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Lower Secondary
English

8

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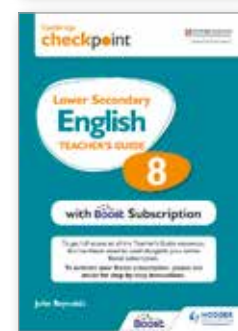
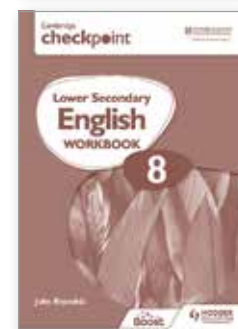
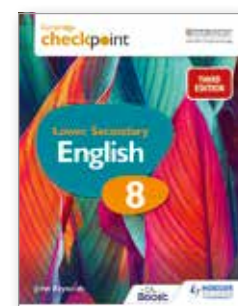
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Glossary

1

It's in the atmosphere!

Reading

- ★ Forest and countryside in winter
- ★ A traveller's impressions of Capri

Speaking and listening

- ★ Discuss a place you like to go to be alone, explaining why its atmosphere is so special to you

IT'S IN THE ATMOSPHERE!

Writing

- ★ Describe a place you know well – create atmosphere by focusing on sights, sounds and smells

Key skills

- ★ Semi-colons
- ★ Similar words
- ★ Word attack skills

LET'S TALK

You have already looked at ways in which writers describe characters and settings.

Another important feature of imaginative writing is how the description of the setting or background to the story can create an atmosphere in the minds of readers that reinforces and underlines the story's main **themes** and **topics**.

- What kinds of atmosphere can you remember in texts or stories you've recently read?
- How does the atmosphere affect the reader?
- Why is atmosphere important in a text or a story?
- Think about what you could do to create an atmosphere in your own writing. What kinds of words or phrases do you think would be useful?

Author:
Yuri Nagibin

Yuri Nagibin is a Russian author who was born in Moscow in 1920. He wrote many Soviet screen plays, particularly during the 1960s, as well as novels, short stories and newspaper articles.

Reading

Read this extract from a short story of a young schoolteacher, Anna Vasilevna, who learns an important lesson about the natural world from Savushkin, a student from the countryside, of whom she has previously had a low opinion. As you read, think about what kind of atmosphere is created.

Forest and countryside in winter

The path along which Savushkin led Anna Vasilevna began just behind the school building. As soon as they stepped into the forest and the fir branches that looked like paws heavily laden with snow closed behind them, they were immediately transported into another world, an enchanted world of peace and silence. Magpies and crows flew from tree to tree, shaking the branches, knocking off the fir cones, and sometimes their wings caught on the dry, brittle twigs, and broke them. Yet not a sound could be heard.

All around everything was white. Only high up the wind had blown on the tops of the soaring weeping birches, so that they showed up black, and their delicate little branches looked as if they had been etched in Indian ink on the blue surface of the sky.

The path ran by the stream, sometimes alongside it, **submissively** following its twisting course, sometimes rising high up and winding along a steep bank.

Now and again the trees would part and reveal sunny, joyful glades, criss-crossed with hare tracks that looked like watch-chains. There would also be heavier tracks shaped like a **trefoil**, and they must have been made by a larger beast. These tracks ran right into the thicket, in among tree-trunks that had fallen to the wind.

'An elk has been here,' said Savushkin, as if talking about a close friend, when he saw that Anna Vasilevna was interested in the tracks.

'But don't be afraid,' he added in response to the glance the schoolmistress threw towards the depths of the forest, 'the deer is gentle.'

Have you seen one?' asked Anna Vasilevna excitedly.

'No,' – Savushkin sighed. 'I haven't actually seen one, not alive. But I've seen his pellets.'

'Pellets?'

'Droppings,' Savushkin explained shyly.

Slipping under an archway of bent branches, the path again ran down to the stream. In some places the stream was covered with a thick white blanket of snow, while in others it was imprisoned in an armour of clear ice, and sometimes living water would gleam through the ice, looking like a dark, **malevolent** eye.

WORD ATTACK SKILLS

Use your word attack skills to work out the meaning of the highlighted words by using the surrounding words:

- ✓ submissively
- ✓ trefoil
- ✓ malevolent
- ✓ enraptured
- ✓ enthralled
- ✓ corrugations

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Find out more about the forests in Russia and how they look in wintertime – try to find some images to look at. For contrast, find some images of Russian forests in the summertime. Describe how they look as accurately as you can to a classmate.

