

The Assassin

KS4 > GCSE > Creative Writing 2 > The Assassin

- How it works** This is an oven-ready resource, great for producing effective writing from students because it's short, simple and elegantly structured. Students follow the instructions and – bingo! – come up with a piece of original prose.
- Try this!** Do read the Teacher Notes at the start of the resource – they contain a number of great ideas to spice up the activity and develop learning.
- Or this!** Get students to complete *their own* paragraph plans for a tense, atmospheric narrative. Use the given plan for 'The Assassin' to establish the requirements of a successful plan i.e. simple three-stage plot; few characters; logical, cohesive structure etc.
- Or this!** Display the paragraph from sheet 1 describing the character (beginning 'He shuffled forward ...') on the board. Get pupils in turn to underline / highlight the most expressive words and phrases (start off by focusing on adjectives and adverbs, then look at verbs and key nouns). Then get everyone to rewrite the paragraph, substituting the words marked to change the tone of the piece completely. Turn it into the opening of a love story, perhaps!
- Or this!** Having looked at sheet 1 with the class, provide them with a version of the sheet which has all the examples particular to 'The Assassin' deleted (see the example, plot character and setting SHEET 1a, below). Ask pupils to recreate the worksheet with a *new* title (The Rescuer? The Thief? The Addict? The Lover?) and appropriate new descriptions. The worksheets can then be swapped within the class to provide a whole fresh set of stimuli!
- Even this!** Use the whole original resource for a piece of speaking and listening or drama work rather than written work. How will students be able to convey the character, setting and tone with minimal props? One way of doing this would be for students to present their narrative outlines orally, using persuasive language, as if to a Hollywood producer. Give them a time limit to focus the activity.

Lorna Smith and Philip White

Your task is to produce a *new* worksheet to help your fellow students produce a piece of original writing. Look at 'The Assassin' planning sheet to give you an idea of the type of thing you need to write - but remember that *this* story will be completely different...

What will it be called? Who will be involved? Where will it be set? What will happen?

Character descriptions

Showing, not telling, by using a few well chosen details, is an excellent way of building character. Make the reader work, and if you allow him/her to complete the picture in his/her mind, this will be a very effective way of making your writing engaging and interesting to read.

Read the example opposite and think carefully about what makes it effective.



Write here...

Write a paragraph, using the techniques discussed, to create character. Write no more than five sentences.

Some details to start you thinking might be: *write here...*

The plot in your personal, imaginative coursework piece will be very **simple** and you will need to stick to it exactly, by following the five paragraph plan.

Make notes here...

Paragraph 1:

introduce the main character

Paragraph 2:

describe the setting

Paragraph 3:

introduce another character

Paragraph 4:

describe what happens between the two people

Paragraph 5:

describe the main character leaving

Setting

Now you will work on the setting of your story. Think about what you have learnt – the techniques you have just used to create character can be used as effectively for establishing a sense of place too.

Read the example opposite and think carefully about what makes it effective.



Write here...

Suggested pre-teaching activities

1. Practise the technique of using the senses effectively in a descriptive piece written in the first person involving the feeling of loss in the setting of a multi-storey car park. (This is the first "Your Turn" task on page 20 in the book above).
2. Discuss other ways in which tension can be built by analysing the opening of *Cold Heaven* by Brian Moore. This is in *English to GCSE Revision Guide* by Geoff Barton, published by Oxford University Press, pages 158 to 161. Students listen carefully while the story is read out and complete the Activity task on page 158.
3. Place techniques that help to create atmosphere and tension in order of importance. This is on page 161 of *English to GCSE*.
4. Make a few further notes on these techniques and add a few more to the list, based on pages 110 to 113 of *English to GCSE*.
5. Practise some of these techniques such as showing the reader what a character is like using a few well-chosen details rather than telling the reader directly. This is the task at the bottom of page 112 of *English to GCSE*.
6. Read 'Lamb to the Slaughter' by Roald Dahl and discuss how he uses these techniques to create atmosphere and tension in this, and other Dahl stories with which students are familiar.

Character descriptions

Showing, not telling, by using a few well chosen details, is an excellent way of building character. Make the reader work, and if you allow him/her to complete the picture in his/her mind, this will be a very effective way of making your writing engaging and interesting to read.

Read the example opposite and think carefully about what makes it effective.



He shuffled forward, squinting wickedly at my daughter. Drawing back his lips in the most sickening smile, he displayed teeth yellowed with age and neglect. He extended his filthy paw and grasped my hand. Leaning forward as he did so, he sent me reeling with disgust with the foul stink of his breath.

The Assassin, naturally, involves a character who is a cold-blooded killer. Write a paragraph, using the techniques discussed, to create character. Write no more than five sentences. Some details to start you thinking might be his hard, cold eyes, expressionless face, thin, bloodless lips etc.

