Consider Jules Feiffer's cartoon about the old man (or is he a Senior Citizen?). What is his complaint? Would he have Orwell's sympathy?

In Zimbabwe (Rhodesia), use of the word "native" is considered by the black people to be profoundly offensive; in the United States, some "Indians" now prefer to be called "Native Americans." Look up "native" and discuss the ambiguities of its use.

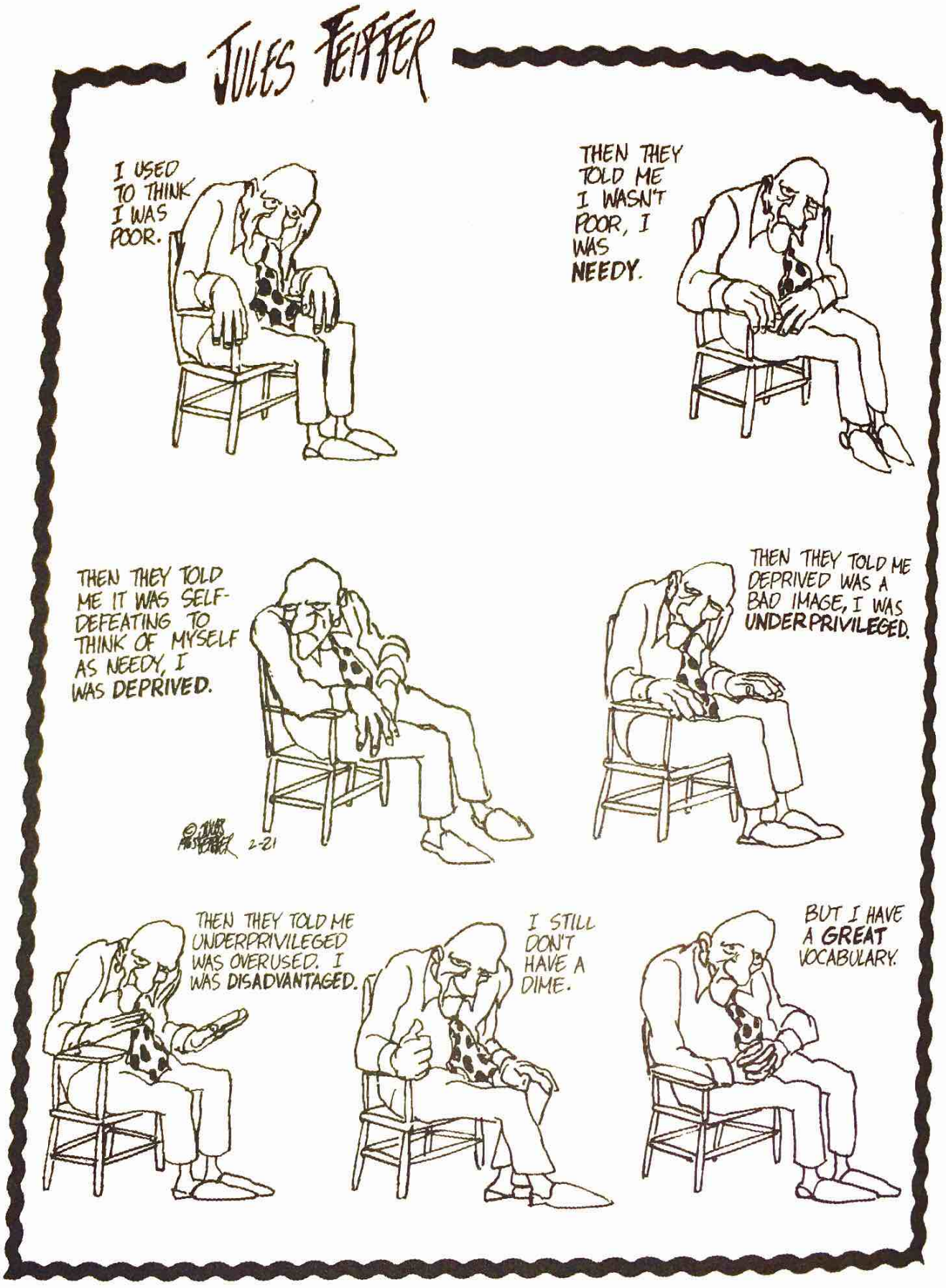
Read the following passage by the young German writer Peter Handke. Consider his analysis of the class-name "poverty" and then do the same sort of analysis, choosing two words that refer to to the same situation or event but that name different concepts, e.g., *barber/hair stylist; invasion/cross-border operation; juvenile delinquent/young hood.* Explain how these words are used and by whom.

