Concrete Detail and Commentary  
[Row B]

# **Concrete Detail**

Concrete detail in a novel includes specific descriptions, actions, words from the text.   
In a play, much of the concrete detail comes in stage directions.   
The details are fact, not opinion. Everyone looking at them will see the same thing:

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| *In a novel, for instance:* |  |
| *Examples from a novel:* |
| What a narrator says things are like: | *The wind from the lake brings a sweetish smell to the shore.* |
| What a narrator says happens: | *The airplane ride exhilarated him, encouraged illusion…* |
| What a narrator says characters do: | *Suddenly she lifted her head and made a sound like a hoot owl.* |
| What a narrator says characters say: | *“Keep your eyes open,” Freddie went on.* |
| What a narrator says characters think: | *He had come to believe… that he was impregnable.* |

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| *In a play, for instance:* |  |
| *Examples from a play (Italics are stage directions; Roman type is dialogue.)* |
| What the text says things are like: | *All is calm and peaceful.* |
| What happens: | *Immediately a storm comes up.* |
| What a character does: | *Aunt Ester is smoking a pipe.* |
| What a character says: | *Solly:* Here, put this piece of chain in your pocket. |
| What a narrator says characters think: | *He has arrived at the City of Bones. He is awed by its beauty.* |

# **Commentary**

Commentary is reaction, response, opinion, comment, observation, interpretation.   
Different readers will see the same concrete detail but may differ in their interpretation of it.   
Countless questions can help with forming an interpretation; here are some to start with:

Does the detail:

* suggest something?
* echo anything from earlier in the work?
* foreshadow something coming later?
* contrast with another detail?
* appear similar to another detail?
* fit into a pattern with other details?
* seem motivated by other details?
* contain its own contradiction or irony?
* come in an unexpected place?
* have unusual or unexpected language?

# Strategies:

### Color Highlighting:

1. On a previous essay: highlight all the concrete detail from the work or passage in one color (blue?).
2. Then highlight all your commentary about that detail in another (yellow?).
3. Now check if you can see if you have close to an average of two pieces of commentary for each detail and if you have them grouped in a way that will help a reader follow your line of reasoning.

### Column Writing:

1. Use a first column for the concrete detail you want to use to support your interpretation.
2. Use a second column for your commentary on that detail. List at least two pieces of commentary for each concrete detail.