Spelling

- 1 Find three examples of a root word with a prefix or suffix.

'Why has it not all frozen up?' asked Anna Vasilevna.

'There's a warm spring which rises up in it. Look! See that little jet?'

Bending over an unfrozen patch in the middle of the ice, Anna Vasilevna could see a thin little thread rising up from the bottom; by the time it reached the surface it had broken into tiny bubbles. This minute stem with the little bubbles on it looked like a spray of lily of the valley.

'There are loads of springs like that here,' said Savushkin enthusiastically. 'The stream is alive even under the snow.'

He brushed away the snow, and they saw the coal-black but transparent water.

Anna Vasilevna noticed that, when the snow fell into the water, it did not melt away, but immediately turned into slush, a greenish jelly suspended in the water as if it were algae. She was so pleased with this that she began to kick snow into the water with the toe of her boot, and was **enraptured** when a particularly intricate figure emerged from a large lump of snow. She was so **enthralled** that she did not at once notice that Savushkin had gone on, and was waiting for her, sitting high up in the fork of a bough overhanging the stream. Anna Vasilevna caught him up. Here the action of the warm springs came to an end, and the stream was covered with a thin film of ice. Light shadows darted rapidly over the marble surface.

'Look, the ice is so thin that we can even see the current!'

'No, Anna Vasilevna, I'm swaying this branch, and that's its shadow moving.'

Anna Vasilevna bit her tongue. Clearly here in the forest she had better keep quiet.

Savushkin strode on again in front of the schoolmistress, bending down slightly and looking around him.

And the forest led them on still farther along its intricate, tangled paths. It seemed as if there was no end to the trees, the snowdrifts and the silence of the sun-dappled twilight.

Suddenly, in the distance, a smoky-blue chink appeared. The trees began to thin out, there was more space and it was fresher. Soon there was no longer a chink, but a broad shaft of sunlight appeared before them, and in it something glistened and sparkled, swarming with frosty stars.

The path went round a hazel bush, and straightaway the forest fell away on either side. In the middle of the glade, clothed in glittering raiment, huge and majestic as a cathedral, stood an oak. It seemed as if the trees had respectfully stood aside to give their older brother room to display himself in all his strength. The lower branches spread out over the glade like a canopy.

Snow was packed into the deep **corrugations** of the bark, and the trunk, three times the normal girth, seemed to be embroidered with silver thread. Few of the leaves that had withered in the autumn had fallen, and the oak was covered right up to the top with leaves encased in snow.

'There it is, the winter oak!'

Yuri Nagibin

Reading

EXERCISE 1: FOREST AND COUNTRYSIDE IN WINTER

- 1 Explain as fully as you can what you learn about Anna Vasilevna and her reaction to what she sees and hears in the forest. You should refer closely to the extract in your answer.
- 2 Explain as fully as you can how Savushkin's behaviour in the forest helps you to understand him. Refer closely to the extract.
- 3 What do you think Anna Vasilevna learns from her experience in the forest?
- 4 Explain how the writer conveys the 'enchanted' atmosphere of the forest by referring closely to some of the similes he uses in his description.

Key skills: Semi-colons

Semi-colons are an important punctuation device. They are used to:

- 1 separate two main **clauses** when a conjunction such as *and* or *but* is omitted:

When I woke up, I remembered that I had a particularly demanding maths test this morning; I really did not want to get out of bed.

- 2 separate groups of words in a list (clauses or sentences) inside which commas may already exist:

I started to pack my bag ready for school. I packed my trusty calculator, the screen cracked by an earlier accident; two spare pencils, in case the one I was using broke its point; my geometry instruments, which my grandfather had given me; a book entitled *Mathematics Made Simple*, written by I Countem; and my good-luck charm in case all else failed!