> The word "poverty" was a fine, somehow noble word. It evoked an image out of old schoolbooks: poor but clean. Cleanliness made the poor socially acceptable. Social progress meant teaching people to be clean; once the indigent had been cleaned up, "poverty" became a title of honor. Even in the eyes of the poor, the squalor of destitution applied only to the filthy riffraff of foreign countries.
>
> "The tenant's visiting card is his windowpane." And so the have-nots obediently bought soap with the money provided for that purpose by the progressive authorities. As paupers, they had shocked the official mind with repulsive, but for that reason palpable, images; now, as a reclaimed and cleansed "poorer class," their life became so unimaginably abstract that they could be forgotten. Squalid misery can be described in concrete terms; poverty can only be intimated in symbols.
>
> Peter Handke, *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams*

Details, Examples, Facts, Images

In naming the classes that emerge as you form concepts, you choose one word rather than another—*swamp* rather than

JULES FEIFFER



Jules Feiffer, © 1965.

wetlands—and thus express your opinion of the facts. In the same way, the kinds of examples you choose, the number of details you develop, will also help to determine what you want to get across. Composition requires a careful balancing of generalization and particularization. Too many particular examples without generalization will result in obscurity: nobody will be sure of what you are talking about. On the other hand, too many generalizations without examples of what you mean will make it difficult for your readers or your audience to understand the implications of or "to relate to" your view of the subject.

Suppose that you describe in very careful, highly particularized detail one teacher or supervisor you have known. You can list details of dress and manner, appearance and behavior; you can set down examples of how this person sees the world and so forth until we have a very clear picture—of one teacher or supervisor. If you wanted to define a typical teacher, even in so limited a context as your school, these details would stand in the way of any generalizing your reader could attempt. To typify—to provide a "profile"—you would have to choose details that would be representative of more than just one teacher's habits and attitudes. Particularization and classification—describing the individual and characterizing the type—are both essential to almost any kind of writing.

That will seem obvious to anyone lucky enough to have avoided two directives that are great favorites with English teachers—almost as sacred as, "What is the author trying to say?" They are the admonitions "Show, don't tell!" and "Don't generalize!" Both are nonsensical. *Showing*—and there is no more problematic term in the language *—is a way of *telling*. What is generally meant by "Show, don't tell" is something like this: "Don't go on and on writing statements that are all conceptual; don't depend on dictionary definitions; show your reader the examples from which you have generalized." But "Show, don't tell" does not make any of that clear and indeed is sometimes meant to warn students away from concepts altogether. "Don't generalize" is equally absurd, since if you don't generalize, you will have to be contented with pointing. If you couldn't generalize, you couldn't think, since generalizing is

* Richards lists the main meanings as follows: "to look at (obsolete); to put in view, to let be seen; to make see, to point out; to be, or give, signs of; to prove, or make certain by argument. . . ." See *How to Read a Page* (Boston: Beacon, 1959), pp. 139–141 for his analysis of this word whose "trickiness derives from our own lack of competence and candor in certain situations."

necessary to the forming of concepts. The point is that you have to learn how to generalize critically, with an understanding of the role of supporting detail and the need for a balance of classification and exemplification. Hidden in these misleading directives—"Show, don't tell" and "Don't generalize"—is the notion that since concepts aren't "real" (they don't take up space, they can't be measured), they should be avoided by everyone except philosophers and critics, who are unaccountably attracted to them. Collecting examples without generalizing carefully to show what it is they exemplify characterizes the writing of students who have been taught that the "life" of writing is in the detail. But, of course, detail is meaningless unless it is a "telling" detail—and you can't tell without having something to tell.

