

ASSIGNMENT 6: WRITTEN DESCRIPTION INTO MOVIE SET

Blog entry due: Tuesday, March 11

Comment due: Thursday, March 13

The purpose of this assignment is to get a sense of the process of translating a written description, which relies on the reader's imagination to supply missing details, into a set where every detail must be worked out.

To illustrate: A writer merely states, "A tree stood in front of the house where I used to live." The director, the set designer, etc. must transform this description into a screen image. First they need to eliminate any text which cannot be presented visually; "where I used to live" would be difficult, if not impossible to present visually, so they will ignore this part of the sentence and concentrate on the first part of the sentence.

Now, they must decide what effects they want to communicate with the image. What is needed at this point in the movie is a traditional middle-class New England home and yard which have a comfortable, "homey" look. Having made this decision, they can now concentrate on creating such a setting. This process involves many questions, such as...

First, what effect will the house make? Or, what statement does the house make?

What kind of tree is it? How tall? How far is it from the house? Is it set in the yard? If so, is it a well-tended lawn, a neglected lawn, dirt and weeds, or flowers?

What is the season? What time of day is it?

What kind of light is the scene to be shot in?

What is the house like—e.g., style, size, well-maintained or neglected?

Having answered such question, they are ready to construct the set. Here is what the set will look like:

The tree is a tall oak which dominates a large, well kept lawn. It is summer, early afternoon in bright sunlight. White Impatiens ring the tree and glow in the light. The tree is located near the sidewalk but not so close that its roots push up the sidewalk.

The house is a two-story house. Its cedar shingles are dark grey from weathering; the roof shingles are a lighter grey; it has two chimneys, one at either end of the house. The window frames and door are white. The windows are open, and a light breeze stirs the white lace curtains. The front door in the middle of the porch has glass panels, is painted white, and has a white metal screen door. A covered porch extends across the front of the house; the bannisters and railings are painted white; the floor, ceiling, and steps are painted grey. Three outdoor aluminum and mesh chairs, a matching love seat, and two small tables are on the porch; the pillows are blue. Three pots of flowers hang from the porch ceiling; a red geranium, a white geranium, and purple petunias. A girl's bike is leaning against the porch. A flagstone path leads from the sidewalk to the porch. A black SUV is parked in the asphalt driveway to the right of the house.

Writing Assignment

Please indicate the assignment number (Assignment 6) in the Blog Entry Title box.

Choose one of the following sentences and turn it a detailed description, so that the setting can be created and shot.

First you must identify what effect(s) you want to communicate, i.e., what the purpose of this setting is. Then

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you must create it visually with concrete and specific details; you cannot use vague or general adjectives like “nice” or “pretty.” Rather, you must identify what physical traits make the object “nice” or “pretty” and recreate them. Your description will be almost entirely, if not entirely physical—what can be seen and heard.

There are NO PEOPLE in your description. You are writing only about the set. Let me repeat: **no people!**

1. The playground had the usual equipment. (No children)
2. A piano stood in the middle of the room.
3. The picnic table was situated next to a parking lot.
4. A mannequin stood in the store window.
5. A bicycle rack was by the entrance.
6. Books were open on the desk.
7. A bench overlooked the path. (No pedestrians)
8. The bedroom had the usual furniture.
9. The car sat in the driveway.
10. Tables lined one side of the dance floor.
11. The desks were arranged in rows.
12. Snow covered the road and sidewalk (No people).
13. Spring had come to the campus.
14. The beach was deserted.

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