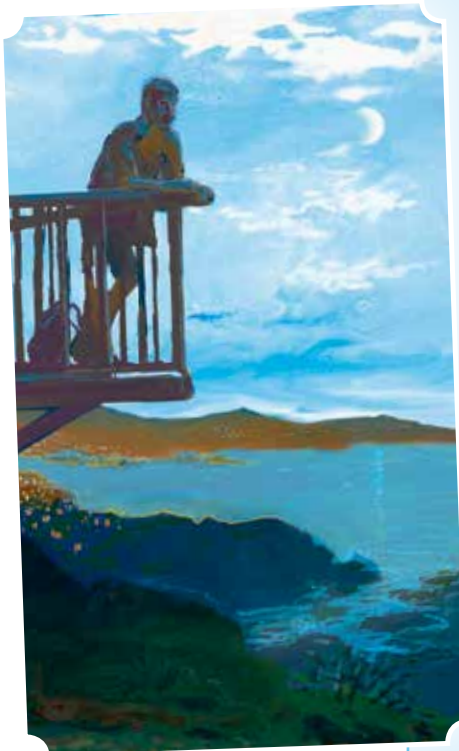
EXERCISE 2: SEMI-COLONS

Copy the following sentences and add semi-colons where necessary:

- 1 Rita did not want to go to bed when her mother told her to she really wanted to watch the late-night film on television.
- 2 In order to visit his grandparents, Hari had to walk to the nearest bus stop which was 800 metres from his home wait half an hour for the next bus as he had just missed one stand up on the journey as the bus was crowded change to another equally crowded bus and then walk for 15 minutes to their house.
- 3 It was six o'clock in the morning the sun was just beginning to rise.
- 4 When cooking your pancakes you should sift the flour into a bowl making sure that you don't spill any break two eggs into a cup to check they are fresh add the eggs to the flour which is in the bowl whisk them together gradually adding milk and water as you do so.
- 5 It was too late the phone stopped ringing just as he picked up the receiver.

Travel writing

Travel writers, in particular, want to create the atmosphere of the places they visit in the minds of their readers. Read the following extract in which well-known travel writer Bill Bryson describes his impressions of the island of Capri. Notice how he creates the atmosphere of the place, not just through describing what he sees, but by appealing to the reader's other senses, especially that of smell.



A traveller's impressions of Capri

A few of the lanes were enclosed, like catacombs, with the upper storeys of the houses completely covering the passageways. I followed one of these lanes now as it wandered upward through the town and finally opened again to the sky in a neighbourhood where the villas began to grow larger and enjoy more spacious grounds. The path meandered and climbed, so much so that I grew breathless again and propelled myself onwards by pushing my hands against my knees, but the scenery and setting were so fabulous that I was dragged on, as if by magnets. Near the top of the hillside the path levelled out and ran through a grove of pine trees, heavy with the smell of rising sap. On one side of the path were grand villas – I couldn't imagine by what method they got the furniture there when people moved in or out – and on the other was a giddy view of the island: white villas strewn across the hillsides, half buried in hibiscus and bougainvillea and a hundred other types of shrub.

It was nearly dusk. A couple of hundred yards further on the path rounded a bend through the trees and ended suddenly, breathtakingly, in a viewing platform hanging out over a precipice of rock – a little patio in the sky. It was a look-out built for the public, but I had the feeling that no one had been there for years, certainly no tourist. It was the sheerest stroke of luck that I had stumbled on it. I have never seen anything half as beautiful: on one side the town of Capri spilling down the hillside, on the other the twinkling lights of the cove at Anacapri and the houses gathered around it, and in front of me a sheer drop of – what? – 200 feet, 300 feet, to a sea of the lushest aquamarine washing against outcrops of jagged rock. The sea was so far below that the sound of breaking waves reached me as the faintest of whispers. A sliver of moon, brilliantly white, hung in a pale blue evening sky, a warm breeze teased my hair and everywhere there was the scent of lemon, honeysuckle and pine. Ahead of me there was nothing but open sea, calm and seductive, for 150 miles to Sicily. I would do anything to own that view, anything.

Bill Bryson



Author: Bill Bryson

Bill Bryson is an American-British author of books. He was born in America but has resided in Britain for most of his life. He made his name in travel writing when he wrote *Notes from a Small Island* in 1995. He later released books on science, the English language and many other non-fiction topics.

Spotlight on: travel writing

Travel writing includes nature writing, guidebooks, diaries, memoirs and blogs. It has been around for centuries and centuries – Pausanias (110– c. 180CE) was a Greek traveller who explored the Greek empire and is known as one of the first travel writers.