The plot in your personal, imaginative coursework piece will be very **simple** and you will need to stick to it exactly, by following the five paragraph plan. You will use **few characters** who will remain nameless to add to the sense of mystery. **You will be concentrating on creating atmosphere and building tension**, and this means you will need to work very hard at creating an appropriate setting.

last year's calendar hung on the wall

the empty street

the darkness descended slowly

the voice was as hollow as a cave

The tarmac glistened after the rain

his palms felt clammy

fear hung in the air

shrieking owls

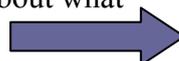
somewhere in the distance a dog barked

creaking doors

Setting

Now you will work on the setting of 'The Assassin'. Think about what you have learnt – the techniques you have just used to create character can be used as effectively for establishing a sense of place too.

Read the example opposite and think carefully about what makes it effective.



There was a rich warmth about the room. The elegant simplicity of the furnishings did nothing to disguise the expense and care which had gone into their making. I moved silently across the richly carpeted floor to the piano, and began to search through the papers for the document I sought.

Now read the phrases above. There is a range here, from description of the weather, appeals to the senses, small details, use of imagery and people's reactions. Some are better than others – if you don't know what the word cliché means, look it up. Do any of these phrases fit into this category?

Write a paragraph setting the scene of a lonely, isolated house. This is the setting for 'The Assassin'.

Checklist for an effective piece of writing

You are now ready to write the coursework. You should follow the plan exactly. To get a very good grade, you will need to:

1. Read through all your notes again, reminding yourself of the techniques you can use to make your writing engaging and powerful.
2. Make a checklist of these techniques using key words e.g.
 - Senses
 - Imagery
 - Holding back information etc.

3. Read through your work carefully



After each paragraph, you should ask yourself:

- Is it technically accurate?
- Have I included everything I should?
- Have I stuck to the given plot?



If the answer is yes, move on. You can redraft when you have got to the end.

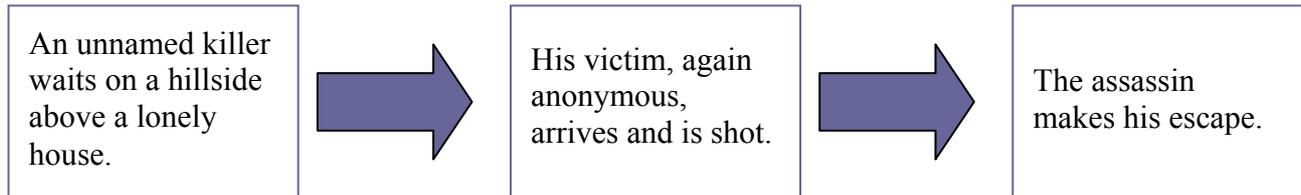
When you have got to the end, you will need to:

- Ask yourself whether you have met the main assessment criteria of creating atmosphere and tension in your writing.
- Ask yourself how many techniques you can tick off from the list you made earlier. Don't worry if you haven't used them all – don't use techniques for the sake of it, only for a certain effect.
- Ask yourself whether there are phrases that don't quite work. There probably will be, and if you think there aren't, you are probably fooling yourself. Be critical!
- Give your work to people you know and trust. It is hoped you will get a blend of congratulations and constructive criticism!

Then, hand it in. Your teacher will help you to improve it further by marking it and discussing it with you.

Good luck!

The most obvious plot would involve a president or head of state being shot. It is so obvious that we want nothing to do with it. The plot is very simple:



The difficulty about the story is to create the atmosphere required.

Paragraph 1

This paragraph will deal with the killer's wait. I think he should be lying down as comfortably as he can manage in heavy rain. Now and then he is alerted by a car passing down the lonely road. Try to suggest his cold-blooded lack of nerves. Do not write anything which suggests why he is there until the final sentence. Then you could write something like:

“He lifted the rifle and once again sighted down to the front of the house.”

Paragraph 2

This paragraph will deal with a description of the house and its immediate surroundings. Use this paragraph to make the atmosphere more depressing. Use the weather. Use the shabbiness of the house and outbuildings. Use dull colours.

Paragraph 3

Use this paragraph to describe the arrival of the victim by car. Do not waste time getting the car to the house. Start the paragraph with a sentence such as "He turned as a blue car turned off the road onto the muddy, rutted path leading to the house." Deliberately avoid tension in this paragraph. Keep the assassin cool and unhurried. Use the technique of observing small irrelevant details: a defective windscreen wiper, mud streaks on the car, a damaged bumper.

Paragraph 4

In this paragraph deal with the victim and the killing. Perhaps the victim could be a woman. How would she move from car to house? Remember it is raining, there would be muddy puddles she would avoid. Delay the killing until the end of the paragraph. Its violence should be in harsh contrast to the rest of the paragraph. e.g.

“She paused at the door. He knew she would pause at the door. Before the echoes could catch the shattering sound the shell had ripped her life from her in a flurry of blood and splintered bone.”

Use that technique but your own sentences.

Paragraph 5

The assassin moves away from the scene. He needs to pack away his rifle, remove the signs of his presence (cigarette ends, cartridge case) and move away towards his car. The atmosphere to aim at is calmness. He is unmoved, even casual about his experience. He remains cold, careful and completely unruffled.