



## 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?

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### 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



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## 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!

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shuffle

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### Ways of talking

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## HELP SECTION

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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?