

Write Your Life Story

*Examples of Figurative Language that creates Vivid Descriptions of People and Places*

*Terry Northcutt*

## Figurative Language that Creates Vivid Portraits of People

*Russell Baker writes about his mother in his memoir **Growing Up:***

*And so, she was. A formidable woman. Determined to speak her mind, determined to have her way, determined to bend those who opposed her. In that time when I had known her best, my mother **had hurled herself at life** with chin thrust forward, **eyes blazing**, and an **energy that made her seem always on the run.***

*She ran after squawking chickens, an axe in her hand, determined on a beheading that would put dinner in the pot. She ran when she made the beds, ran when she set the table...**Life was combat**, and victory was not to the lazy, the timid, the slugabed, the drugstore cowboy, the libertine, the mushmouth afraid to tell people exactly what was on his mind whether people liked it or not. She ran.*

## **Geoffrey Wolff writes about his father in his memoir, *The Duke of Deception***

*I listen for my father and I hear a stammer. **This was explosive and unashamed, not a choking on words but a spray of words.** His speech was headlong, edgy, breathless: there was neither room in his mouth nor time in the day to contain **what he burned to utter...***

*As he spoke straight at you, so did he look at you. he could stare down anyone, though this was a gift he rarely practiced. **To me, everything about him seemed outsized. Doing a school report on the Easter Islanders I found in an encyclopedia pictures of their huge sculptures, and there he was, massive head and nose, nothing subtle or delicate...**When I was a child I noticed that people were respectful of the cubic feet my father occupied: later I understood that I had confused respect with resentment.*

## **Figurative Language that Creates Vivid Impressions of Places**

### ***Tuck Everlasting*, a novel by Natalie Babbitt**

*On the left stood the first house, a square and solid cottage with **a touch-me-not appearance surrounded by grass cut painfully to the quick and***

**enclosed by a capable iron fence** some four feet high which **clearly said**,  
**“Move on—we don’t want you here.”**

For the wood was full of light, entirely different from the light she was used to. It was **green and amber and alive, quivering** in splotches on the padded ground, fanning into sturdy stripes between the tree trunks. There were little flowers she did not recognize, white and palest blue; and endless tangled vines; and here and there a fallen log, half rotted but soft with patches of **sweet green-velvet moss**.

### *The Liar’s Club, a Memoir by Mary Karr*

**If Daddy’s past was more intricate to me than my own present, Mother’s was a blank as the West Texas desert she came from.** She was born into the Dust Bowl, a vast flat landscape **peppered** with windmills and occasional cotton ranches. Instead of a kitty for a pet, she had a horny toad. She didn’t see rain fall, she said, for the first decade of her life. **The sky stayed rock-white and far away.**

About all she later found to worship in Leechfield was the thunderstorms, which were frequent and heavy. The whole town **sat** at a semitropical latitude

just **spitting distance** from the Gulf. It sat in a swamp, three feet below sea level at its highest point, and was **crawled through** by two rivers.

In the fields of gator grass, you could see the ghostly outline of **oil rigs bucking in slow motion**. They always **reminded me of rodeo riders or of some huge servant creatures rising up and bowing down to nothing in particular**. In the distance, giant towers rose from each refinery, with flames that turned every night's sky an odd, acid-green color. The first time I saw a glow-in-the-dark rosary, it reminded me of those five-story torches that circled the town at night. Then there were the white oil-storage tanks, miles of them, **like the abandoned eggs of some terrible prehistoric insect**.

### **Hillbilly Elegy a Memoir by J. D. Vance**

**The surrounding mountains were paradise** to a child, and I spent much of my time terrorizing the Appalachian fauna: No turtle, snake, frog, fish, or squirrel was safe. I'd run around with my cousins, unaware of the ever-present poverty or Mamaw Blanton's deteriorating health.

## *Using Figurative Language in Your Themes and Stories*

***Compare people you know to different types of fabric, different types of weather events, different types of cars, or different types of characters in movies.***

She was as prickly as wool on a hot summer day.

***Compare a place you lived or visited to music, to the different kinds of temperaments or personalities of people, or to the typical behaviors of people at different ages and stages of life.***

*When I was eight, we moved to the country where each season the birds and insects performed a different medley. Spring brought the silvery bells of the spring peepers, the duck-like cackling of the wood frog, the trill of the toad and, of course, the mating calls of the birds; late summer brought the crescendo and decrescendo of the buzzing and chattering insects; autumn the honking of the geese and the chirping of crickets; and winter, stillness and silence interrupted only by the occasional caw caw of the crow.*