


Practice Task- Sensory Description and Characterization Through STEAL


Directions: During this two part activity, you will practice your **descriptive and characterization techniques** by writing several short scenes relating to your story. Keep the story prompt in mind as you complete this task. Later, you should be able to come back to this and use some of these passages in your story. **This task should be done by hand, using pen and paper.**

Use the following vocabulary lists to help you write: [Negative/Depressing Vocabulary List](#), [Character Traits List](#), [Master List of Physical Descriptions](#), and [Feelings Vocabulary List](#).


Exercise 1: Sensory Description

 **SEE- What can you see?** Describing the setting. Mention the **date and the city** the story is set in. Use colors, adjectives and similes/metaphors.


We were in an abandoned street, most of the houses destroyed by air raids and emptied out of Jewish inmates who had been recently deported to Auschwitz. It was quiet and dark, very late at night, but still dangerous. There could be Nazi soldiers or Jewish police patrolling the streets.

 **HEAR- What can you hear?** Write a short description of the sounds that can be heard in this setting. Use adjectives, onomatopoeia, and similes/metaphors.


Those were the last words I heard before the coffin shut over me with a soft click. The silence was deafening, drumming against my ears. I couldn't hear any voices from outside, but it didn't matter, because I was already slipping away from consciousness.

 **SMELL- What can you smell?** Write a short scene from your story describing the smells your main character experiences. Use *adjectives* and **metaphors/similes**.

My mother and I stared with dread at the empty coffin. It smelled like death, something rotting and decayed, though maybe that was my imagination. It was empty and black, like a foul gateway into the pits of hell.

 **TASTE- What can you taste?** Write a short scene from your story describing taste. Use *adjectives* and **metaphors/similes**.

I remembered, the one who would make buttery latkes for Sabbath, and kreplach for Yom Kippur, and soft matzah balls for Passover. They were always accompanied by her signature over-salted chicken soup. She wasn't the best cook, but even the memory of her cooking still made my mouth water.

 **TOUCH- What can you feel?** Write a short scene from your story exploring the sense of touch. You can describe the weather, or if relevant, pain the character experiences. Use *adjectives* and **similes/metaphors**.

We headed down the street. The air was freezing, making my arms ache with cold. My teeth chattered as I tucked my hands under my armpits for warmth. My feet felt like blocks of ice, frozen stiff in my thin, threadbare shoes.

Exercise 2: Characterization

Directions: During this activity, you will practice how to use the five 'STEAL' methods to help bring your character to life. Use the examples below to help you draft your own scenes.

S- Write a scene or situation that uses the technique of “S” (what the character SAYS). This should be a dialogue or dramatic conversation between the characters in your story.

“Her name is Chaya Kowalski,” my mother said, her voice desperate. “She is ten. Make sure you tell them; someone has to know who she is—”

“We’ll write it down,” the older resistance fighter said reassuringly. “Irena always keeps the records safe.”

“What are your names?” my mother asked. “How will I find you, after the war?”

“It’s safer if you don’t know, but do not fear. Zegota will find you.”

T- Write a scene or situation that uses the technique of “T” (what the character THINKS or feels)

I looked at the coffin again, my heart seizing in my chest. He had said I was lucky to be so small for my age, but I could feel was a terrible, wrenching fear. How could I lie down in that thing? What if this coffin got mixed up with a real one and taken to the cemetery? Then I would be buried alive...

E- Write a scene or situation that includes uses the technique of “E” (the character’s EFFECT on other characters)

I swallowed, hating to see what the war had done to her. She had already lost so much—not just her looks and her health, but also my father and brother. They had been both deported on the trains last week to who knew where. Now, she was losing me too.

A- Write two short scenes that use the technique of 'A' (the characters' ACTIONS). This should include two different types of actions/gestures a character might make during an intense or emotional moment in the story.

1. Suddenly, I heard footsteps nearby, and I jumped with fear.

2. She brushed a lock of hair out of my face, her eyes brimming with tears.

L-Write two short descriptions using the technique of the “L” (what the character looks like). Focus on eye color, hair, body type, clothes, etc).

1. My mother was sallow and thin, skin tightly drawn over the angles of her cheekbones. Her clothes were worn and torn, stained with dirt and far too thin for winter.

2. The Zegota resistance fighter was a young, handsome man, his face hard and lightly bearded. He carried a gun, but his eyes were very kind. They reminded me of my brother Izaak.