EXERCISE 3: A TRAVELLER'S IMPRESSIONS OF CAPRI

- 1 Explain the meaning of the following words as they are used in the extract: catacombs, meandered, propelled, precipice, sliver.
- 2 In what ways do the words 'wandered' and 'meandered' help you to visualise the nature of the path the writer is following?
- 3 Using a dictionary, check the meaning of the word 'fabulous' and then explain why you think the writer uses this word to describe the scenery around him.
- 4 How does the description of the viewing platform as 'a little patio in the sky' help you to share the writer's experience of the view?
- 5 What effect does the writer intend to achieve by placing the word 'what?' within dashes in line 24?
- 6 Note down all the different scents and smells that the writer refers to in the extract and explain how these descriptions help to convey his experience.
- 7 Explain how the writer's choice of language contributes to the atmosphere, and themes and topics of the text, and their overall impact on the reader.

HINT

Writers will use a range of literary devices (**similes**, **metaphors**, **onomatopoeia**, etc.) to create an atmospheric description. When considering the effectiveness of a passage of descriptive writing it is important to consider as fully as you can how the use of these devices helps to reinforce the atmosphere the writer has created – simply identifying and listing to the different figures of speech is not enough.

EXTENSION

Work in a group of four. Your teacher will provide each of you with Writing template 1.1. Each member of the group re-reads one of the extracts, using the questions on the writing template to take short notes. Then discuss and compare the similarities and differences between the extracts.

HINT

Always start by planning your writing. You can use a mind map to help you. Write a draft, then revise and improve your draft. Finally, write the piece out neatly. Word processing your work can help to streamline the revision process. Remember to use the most appropriate approach to planning your writing in order to generate, organise and shape your ideas.

Writing

Describing a place

When writing a text, it's always important to remember who you are writing for. If it's not always obvious who your audience will be, try to imagine who the ideal reader would be and what they might expect.

If you are writing about a specific place, your reader is unlikely to know the particular qualities of the place that you are describing in the same way that you do, so it is important to provide some factual details, such as where it is, so that the readers can orientate themselves. However, be careful not to spend too much time on the factual details as this will produce a piece of informative writing, rather than a descriptive passage.

What words will best capture the atmosphere?

Writers choose their vocabulary carefully to convey atmosphere, both visually and sensually. Often writers have a specific image or feeling in their mind that they are trying to capture – it could be real or imaginary, but drawing on senses is a useful way of translating this to the reader: what can the character smell, touch, feel, hear or taste?

Carefully chosen metaphors and similes are one way of doing this. Tired and worn-out comparisons, such as 'as green as grass' or 'brave as a lion' don't always provide a unique insight. Original similes and metaphors that are within the experience of the reader can capture the essence of a place or a time and involve the reader within the atmosphere. Thoughtfully chosen verbs, adverbs and onomatopoeic words are an effective way of conveying precisely what a writer wants to express.

To be as precise and descriptive as possible, writers must choose not only their vocabulary very carefully, but also the types of sentences and organisation of the text. When describing a peaceful and dreamy atmosphere, lengthy sentences can help to create this. On the other hand, the vitality and energy of a busy street scene is better conveyed through shorter, sharper sentences to mirror the staccato nature of city sounds and the many people hurrying in and out of buildings.

Another clever way of building tension is to insert clues or hints; for example, hearing footsteps or seeing shadows flicker means danger could be drawing near.



Activity

Write your own description of a place you know well. Try to bring its atmosphere alive for your audience by using a range of language to describe the sights, sounds and smells of the place.

Remember the following key features: precisely chosen vocabulary, original similes, metaphors and other figures of speech, and a range of sentence structures (simple, compound, complex and compound-complex) all contribute to creating a description of the atmosphere of a place.