In composing, you have to decide continually how much detail you need in order to explain your argument, what kind of examples can best support your argument or what kind of particular detail can tell your story. As you get more and more general, you give up the freedom to dwell on the particulars; the more your conceptual terms can gather, the less precisely they will characterize any one instance. Conversely, the more you concentrate on what's "in front of you," the less able you will be to make those particular "particulars" representative. When you're close to certain experiences, it's hard to believe that anyone else has ever been through anything quite like it; if you're not involved in certain experiences, no matter how "dramatic" they can seem commonplace.

✎ Describe an automobile accident from the following points of view (the same accident):

- Victim or someone at fault
- Relative of victim or someone allegedly at fault
- Traffic policeman
- Newspaper reporter
- Statistician for insurance company

The way you compose is up to you, but the context of situation should guide you in deciding whether to "talk it out" or to "write it up," and thus to choose the kind of detail you need.

✎ Compose the specifications for a "Wanted" flyer of yourself, the kind that the FBI posts in federal buildings.

In short stories especially, the balance of particularization and generalization is important because there is no space to develop individual character through many incidents, as there would be in a novel. Description, in the "classical" short story, gives you a particular individual who is a type, a person who is not only himself/herself but representative of a kind of person. In the following descriptions, see if you can give a name to the type represented by the character. Then write your own description of an individual person who could also represent the type. You can present the character in a certain setting, as in the first two selections, or you can have the character speak for herself (himself), as in the third selection.

Little Chandler's thoughts ever since lunch-time had been of his meeting with Gallaher, of Gallaher's invitation and of the great city of London where Gallaher lived. He was called Little Chandler because, though he was but slightly under the average stature, he gave the idea of being a little man. His hands were white and small, his frame was fragile, his voice was quiet and his manners were refined. He took the greatest care of his fair silken hair and moustache and used perfume discreetly on his handkerchief. The half-moons of his nails were perfect and when he smiled you caught a glimpse of a row of childish white teeth.

James Joyce, "A Little Cloud"

While they were in the lake, for the dip or five-o'clock swimming period in the afternoon, he stood against a tree with his arms folded, jacked up one-legged, sitting on his heel, as absolutely tolerant as an old fellow waiting for the store to open, being held up by the wall. Waiting for the girls to get out, he gazed upon some undisturbed part of the water. He despised their predicaments, most of all their not being able to swim. Sometimes he would take aim and from his right cheek shoot an imaginary gun at something far out, where they never were. Then he resumed his pose. He had been roped into this by his mother.

Eudora Welty, "Moon Lake"

You would certainly be glad to meet me. I was the lady who appreciated youth. Yes, all that happy time, I was not like some. It did not go by me like a flitting dream. Tuesdays and

> Wednesdays was as gay as Saturday nights. Have I suffered since? No sir, we've had as good times as this country gives: cars, renting in Jersey summers, TV the minute it first came out, everything grand for the kitchen. I have no complaints worth troubling the manager about. Still, it is like a long hopeless homesickness my missing those young days. To me, they're like my own place that I have gone away from forever, and I have lived all the time since among great pleasures but in a foreign town. Well, O.K. Farewell, certain years.
>
> Grace Paley, "Distance"

In many different kinds of writing—not just police reports—the purpose is to establish that a state of affairs is thus and so, to show that such and such is the case. This kind of writing requires "on the spot" investigation, interviewing, various sorts of measurement such as polls and statistical studies; in short, it involves "getting the facts." But as you know, if you've ever tried to report on controversial issues, "getting the facts" may be impossible and even if you manage to establish what the facts of the case are, you still have to interpret them.

