

The Assassin – plot, character and setting.

Putting it all together!

So far, we have:

1. Looked at how Graham Greene made his short story, "All But Empty," tense and atmospheric. We focused on his use of the senses.
2. Practised the technique of using the senses effectively in a descriptive piece written in the first person involving the feeling of loss in the setting of a multi-storey car park.
3. Discussed other ways in which tension can be built by analysing the opening of *Cold Heaven* by Brian Moore. You listened carefully to the story read out and filled in a worksheet.
4. Put in order of importance techniques that help to create atmosphere and tension.
5. Made a few further notes on these techniques and added a few more to the list.
6. Practised some of these techniques such as showing the reader what a character is like using a few well-chosen details rather than telling the reader directly.

Character descriptions

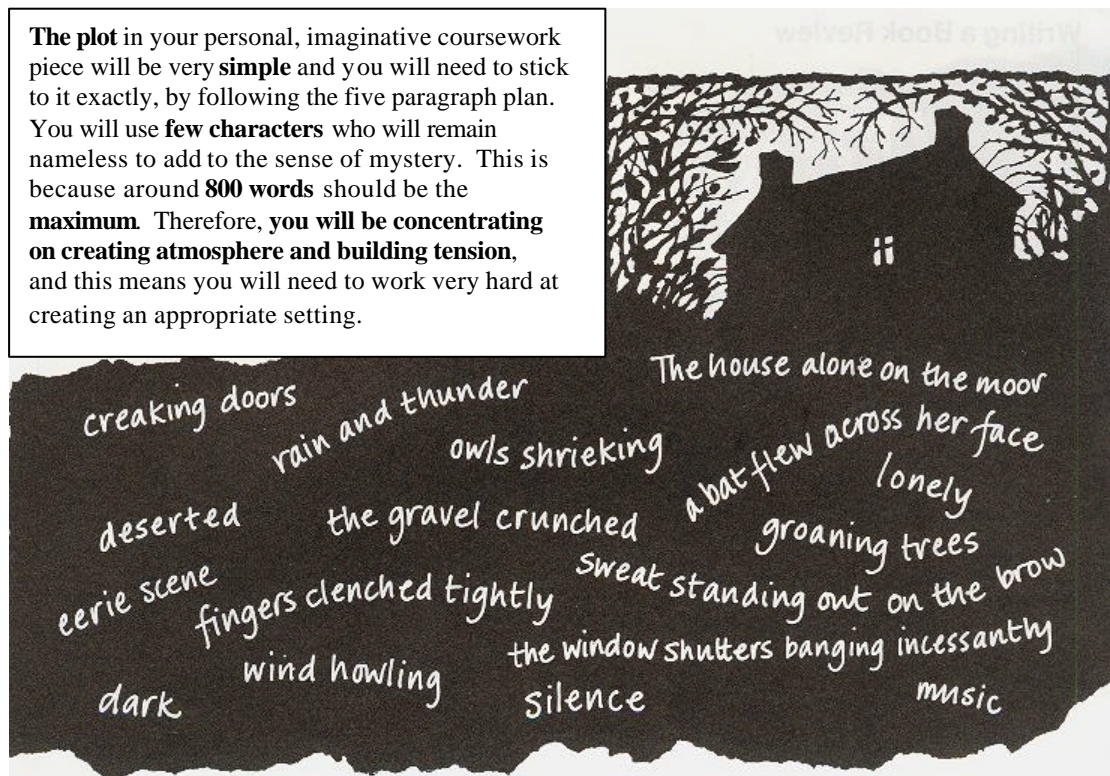
You have already seen how showing, not telling, by using a few well chosen details, is an excellent way of building character. You have taken a bald sentence ("The woman behind the counter was old and bad-tempered.") and shown the reader these traits by choosing one or two details. Make the reader work, and if you allow him/her to complete the picture in his/her mind, this will be a very effective way of making your writing engaging and interesting to read.

Read this example and think carefully about what makes it effective:

He shuffled forward, squinting wickedly at my daughter. Drawing back his lips in the most sickening smile, he displayed teeth yellowed with age and neglect. He extended his filthy paw and grasped my hand. Leaning forward as he did so, he sent me reeling with disgust with the foul stink of his breath.

The Assassin, naturally, involves a character who is a cold-blooded killer. Write a paragraph, using the techniques discussed, to create character. Write no more than five sentences. Some details to start you thinking might be his hard, cold eyes, expressionless face, thin, bloodless lips etc.

