Show It. Don't Sing It.

In his notes to page 67 of his *Making Comics*, Scott McCloud explains that "In *The Wizard of Oz* characters literally sing about their desires, but in more naturalistic stories, your characters should show what they want through their actions and rarely, if ever, spell it out like that." After mentioning that in real life, "people are constantly angling for the things they ant without admitting it to others--or even to themselves," McCloud concludes, "Audiences feel smarter and have more fun if they can guess a character's feelings even before the character does." (122-123)

McCloud's primary audience is individuals who are writing comics, but his advice applies to individuals who are writing essays, blogs, or even research papers. Instead of just telling readers what you want them to know, you should allow them to experience it through their five senses: seeing, hearing, tasting, feeling, and smelling. Or, in the words of Anton Chekhov, "Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass."

Too often, beginning writers will produce what I call the technically perfect "C" paper. There are no grammar or spelling errors, but there are also no details that make the essay interesting or which allow the reader to hear the author's voice. It is in the specifics that make good writing.

Imagine if the Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz* simply stated that his life would be much better if he only had a brain and then said no more. A reader might reply, "That's nice" as he or she moves on to a more engaging piece of writing. Instead, he explains that a brain would allow him to "while away the hours, conferring with the flowers," "unravel ever riddle," and so forth. He paints a picture that the reader can see.

I have read many uninteresting arguments both for and against home schooling written by authors who are content to simply state broad generalities while telling their positions. Bobby Bristol's "*Home Schooling*" is not one of them. Bristol uses personal experience to show why he supports home schooling.

“Home Schooling” by Bobby Bristol
http://www.collegehistory.info/manuscripts/bristol-robb.html

Reprinted from Scholarly Voices
http://scholarlyvoices.org/unflattening/mini/show.html
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Photo Credit: Screen Capture from *The Wizard of Oz* (1939).
Writing Exercise: Expanding for Detail

Sometimes, I will ask students to describe their bedroom or some other favorite place. Then, I will highlight a small passage of their descriptive essay—such a "lamp" or "bed" or "poster"— and ask them write 500 words describing what I had highlighted. I do not expect students to write polished prose. My intent is to get them to search for details.

Writing Exercise: Write for 15 Minutes

In "The Secret to Show, Don’t Tell," Joe Bunting asks his readers to spend 15 minutes rewriting the following story.

They went to Los Angeles to see his parents.

Several individuals took Bunting up on his challenge and posted their writing in the comments section of his blog.

There is no need to use Bunting's prompt to benefit from writing for 15 minutes. You can spend 15 minutes rewriting a section of your essay to add specifics.

For Further Reading