



Put muscle into your writing by using strong verbs

Introduction

VERBS are the ACTION WORDS of language. One way of making your writing more interesting is to use STRONG VERBS instead of neutral ones. Verbs such as *walk* and *talk* don't really help the reader to build a vivid mental picture of the action being performed; however, there are many other verbs you can use that explain the actions of *walking* and *talking* more effectively.

Note to the teacher

Select pupils to 'act out' the following verbs.

Ways of walking

stroll
stride
shuffle
prance
plod
amble
toddle
saunter
pace

Ways of talking

babble
chatter
squeal
gasp
whisper
murmur
mutter
drawl
mumble

Development

Note to the teacher

Get pupils to write out the paragraphs below (also on the next sheet), replacing the underlined verbs with stronger verbs from the HELP SECTION. When they have done that, let them compare the two versions, so that they can see how the use of stronger verbs makes their writing more effective, e.g. using *creaked* instead of *swung* (8) involves our senses, helping us to imagine more clearly the eerie sound of the door opening.

James saw (1) the old house first. Holes showed (2) in its thatched roof and weeds covered (3) the garden. To hide the fear that went (4) through their bodies, the boys kept up a steady stream of chatter.

With a show of bravado, they walked (5) through a gap in the wall and worked (6) through the tangle of weeds until they stood before the enormous front door. James raised his hand tentatively and pulled (7) on the handle. Slowly the door swung (8) open.

With the other boys close on his heels, James stepped over the threshold into a large hall. The boys looked (9) at the room, not quite sure what to make of it. Instead of the dust they expected to see covering (10) the floor, or the cobwebs they imagined would be hanging (11) from the ceiling, the room was spotlessly clean.

As a final activity, pupils can 'fill' the story out:

- How many boys are there? What are their names?
- Are the boys looking for the old house, or do they come upon it by accident?
- Do the boys explore the rest of the house? If so, in what condition do they find the other rooms?
- Why is the hall (even perhaps the rest of the house), so spotlessly clean?
- What is the outcome of the boys' visit to the house?

James saw (1) the old house first. Holes showed (2) in its thatched roof and weeds covered (3) the garden. To hide the fear that went (4) through their bodies, the boys kept up a steady stream of chatter.

With a show of bravado, they walked (5) through a gap in the wall and worked (6) through the tangle of weeds until they stood before the enormous front door. James raised his hand tentatively and pulled (7) on the handle. Slowly the door swung (8) open.

With the other boys close on his heels, James stepped over the threshold into a large hall. The boys looked (9) at the room, not quite sure what to make of it. Instead of the dust they expected to see covering (10) the floor, or the cobwebs they imagined would be hanging (11) from the ceiling, the room was spotlessly clean.

HELP SECTION

Choose a strong verb from the following lists to replace the more neutral verbs in the passage. Perhaps you would like to add some of your own strong verbs to the lists.

1. SAW – spotted/noticed/sighted
2. SHOWED – gaped/yawned/glared
3. COVERED – choked/blanketed/smothered
4. WENT – quivered/thrilled/shivered
5. WALKED – swaggered/strutted/sauntered
6. WORKED – toiled/stumbled/struggled
7. PULLED – dragged/tugged/yanked
8. SWUNG – creaked/groaned/drifted
9. LOOKED – gazed/stared/peered
10. COVERING – caking/coating/carpeting
11. HANGING – dangling/drooping/trailing



Put muscle into your writing by using strong verbs

Introduction

VERBS are the ACTION WORDS of language.

To make your writing more interesting, use STRONG VERBS instead of neutral ones.

Verbs like **walk** and **talk** are not very interesting.

Try acting these!

Ways of walking

stroll

stride

shuffle

prance

plod

amble

toddle

saunter

pace

Ways of talking

babble

chatter

squeal

gasp

whisper

murmur

mutter

drawl

mumble

Development**Note to the teacher**

Get pupils to write out the paragraphs below (also on the next sheet), replacing the underlined verbs with stronger verbs from the HELP SECTION. When they have done that, let them compare the two versions, so that they can see how the use of stronger verbs makes their writing more effective, e.g. using *creaked* instead of *swung* (8) involves our senses, helping us to imagine more clearly the eerie sound of the door opening.

James saw (1) the old house first. Holes showed (2) in its thatched roof and weeds covered (3) the garden. To hide the fear that went (4) through their bodies, the boys kept up a steady stream of chatter.

With a show of bravado, they walked (5) through a gap in the wall and worked (6) through the tangle of weeds until they stood before the enormous front door. James raised his hand tentatively and pulled (7) on the handle. Slowly the door swung (8) open.

With the other boys close on his heels, James stepped over the threshold into a large hall. The boys looked (9) at the room, not quite sure what to make of it. Instead of the dust they expected to see covering (10) the floor, or the cobwebs they imagined would be hanging (11) from the ceiling, the room was spotlessly clean.

James saw (1) the old house first. Holes showed (2) in its thatched roof and weeds covered (3) the garden. To hide the fear that went (4) through their bodies, the boys kept up a steady stream of chatter.

With a show of bravado, they walked (5) through a gap in the wall and worked (6) through the tangle of weeds until they stood before the enormous front door. James raised his hand tentatively and pulled (7) on the handle. Slowly the door swung (8) open.

With the other boys close on his heels, James stepped over the threshold into a large hall. The boys looked (9) at the room, not quite sure what to make of it. Instead of the dust they expected to see covering (10) the floor, or the cobwebs they imagined would be hanging (11) from the ceiling, the room was spotlessly clean.

HELP SECTION

Choose a strong verb from the following lists to replace the more neutral verbs in the passage. Perhaps you would like to add some of your own strong verbs to the lists.

12. SAW – spotted / noticed / sighted
13. SHOWED – gaped / yawned / glared
14. COVERED – choked / blanketed / smothered
15. WENT – quivered / thrilled / shivered
16. WALKED – swaggered / strutted / sauntered
17. WORKED – toiled / stumbled / struggled
18. PULLED – dragged / tugged / yanked
19. SWUNG – creaked / groaned / drifted
20. LOOKED – gazed / stared / peered
21. COVERING – caking / coating / carpeting
22. HANGING – dangling / drooping / trailing

Now make the story even more interesting. Answer the questions and put them in the story.

1. There were ... boys altogether (how many?)
2. Their names were ...
3. Were the boys looking for the old house, or do they come upon it by accident? The boys ...
4. Do the boys explore the rest of the house?
5. Why is the hall, (even perhaps the rest of the house), so spotlessly clean?
6. What happens next?