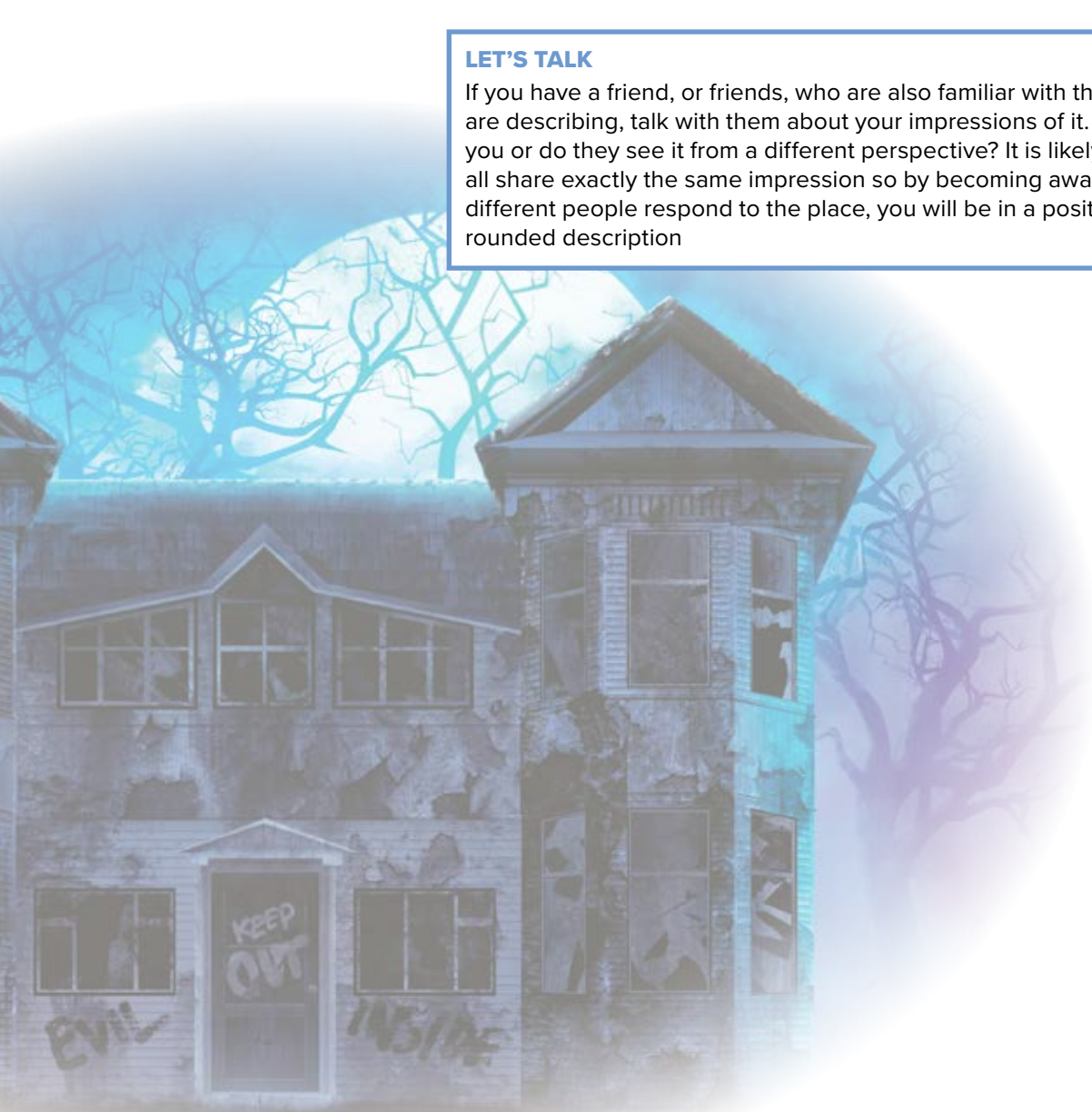
When you have finished, check your spellings in a dictionary and check that you have used punctuation accurately.

HINT

It is important that you choose to write about somewhere with which you are familiar – you need to concentrate on choosing the best words to recreate the place in the minds of your readers so you don't want to waste time trying to make up a fictional place!

LET'S TALK

If you have a friend, or friends, who are also familiar with the place that you are describing, talk with them about your impressions of it. Do they agree with you or do they see it from a different perspective? It is likely that you won't all share exactly the same impression so by becoming aware of the ways different people respond to the place, you will be in a position to write a more rounded description



HINT

You may find that you will need to employ a certain amount of persuasive tactics in your description to help your classmates understand your viewpoint. Can you appeal to their senses?

Speaking and listening

Atmosphere is a way for writers to pull in readers, engage them in their purpose and create an emotional response or reaction. Now you have had a go at building atmosphere in your own writing, see if you can do it in your speaking!

