



Proficient | Exemplar Essay

The Tell-Tale Heart

There Was Something About Him...



Plot and Ideas

The storyline establishes an engaging perspective (nosy old woman neighbor) and is built on an exposition that supports the establishment of the plot (“It’s a good thing too or we’d all be murdered in our beds”). Purposeful description builds toward a logical climax and effective resolution (“That nice young John was in handcuffs of all things”).



Development and Elaboration

The narrative establishes and maintains a clear setting (“So when the man started living at my other neighbor’s house, I made sure to watch”). The narrator’s thoughts are revealed to develop important aspects of the character (“I’m the nosy one” and “I sure am interested in people”). Meaningful description from the narrator reveals how and why she becomes important to the story (“I may be old but I’m no fool. I called the police”).



Organization and Sequencing

The narrative utilizes a clear sequence of events to establish a beginning, middle, and end. Pacing supports the development of the story. The narrative uses effective transitions to signal shifts in time (“But maybe I should start at the beginning, hmmm?” and “But I don’t want to get away from the real story”). The resolution offers closure to and reflects on the course of events (“I just knew there was something about him”).



Language and Style

The narrative uses descriptive words to clearly develop the narrator’s character (“but who am I to judge”). Writing is interesting and builds the voice of the narrator (“It’s nice when people have manners. People don’t anymore, you know”). The point of view is well-established and consistently maintained. The narrative uses language throughout to suggest a suspenseful tone (“Maybe something interesting would come of it”).



Using Exemplars in Your Lessons

Exemplar essays are tools to take abstract descriptions and make them more concrete for students. One way to use them is to print the clean copies of the essays and allow students to use the rubric to make notes or even find examples of important elements of an essay - thesis statements, introductions, evidence, conclusions, transitions, etc. Teachers can also use exemplars to illustrate what each score point within a trait ‘looks like’ in an authentic student essay. For additional ideas, please see “25 Ways to Use Exemplar Essays” by visiting the Curriculum Resources page in Help.

The Tell-Tale Heart



There Was Something About Him...

It all happened on one cold night. I'd been keeping an eye on the house next door. All the neighbors say I'm the nosy one, but they'll be grateful when I keep them safe. Sure, I spend a lot of time looking out the window, but you know what I always say, you can't be too careful. Some say nosy, but I say I am interested in people. It's a good thing too or we'd all be murdered in our beds. Anyway, as it turns out, I was right to keep watching next door. But maybe I should start at the beginning, hmmm?

I know my neighborhood. I know when the mail truck comes by and I know when groceries are delivered and when the kids finally visit their parents in the house to my left. So when the man started living at my other neighbor's house, I made sure to watch. Maybe something interesting would come of it. It didn't seem likely but he was a new face so it gave me something different to do. I sure am interested in people.

There really wasn't anything different about this fellow from anyone else who came in to take care of the old man. He was maybe a little too old to be doing this kind of work because most people who look after us old people are usually young and starting out, but who am I to judge. He was of medium height and average appearance and seemed nice enough. He always waved when he saw me in the garden or at the window. It seemed a little pushy to me, but it's not like I'm judging anyone. Sometimes he even said hello Mrs. P-- --. It's nice when people have manners. People don't anymore, you know. Still, there was just something about him. I promised myself I'd watch him.

But I don't want to get away from the real story. It was a cold night. I'd passed the day in my garden and speaking to all the people who walked by. That was the last

time I talked to the old man's caretaker. We talked about the weather and I asked after the old man. John Collins, for that was his name, spoke willingly enough about how the old man seemed to be getting worse. It made me sad because he was always a nice man who always had time to speak to an old woman. He might have been handsome as a young man if not for that eye of his. It always kind of creeped me out. Anyway, I was worn out from my work in the garden so I decided to go to bed early.

I don't know if it was my arthritis or the cold or the wind, but I was awake to hear this horrible scream at around midnight. Then, nothing. It was completely silent again. I may be old but I'm no fool. I called the police. I spoke to Mildred--she's such a nice lady and we talk all the time--and she promised me that she would send someone out to investigate immediately. I sat in the chair by the window and watched until two policeman arrived. It seemed to me that they were there a long time.

Finally, around dawn, I saw them come out. That nice young John was in handcuffs of all things. I just knew there was something about him ...