At the heart of any controversial issue there is the question of what the facts "really" are. People on opposing sides of the abortion issue, for instance, will never agree about what the facts are, much less about how they are to be interpreted. The doctor who defines viability on the basis of one set of facts will judge a fetus differently—he may even call it a "baby"—from another who proceeds from different facts. The person who speaks of a "baby" has judged the facts one way or has selected one set of facts, disregarding another; the person who speaks of "the products of conception" has made a different judgment by leaving out of account certain facts or by proceeding from different assumptions about their significance. Getting the facts of the matter or of the case is not a skill like learning to use a linoleum cutter, because a fact is not a thing. Writers, like doctors, lawyers, housewives, and detectives, have to know how to "handle" the facts, but that doesn't mean that facts are thing-y: "handling the facts" is a way of describing the process of seeing relationships, making sense of experience and interpreting how the world goes.

The word "fact" is not hard to define, but it is difficult to explain what you mean by it when you use it. If you declare that a fact is "something known to be true," you land right away in

a philosophical swamp, since the meanings of *known, to be,* and *true* are all problematic: *knowledge, being,* and *truth* are all concepts, and they can't be explained with dictionary definitions. The history of ideas concerns changes in such concepts, including the concept of *fact* itself. What one era takes as fact is likely to be what the next sees as highly questionable. Here is the art historian Kenneth Clark commenting on this subject:

> Pilgrimages were undertaken in hope of heavenly rewards: in fact they were often used by the Church as a penitence or a spiritualized form of extradition. The point of a pilgrimage was to look at relics. Here again we like to rationalize in modern terms and compare the pilgrim looking at a large fragment of the True Cross in Constantinople with the tourist cricking his neck in the Sistine Chapel. But this is quite unhistorical. The medieval pilgrim really believed that by contemplating a reliquary containing the head or even the fingers of a saint he would persuade that particular saint to intercede on his behalf with God. How can one hope to share this belief which played so great a part in medieval civilization? Perhaps by visiting a famous place of pilgrimage—the little town of Conques, dedicated to the cult of St. Foy. She was a little girl who in late Roman times refused to worship idols. She was obstinate in the face of reasonable persuasion—a Christian Antigone; and so she was martyred. Her relics began to work miracles, and in the eleventh century one of them was so famous that it aroused much jealousy and Bernard of Angers was sent to investigate it and report to the Bishop of Chartres. It seemed that a man had had his eyes put out by a jealous priest. He had become a *jongleur,* a blind acrobat. After a year he went to the shrine of St. Foy and his eyes were restored. The man was still alive. He said at first he suffered terrible headaches, but now they had passed and he could see perfectly. There *was* a difficulty: witnesses said that after his eyes had been put out they had been taken up to heaven, some said by a dove, others by a magpie. That was the only point of doubt. However, the report was favorable, a fine Romanesque church was built at Conques, and in it was placed a strange eastern-looking figure to contain the relics of St. Foy. A golden idol! The face is perhaps the golden mask of some late Roman emperor. How ironical that this little girl, who was put to death for refusing to worship idols, should have

> been turned into one herself. Well, that's the medieval mind. They cared passionately about the truth, but their sense of evidence differed from ours. From our point of view nearly all the relics in the world depend on unhistorical assertions; and yet they, as much as any factor, led to that movement and diffusion of ideas from which western civilization derives part of its momentum.
>
> Kenneth Clark, *Civilisation*

Sorting out questions of fact from concepts can be difficult because the principles by which the facts of a case are defined and recognized are themselves conceptual. What you take as a fact will depend on your experience, your memory, your own power of reason—the capacity to figure out relationships—as well as on your willingness to accept the judgment of others. If we never accepted the authority of tradition or science or witnesses or the community whose principles we affirm as our own, if we never took anyone else's word for anything, we would spend our days formulating and verifying such facts as that fire burns, that the last bus does indeed leave at 9:03, and that it is unlawful to spit in the subway. On the other hand, uncritical acceptance of authority can lead to an abdication of personal responsibility, which is dangerous psychologically and politically.

