



SAMPLE

Descriptive writing

WORK OF ART 1: *Collins St, 5p.m.*,
John Brack, 1955



John Brack

Australian 1920–1999

Collins St, 5p.m. 1955

oil on canvas
114.8 x 162.8 cm

National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne

Purchased, 1956

© National Gallery of Victoria

In this project we are going to use *Collins St, 5p.m.*, by John Brack to learn about and inspire descriptive writing. You will:

- build your vocabulary
- learn how to use synonyms, nouns, adjectives and adverbs
- use imagery in your writing, including alliteration, simile, metaphor and onomatopoeia.

At the end of the project, you'll have the opportunity to apply your new skills to a creative piece, which could be anything from a poem to an interview or article.

1 Introduction to descriptive writing

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this section, you will:

- get an introduction to descriptive writing
- learn to 'read' visual texts
- develop colourful vocabulary for describing things.

Descriptive writing involves painting a picture with words. By paying close attention to detail and describing things, people, places and objects with words that draw upon all five senses, you can create powerful images in the mind of your reader. Literary texts use all kinds of devices to achieve this, which we will learn about in this project. Visual texts also use specific techniques to communicate ideas, and the process of 'reading' images will help you come up with strong descriptive words that you can use in your own writing.

ACTIVITY 1.1 What is descriptive writing?

Consider the following questions to start thinking about descriptive writing. Record your ideas here so that you can refer back to them when you're creating your own writing. Your teacher may ask you to share your responses with the class—write down any ideas that your classmates suggest that you find interesting.

a What are some types of descriptive writing?

b For what purposes do you think writers use descriptive writing?

c What are some features of descriptive writing?

d Where have you found examples of descriptive writing?

e Have you ever written a piece of descriptive writing? If so, what was its purpose?

Looking closely: a focus on visual details

We are usually all so busy and moving so fast that we only get quick glances of the things around us. For example, how much detail do you notice when a bird flies overhead, or when people rush past us on a busy train station platform? Imagine what we would see if we stopped to really look closely. What stories would unfold from the unseen details? Would our views on what we'd seen change?

We are going to look closely at *Collins St, 5p.m.* to unravel the story behind the painting. To help you describe to others what you see, you will need to use some specific parts of speech that writers use in creating descriptions.

Adjectives are words used to describe things. For example, a star could be described as *bright*, *distant* or *sparkly*. Adjectives describe **nouns** (naming words that identify people, places, objects, feelings, groups—you name it!).

Adverbs are used to modify **verbs**. They make verbs more specific—which enables writers to convey descriptions of actions and events in more detail. Remember, verbs are words used to describe actions. You cannot have a sentence without a verb (for example, to walk, to sing, to throw).

ACTIVITY 1.2 Look closely

Study the image of *Collins St, 5p.m.*

- Look at the painting for 30 seconds without writing anything down and then look away. What details can you remember about the image? In the left column of the table below, write a list of nouns and verbs that identify items and actions featured in the image.
- Now look closely at the painting again, this time for five minutes. In the right column, list **adjectives** that describe the nouns and **adverbs** that describe the verbs you listed.

Nouns and verbs	Adjectives and adverbs
<i>faces</i>	<i>serious, glum</i>

Rounding up

Reading a visual text like this painting can help you come up with a more descriptive vocabulary. Developing your skills in looking closely will help you interpret images, inspire ideas and generate colourful words and phrases. Building a record of adjectives and adverbs that you can choose from when you are writing a creative piece will help you make your writing imaginative and more interesting for the reader.

2 Close reading and creative thinking

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this section, you will:

- improve your ability to 'read' visual texts and describe what you see
- consider the historical and social contexts of texts
- think about the techniques the artist uses to communicate ideas.

