cool shade of a tall cherry tree, there are a plethora of activities and experiences one can enjoy that encompass all five of the observer's senses while waiting for dinner.

If you can tune out the sounds of traffic speeding past on the distant highway, the neighbor's raucous stereo five houses down, and the incredible noise an airplane on approach to land at the nearby airport, you can hear the sound of teriyaki steak sizzling on the barbeque grill. The hiss and spatter made each time the steak is turned serves to remind the listener of their growing hunger. The breeze rustles the leaves on the trees, carrying with it the sound of a child's innocent laughter. Plates and silverware clink softly as the table is set. Voices, young and old, good-naturedly ask, "Is it done yet?" until mother quiets them with a glance.

Anderson – 2

Mouths begin to water in anticipation of marinated steaks, corn on the cob, and peach cobbler. There is perhaps nothing more delicious on a cool summer evening than warm peach cobbler, fresh from the oven after a home cooked meal. The warm, sweet juicy peaches and syrupy sauce are complimented perfectly by the cold vanilla ice cream as your taste buds are treated to a tasty symphony of sweet, sticky goodness.

Lying back on the grass, the sunlight filters through the green leafy cover above. Shadows on the ground chase each other as the breeze gently waves the branches of the tree. Next to the patio, an anthill, scurrying with activity, catches the watchers eye. A small Frito corn chip is being dragged along the ground inch by inch by tens of ants. Skyward, the fluffy white clouds are turning bright yellow to be followed by flame orange and crimson red as the setting sun paints the sky into a vibrant sunset.

The evening breeze is cooler now, reminding all that summer is giving way to fall once more. The warmth of the sun is now gone and bare skin begins to goose bump. A twinge of discomfort is felt as a mosquito begins its evening meal on exposed and vulnerable skin. Quick reflexes end the mosquito's meal just as mother calls for dinner.

Lingering to enjoy the scent of freshly cut grass an instant longer, the temptation of dinner is strengthened by a growling stomach. Running into the house, past the barbeque grill, the stench of smoke is quickly forgotten as the sweet aroma of sizzling teriyaki steak fills the room.

Taking the time to observe the world leads to a realization that the tiny details of life add a certain spice and entertainment in a most unexpected way. The five senses have a new awareness, experienced in the backyard.

Scoring Guide—Descriptive Essay

Rating scale for each of the six traits: 6 points are possible per category:

- 6 = Goes beyond expectations. An exemplary performance.
- 5 = A good performance. Any weaknesses are very minor.
- 4 = An adequate performance. Has some serious weaknesses, but not enough to be below the basic standard.
- 3 = Below standard performance. Problems are severe enough that the paper is not acceptable as is. Needs revision.
- 2 = You have misunderstood or ignored the basic requirements. No credit without revision.
- 1 = Minimal or no attempt at completing the assignment as directed. No credit without rewrite.

Grading Criteria:

1. Ideas and Content: Your paper describes a place, not an event or story, and creates a new way of seeing or thinking about the place you are describing. Your essay is full of specific, concrete, sensory details, which create vivid images in the reader's mind and relate to a variety of senses. You use an interesting and appropriate title.

2. Organization: Your opening paragraph contains your thesis, or statement about the place. The body paragraphs support your thesis with specific, concrete details. You organize your body paragraphs according to one of the following techniques:

Panorama Technique: the writer describes the topic almost like a camera moving through a scene in a systematic way. Front to back, back to front, left to right, right to left, bottom to top, or top to bottom. Paragraphs are divided by what section of the scene the focus is upon, where the camera pauses, so to speak. Do not start a new paragraph for every single detail. Group details together according to the part of the scene in which they are located (an area of focus).

Tour Technique: the writer describes the scene almost as if he/she were a tour guide conducting the reader on a tour of the place. Separate paragraphs are created for the major points of interest on the tour. Do not make each separate detail a point of interest. Rather group certain details around each point of interest.

Association Technique: in this method the writer is not so much worried about where in the scene the particular details are located, but rather about what the details have to do with each other, how they relate in idea, not location. Each paragraph is a collection of details focused around a particular idea, which in turn supports the main idea of your essay.

Chronological Technique: in this method, the writer groups the descriptive details according to the time sequence in which he/she observed them. In time order, what does one notice first, then what, then what? This technique is especially effective if the passage of time changes the scene, the sun going down on your scene, for example, in which the scene itself changes as the light, sound, and temperature change. Do not start a new paragraph with each detail. Divide the experience into paragraphs for shifts in time. Be careful with this technique; your essay needs to be primarily a description of a place, not a story.

Other important aspects of organization include having smooth transitions between paragraphs and sentences, sticking to your thesis idea, and making sure your last paragraph ties all ideas together and brings the paper to a close, but, at the same time, leaves the reader with something to ponder.

3. Voice: You should use an interesting and natural voice, which allows your unique personality to come through. A descriptive essay should not sound stiff and formal. Your readers should feel like they are listening to a human being with something interesting or entertaining to say, not just someone mechanically completing a homework assignment. You should sound genuine, not phony. If you had fun writing it, it's more likely to be fun for someone to read it.

4. Word Choice: In descriptive writing, word choice is the name of the game. Avoid just putting down words that everybody always uses to describe a place like the one you are describing. Your job is to say it as it's never quite been said before. Use a variety of specific, concrete nouns; good, specific action verbs; and vivid descriptive phrases that appeal to a variety of the senses. Don't rely on high-sounding abstractions, fancy language, or big words. Show. Don't tell. Choose words to communicate, not merely to impress. Make your words paint specific images in the reader's mind.

5. Sentence Fluency: First of all, use complete sentences. While a well-placed sentence fragment can be effective, your descriptive essay should mainly consist of well-constructed sentences, not just a list of descriptive phrases in fragment form. Sentences make statements and contain subjects and verbs. Furthermore, make sure the sentences flow smoothly together. The ideas from one sentence lead into the ideas in the next sentence, everything flows and connects. Also, there should be sentence variety. Sentences should vary in length and should not all begin or end the same way.

6. Conventions: The final draft should be carefully edited for clarity, brevity, usage, and mechanics. It must be typed, neat, and readable, no smaller than a 10-point font, no larger than a 12-point font. There should be margins of approximately one inch on all four sides. Writing is neatly spaced. Pages should be numbered and in order. Write on the front side of each page only. Paragraphs should be properly indented. There should be no typos, scratch-outs, or write-overs.

Special thanks to Lind Williams (PHS and UCAS) for developing this rubric.