All of us, especially bureaucrats, take advantage of uncritical attitudes about what is fact and what is a matter for conjecture. One of the chief things we do with language is to lie—to try to convert factual matters to conceptual problems and to make concepts and problematic terms seem matters of fact. Here are examples of each tactic.

> Making facts seem a matter of conjecture:
> *Reporter:* Are we bombing Hanoi?
> *Pentagon spokesman:* No. Well—what do you mean "Hanoi"?

> Making concepts seem matters of fact:
> *Interviewer:* But how could you be sure that Bosch's supporters were Communists?
> *American diplomat:* Well, if they *look* like Communists, and they *act* like Communists, and they *smell* like Communists, then they must *be* Communists.

Trying to isolate matters of fact from concepts is a good way to discover the concepts themselves. Concepts aren't objects; they are ideas that you bring into being by naming. You can

ask, "What concept would this fact support?" or you can ask, "What are some facts that could fill out this concept?" Try it.

Concerning each of the following concepts, write out a statement of fact. As a working definition of fact, you can think of an aspect of a state of affairs or of a situation that you could point to, measure, or name, without being readily disputed.

- national security
- the right to life
- women's liberation
- mass transportation
- rehabilitation

For each of the following statements of fact, name two concepts towards a definition of which they might be relevant. In other words, for which concepts could these statements be "for instances"?

- Twenty dogs and cats per week were treated at the Spay and Neuter Clinic in Boston in 1975.
- The membership of the Glassworkers Union as of July 1976 was 35,000.
- The composition of the five-cent coin continues to be 75% copper, 25% nickel, while the one-cent coins are 95% copper and 5% zinc.
- Mean annual snowfall for Boston, Massachusetts, based on records through 1972, is 42.8 inches.
- Retired and disabled workers and their families and survivors of deceased workers received 70.8 billion dollars in social security cash benefits in the 12 months ending June 1976.
- Surveys have determined that nonpoint sources (runoff from farm chemicals, mines, urban areas) account for 50% of water pollution.
- The Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, 1,137 miles long, extends from Apalachee Bay, Florida, to the Mexican border.

The terms *subjective* and *objective* should be avoided in discussing the roles of facts in composition, since depending on them encourages us in the notion that facts are "out there" where "it" is happening and that concepts are all "relative,"

merely personal, merely verbal. Insofar as they are formulated, talked about, named, written about, facts too are "verbal." We live in a world built by language; there is no "reality" that can be known or conceived without the mediation of our senses and the forms of thought and feeling the human mind provides. To be "meaningful"—bearers of meaning—facts must be seen in context, related to other facts, seen as being in support of one concept or another. We build up such relationships by means of language, which is not a veil between us and some ultimate reality but our chief means of making meaning and thereby conceiving reality.

A detail or a fact or an example can be brought to life if it is given a form that we can *imagine,* bring to the mind's eye. Such a form is called an *image* and though it generally is visual —a form that could be seen—an image can also be auditory or kinetic, a form that brings to mind something heard or perceived as being in motion. Some kinds of poetry depend on imagery for their very being, though other kinds may have little or none. A poetic image pictures not just a particular thing; it also *re*-presents a conception of that thing and the poet's feelings about it. But using imagery is not limited to poets; you can learn to realize a concept—to make it real—by giving it a shape. We say that an image *embodies* a concept; that's an image of an image. You can't visualize freedom, but you can imagine something that can represent it.

An image must have a context in order to be meaningful, just as a word or an object or anything else we respond to must have a setting, and the meaning changes or shifts as the context changes. An Afro-American storyteller who calls himself Brother Blue accompanies his songs and tales with the clinking and clanging of a chain meant to symbolize the continuing struggle of his people for liberation. A chain in the dark corner of a garage shelf is just a chain; a tire chain shaken with a certain intent, which can be interpreted by an audience, becomes an image. A tiny Chinese shoe that now belongs to me means one thing if I consider it in the context of my childhood: a souvenir brought back by a missionary who had been sent out to convert the heathen; a rather pretty little thing, like a baby's slipper, with a quilted sole and green and pink uppers trimmed with black tape; its place on the parlor table, next to the brass bell from India. But if I look at the little shoe in the context of accounts of the Chinese revolution, it has quite a different meaning; if I see it not as a colorful trinket but as a real shoe for an

