

Don't Tell Me, Show Me! (Trait of Ideas)

-Lori Jamison

Good writers don't just *tell* you about characters, places or events; they use rich details and elaboration to *show* you. For example, instead of just *telling* us the man was rich, a good writer might *show* us with details like: he lived in a huge mansion with fifteen bathrooms and five swimming pools, he flew in his own private jet to Paris just for dinner, and instead of buying a new watch, he bought the whole jewelry store.

Literature Link: *The Dirty Cowboy* by Amy Timberlake and Adam Rex
This is a picture book about a cowboy who decides one day that "this ol' boy needs a bath." He walks a full day down to the river and gives his clothes to his old dog to guard. The problem is that the dog is old and blind and only recognizes the cowboy by his smell, so he won't give the clean cowboy his clothes. In addition to a hilarious storyline and illustrations, the book is full of wonderful figurative language and literary techniques, and could also be used for teaching Word Choice or Voice.

Read the book first as readers and a second time as writers. Read the story aloud for students to enjoy and discuss. Pause occasionally for students to respond or ask questions.

Go back and revisit the first few pages to listen for examples of how the author "shows" us that the cowboy needed a bath - without ever using the word "dirty". Invite students to recall all the details that *showed* rather than *telling*. (Revisit this book on another occasion to draw students' attention to figures of speech, interesting word choice and author's techniques.)

Now have the students practice. Put the sentence on the board: "The house was haunted." With the students, brainstorm as many examples as possible of how you could tell the house was haunted.

Then give the students opportunities to work independently or in pairs to choose one of the topics below (or one of their own) and generate *showing* details. Topics might include:

My bedroom was a mess.

It was a delicious meal.

The weather was terrible.

My friend is so cool.

It was really hot outside.