Activity

Think of a place that you like to go to when you feel the need to be alone – it could be a quiet spot in the countryside, an old building or simply a room in your house/apartment or a part of your school. Give a talk about the place to your class, concentrating on creating its special atmosphere which makes it so attractive to you.

Key skills: Confusing similar words

English is a flexible language, which enables writers to express a wide range of thoughts and feelings. However, it is difficult to find a precise set of rules on how to use the English language correctly! Unfortunately, lots of areas of the English language cause confusion so it's good to know some tips on how to avoid them.

Many writers of English blur the meaning of what they want to say by confusing words that either sound similar or have a similar, but not exactly equivalent meaning. Here are some of these words:

- avoid/prevent
- stay/live
- bring/take
- uninterested/disinterested
- bored/boring
- there/their/they're
- your/you're
- horde/hoard
- principal/principle
- affect/effect.

Activity

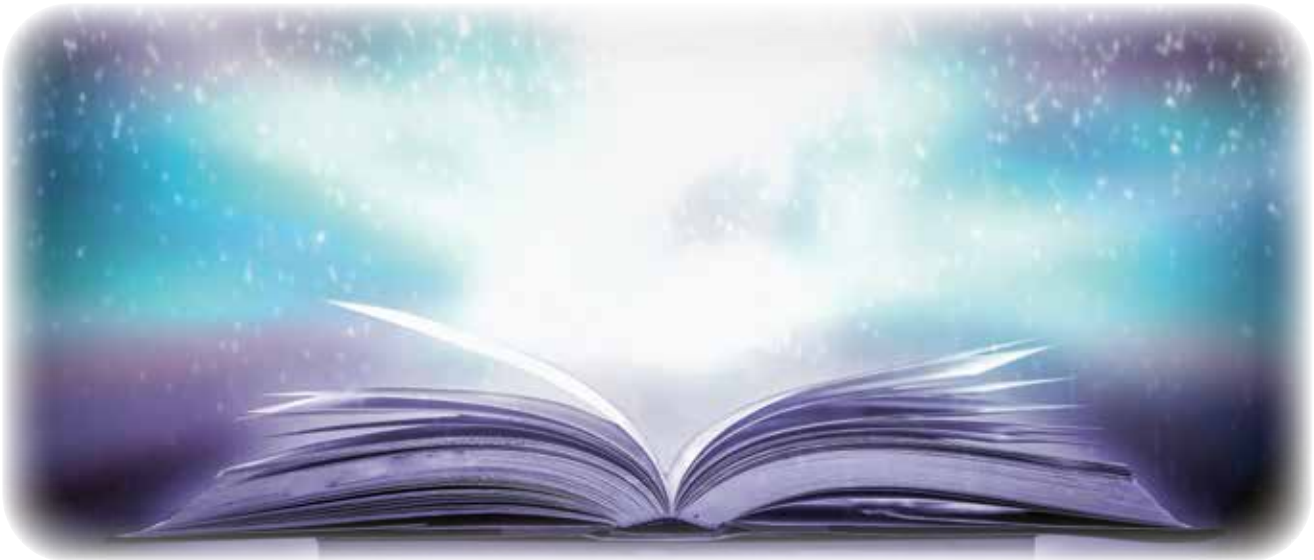
Write sentences containing each of the words listed above to make their meaning clear. Remember: if you are in doubt about their meanings, check them in a dictionary before writing your sentences.

Reviewing

Reflect on the texts you've read

Talk about the texts you engaged with in this chapter.

- Which did you like?
- Which didn't you like?
- Which appealed to your senses? How?
- What techniques did the authors or poets use to create atmosphere in their writing?
- What stories, novels or poems have you read that are similar to these?



Ideas for further reading

If you want to read similar stories, here are some suggestions:

- *Notes from a Small Island* by Bill Bryson
- *The Time Machine* by H G Wells
- *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins.
- *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel

Reflect on your learning in this chapter

Just as writers build tension throughout their texts, think of the strategies you have learned in this chapter to build yourself into a better reader – and a better writer!

Make a list of things that you still need to master – or concepts with which you need more practice. Compile a plan for tackling these. Discuss your lists and ideas with your classmates and your teacher.

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