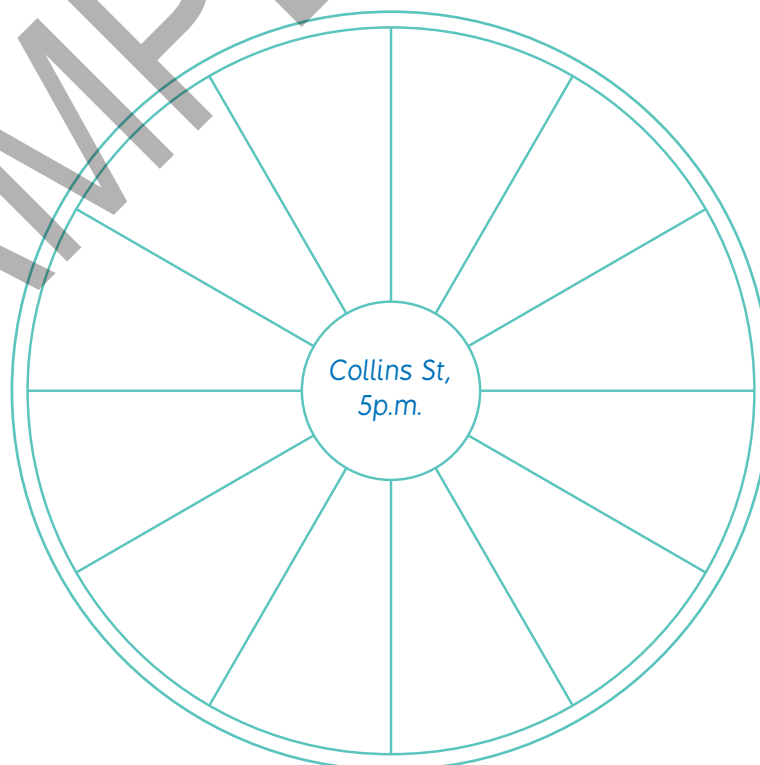
When you view a piece of art, your interpretation of it is influenced by many different things such as your life experiences, your culture and even your personality. It is highly likely that your closest friend will see something different than you see in the painting, and this is one of the great things about art! There is no right or wrong answer when it comes to your reactions, as long as you can support your answer with evidence from the painting. Discussing art with other people will give you different perspectives and insights that you might not have considered.

We are going to look at the impressions that this painting conveys to you, and why the artist may have painted it. Record your thoughts and ideas here, and refer back to them when you come to write a creative piece inspired by *Collins St, 5p.m.*

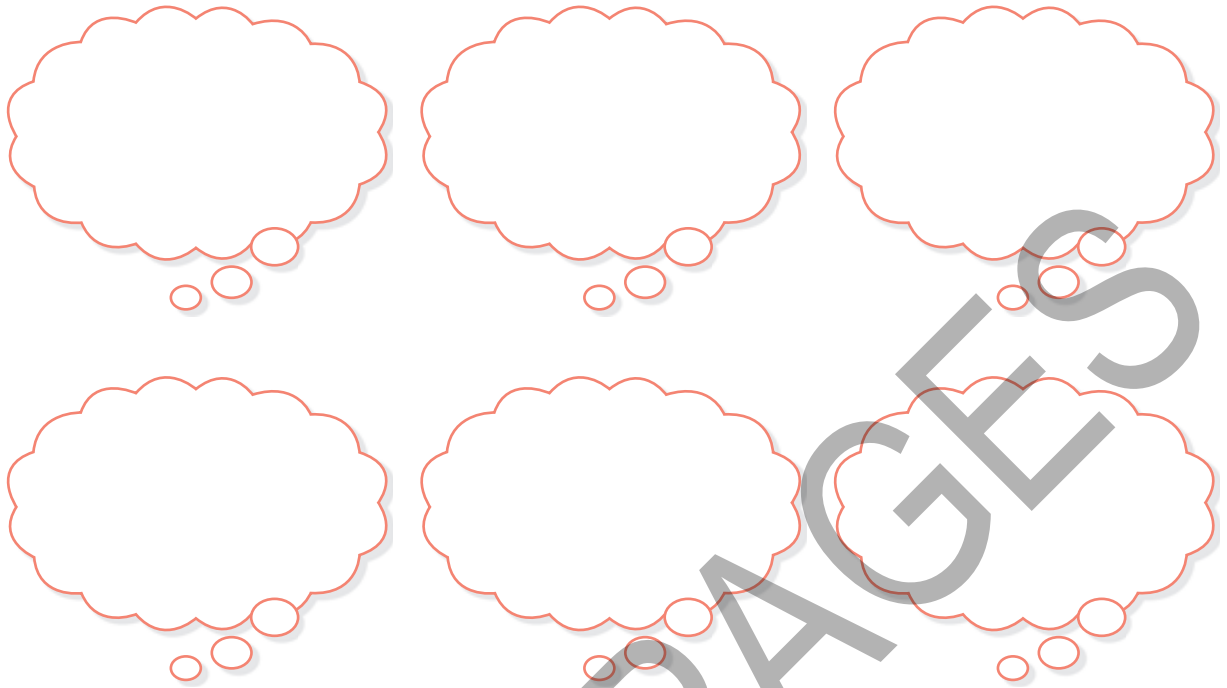
ACTIVITY 2.1 Impressions of *Collins St, 5p.m.*

Consider the following questions and record your thoughts in the graphic organisers below.