The plot in your personal, imaginative coursework piece will be very **simple** and you will need to stick to it exactly, by following the five paragraph plan. You will use **few characters** who will remain nameless to add to the sense of mystery. This is because around **800 words** should be the **maximum**. Therefore, **you will be concentrating on creating atmosphere and building tension**, and this means you will need to work very hard at creating an appropriate setting.



Setting

You have practised creating the atmosphere of nervous tension of a multi-storey car park. Now you will work on the setting of *The Assassin*. Think about what you have learnt – the techniques you have just used to create character can be used as effectively for establishing a sense of place too.

Read this example and think carefully about what makes it effective:

There was a rich warmth about the room. The elegant simplicity of the furnishings did nothing to disguise the expense and care which had gone into their making. I moved silently across the richly carpeted floor to the piano, and began to search through the papers for the document I sought.

Now read the phrases in the graphic opposite. There is a range here, from description of the weather, appeals to the senses, small details, use of imagery or poetic techniques such as simile and metaphor and people's reactions. Some are better than others – if you don't know what the word cliché means, look it up. Do any of these phrases fit into this category?

Write a paragraph setting the scene of a lonely, isolated house. This is the setting for *The Assassin*.

You are now ready to write the coursework. You should follow the plan exactly. To get a very good grade, you will need to:

1. Read through all your notes again, reminding yourself of the techniques you can use to make your writing engaging and powerful.
2. Make a checklist of these techniques using key words e.g.
 - Senses
 - Imagery
 - Holding back information etc.
3. Read through your work carefully.

After each paragraph, you should ask yourself:

- Is it technically accurate?
- Have I included everything I should?
- Have I stuck to the given plot?

If the answer is yes, move on. You can redraft when you have got to the end.

When you have got to the end, you will need to:

- Ask yourself whether you have met the main assessment criteria of creating atmosphere and tension in your writing.
- Ask yourself how many techniques you can tick off from the list you made earlier. Don't worry if you haven't used them all – don't use techniques for the sake of it, only for a certain effect.
- Ask yourself whether there are phrases that don't quite work. There probably will be, and if you think there aren't, you are probably fooling yourself. Be critical!
- Give your work to people you know and trust. It is hoped you will get a blend of congratulations and constructive criticism!

Then, hand it in. Your teacher will help you to improve it further by marking it and discussing it with you.

Good luck!

The Assassin

The most obvious plot would involve a president or head of state being shot. It is so obvious that we want nothing to do with it. The plot is very simple. An unnamed killer waits on a hillside above a lonely house.

His victim, again anonymous, arrives and is shot. The assassin makes his escape. The difficulty about the essay is to create the atmosphere required.

Paragraph 1

This paragraph will deal with the killer's wait. I think he should be lying down as comfortably as he can manage in heavy rain. Now and then he is alerted by a car passing down the lonely road. Try to suggest his cold-blooded lack of nerves. Do not write anything which suggests why he is there until the final sentence: Then something like:

“He lifted the rifle and once again sighted down to the front of the house,.” will be ideal.

Paragraph 2

This paragraph will deal with a description of the house and its immediate surroundings.

Use this paragraph to make the atmosphere more depressing. Use the weather. Use the shabbiness of the house and outbuildings. Use dull colours.

Paragraph 3.

Use this paragraph to describe the arrival of the victim by car. Do not waste time getting the car to the house. Start the paragraph with a sentence such as "He turned as a blue car turned off the road onto the muddy, rutted path leading to the house." Deliberately avoid tension in this paragraph.

Keep the assassin cool and unhurried. Use the technique of observing small irrelevant details: a defective windscreen wiper, mud streaks on the car, a damaged bumper.

Paragraph 4.

In this paragraph deal with the victim and the killing. Perhaps the victim could be a woman. How would she move from car to house? Remember it is raining, there would be muddy puddles she would avoid. Delay the killing until the end of the paragraph. Its violence should be in harsh contrast to the rest of the paragraph. e.g.

“She paused at the door. He knew she would pause at the door. Before the echoes could catch the shattering sound the shell had ripped her life from her in a flurry of blood and splintered bone.”

Use that technique but your own sentences.

Paragraph 5.

The assassin moves away from the scene. He needs to pack away his rifle, remove the signs of his presence (cigarette ends, cartridge case) and move away towards his car. The atmosphere to aim at is calmness. He is unmoved, even casual about his experience. He remains cold, careful and completely unruffled.