actual foot, the feeling I have is of disgust or even horror, since this shoe could not possibly fit on a normal foot. (In prerevolutionary China, the feet of young girls were, in some cases, turned backwards, toes towards heel, and bound day and night to prevent normal growth. The resultant malformation necessitated a kind of walk that was thought beautiful and womanly.) Seen in the context of the custom of footbinding, the decorative shoe becomes an image of the oppression of women. Having read that the slogans of the Red Army in organizing the peasants throughout the 1930s and 1940s were "Land to the tiller!" and "Free the feet!", I came to see the shoe as an image of the oppression of a whole people enslaved by traditions that, in turn, helped maintain a certain social and economic order.

Visualizing images that can represent concepts is a skill of fundamental importance to anyone who has to explain, argue, persuade—all of us. Even scientists, some would claim, are dependent on imagery, once they forsake mathematical formulations. For any writer, exploring the relationships between images and concepts can be useful in getting the dialectic started and in forming a concept. The relationship of an *image* to what it represents or expresses is as complex as the relationship of a name and an idea, a word and a thing. (The word *image* has collected as many meanings as the word *form*. It derives from the Latin *imago*, which means *conception, thought, idea,* as well as *likeness*. *Image* is cognate with *imitation*.) You can think of an image as a visual name: it can help you "shape" your ideas by thinking of them as things that take up space. The most common error in thinking comes from confusing the image with what it represents, but that error is not avoided by staying away from imagery.

Like all other forms, an image is a way of seeing relationships. *Imagine* a person, a place, a landscape, an animal, or a thing—singly or in combination—that could represent a concept; that *image* will, at the same time, represent an attitude towards the concept. Imagery is part of the adman's repertory ("Come to Marlboro Country!" "Join the Pepsi Generation!"), but, as I have noted, it is also central in many kinds of poetry. Symbolic gardens, caves, islands, cities, deserts, valleys abound in epic, narrative, and lyric poems and also in some kinds of novels. Here is an account of how a real place became an image for the poet W. B. Yeats. The poem he mentions follows immediately after this passage from *Autobiographies*.

I was in my Galway house during the first months of civil war, the railway bridges blown up and the roads blocked with stones and trees. For the first week there were no newspapers, no reliable news, we did not know who had won nor who had lost, and even after newspapers came one never knew what was happening on the other side of the hill or of the line of trees. Ford cars passed the house from time to time with coffins standing on end between the seats, and sometimes at night we heard an explosion, and once by day saw the smoke made by the burning of a great neighboring house. Men must have lived so through many tumultuous centuries. One felt an overmastering desire not to grow unhappy or embittered, not to lose all sense of the beauty of nature. A stare (our West of Ireland name for a starling) had built in a hole beside my window and I made these verses out of the feeling of the moment—"The Stare's Nest by My Window."

"The Stare's Nest by My Window"

The bees build in the crevices
Of loosening masonry, and there
The mother birds bring grub and flies.
My wall is loosening; honey-bees,
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

We are closed in, and the key is turned
On our uncertainty; somewhere
A man is killed, or a house burned,
Yet no clear fact to be discerned:
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

A barricade of stone or of wood;
Some fourteen days of civil war;
Last night they trundled down the road
That dead young soldier in his blood:
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

We had fed the heart on fantasies,*
The heart's grown brutal from the fare;
More substance in our enmities
Than in our love; O honey-bees,
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

"Meditations in Time of Civil War," *W. B. Yeats*

What characteristics of the honey bee make it an appropriate image by means of which the poet expresses a "sense of the beauty of nature"? What are the images that give substance to the concept of civil war, a time of troubles?

Students, like poets, lawyers, biographers, historians, and popular explainers, can use images to help give form to feelings and ideas. John Wain demonstrates in a passage from his biography of Samuel Johnson how images do that. He has been discussing life in eighteenth century England.

> So on we could go, contrasting and comparing, trying to decide which of the two Englands would be preferable to live in, safe in the knowledge that the issue can never be decided. To me personally, to think of the quality of life in the eighteenth century is inevitably, sooner or later, to think of Josiah Wedgwood's leg. Wedgwood, another Midlander who was to trade and commerce in many ways what Johnson was to literature, was troubled in his younger days by some kind of circulatory complaint in one leg. If he happened to knock it against anything, it swelled up and put him in bed for a few days; and, since he was constantly making journeys up and down England in the course of building up his business, he found the waste of time irritating and had the leg amputated.
>
> Most of us, I fancy, would accept the fate of being a mediocrity in business rather than consent to have a leg amputated without anaesthetic. Wedgwood's decision symbolizes many features of eighteenth-century England—the toughness, the realism, the determination to be up and doing, whatever the price that had to be paid. In a thinly populated country such giant individualities stand out clearly. Wedgwood knew that if he did not succeed in the pottery industry, he could not simply subside into comfortable obscurity as the tenth vice-president in some large faceless corporation, with his name on the door and a carpet on the floor. He had to get out there and do what it was in

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* Yeats here refers to the fact that the Irish uprising against English rule had started with romantic expectations, nourished by dreams of past glory and encouraged by the literary celebration of a Celtic tradition, which included fabulous and heroic exploits. The reality was a bloody defeat.

him to do, or he would be nothing. In such a spirit, also, did Samuel Johnson live his life. . . .

A great photographer, like Cartier-Bresson, creates images which, in capturing "the decisive moment," bespeak more than the actual scene or face they depict. For this reason, a good collection of photographs can provide excellent practice for the student of composition. But even a commonplace photograph can become an image if you bring to it certain questions; you can train yourself to read almost any photograph as an image—and that is precisely what advertisers expect you to do.

If you study the pictures of a public figure chosen by one newspaper with those appearing in another, you can often describe the political viewpoint of either, before reading the editorial pages.

Faye had a paper assigned for a political science course with no helpful constraints: "Write 5,000 words on a modern city." She decided to write on Bogotà because she had a huge and very detailed photograph of the city. She "read" the photograph, translating what she saw into images representing the concepts she'd learned in the course. You can try this with almost any assigned paper.

Here are some assisted invitations to exercise a capacity that is natural, innate, linguistically determined: your capacity to construe and construct images.

Imagine and describe in single sentences the following:
Landscapes to represent each of these: youth, maturity, old age
Persons to represent each of these: faith, hope, charity
Animals to represent each of these: cleverness, courage, timidity
Places to represent each of these: fear, despair, authority
Weather or other natural phenomena to represent each of these: mercy, justice, equality

Develop a context for an object that is valueless in itself but is of great signifi-

cance to you. Or try to explain someone else's peculiar attraction to (for instance) a greasy, torn jacket, even though there are others hanging in the closet. What concept of self is involved?

A Hippie has sewn the American flag to the seat of his pants: how does The Patriot construe this image?

Look up the word *talisman* in a good dictionary. Describe a talismanic ceremony in another time, far away. Or describe an everyday action (toasting a slice of bread) as if it were talismanic.

Design—or give instructions for designing—a poster to advertise several of the following lectures:
"Disarmament or Arms Control?"
"The Air You Breathe"
"Feminist Fiction"
"Celtic Invaders of the Eastern Mediterranean"
"Behavior Modification Techniques in Correctional Institutions"

Do the same for a poster advertising a speaker whose views you oppose. Make the design express your loathing, fear, distrust, contempt, rage—whatever—but without using any verbal statements of your opinion.
Or consider how you would go about expressing disfavor of a person or a group whose activities you were filming for a television report.

Convert one of the following objects to an image representing a concept. Then compose an editorial denouncing the concept so represented, beginning with a description of the object.

- platform shoes
- station wagons
- paperback novels
- saunas
- a clear, fresh river by a deserted factory