- a What are your first impressions of the painting? What thoughts or words come immediately to mind? Be sure to include some adjectives and adverbs.



b What does the painting make you think or wonder about?



c We call the emotional atmosphere of the text 'mood'. What mood or moods are conveyed? What do you see that makes you think this? What emotions do you associate with these moods?

Moods that are conveyed	What do you see that suggests this mood?	What emotions do you associate with the mood?

- d** What clues do you see in the painting that tell you what actions might be happening in the scene?

Clue 1:

Clue 2:

Clue 3:

Clue 4:

Clue 5:

Clue 6:

What might be happening in the painting?

- e** What clues are there that suggest the time of day and season the artist has depicted?

Time of day and season?

Clue

Clue

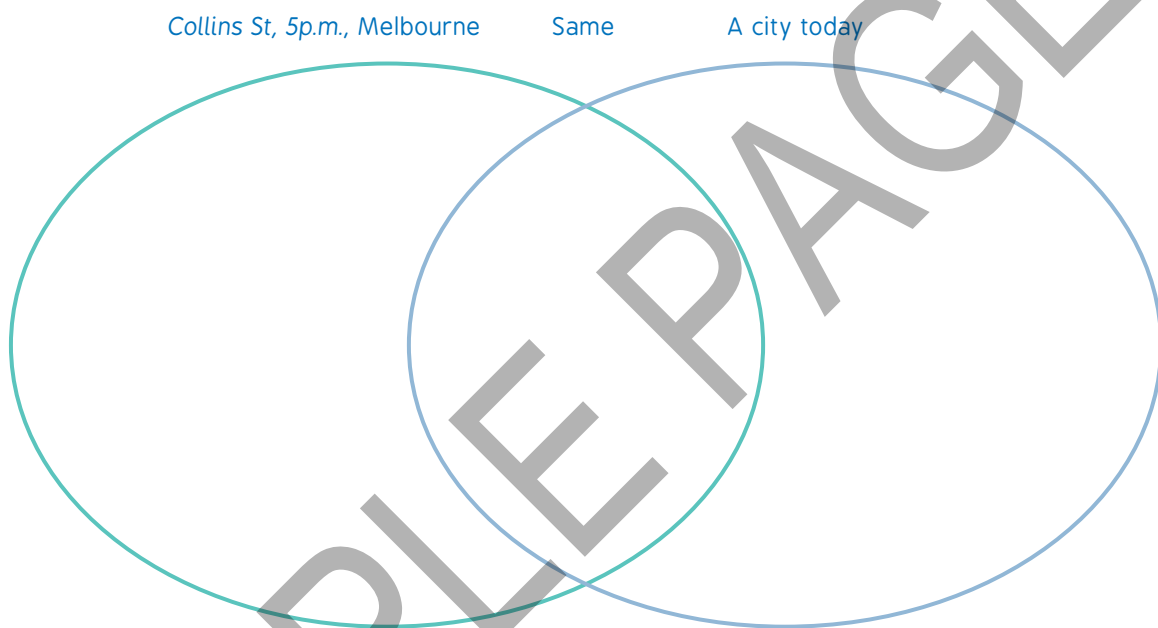
Clue

Then and now

The time and place in which an artist creates their image influences not only how it looks but the messages and ideas it conveys. This is the historical and social context, and it is an important part of interpreting a text. You have probably already noticed that *Collins St, 5p.m.* shows a very different time to the one we live in. Or does it also show similarities to the time we live in?

ACTIVITY 2.2 City life

- a** Find an image of a modern busy city. Compare it with *Collins St, 5p.m.* List all the aspects of city life that are the same today and all the things that are different in the Venn diagram below.



- b** In what ways does the painting remind you of something in your life?

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.....

- c** What aspects of the picture do you find puzzling?

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- d** What questions would you like to ask the artist if he was in the classroom?

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- e** How many aspects of the painting can you find that are ‘unrealistic’, in your opinion?

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Homework task: unrealistic images

Why might the artist John Brack have used exaggeration and 'unrealistic' looking images in his painting? Write a paragraph explaining what you think the artist is trying to communicate about people who lived in Melbourne (or in any busy city) in 1955.

Rounding up

Art is a medium that can communicate historical, social and psychological ideas through a single image. Use your new analytical skills to feel confident in expressing your interpretation, and to appreciate and respect the different opinions other people might have. Our own personal experience influences what we see, and there is no right or wrong answer when it comes to appreciating a work of art.

3 Building vocabulary

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this section, you will:

- work with words that describe feelings and emotions
- explore descriptive devices used in both poetry and art
- continue to develop your descriptive language skills.

We use our five senses of touch, smell, taste, sight and hearing to interpret the world around us. In descriptive writing we can employ these senses to communicate ideas imaginatively, using what we call 'sensory language'. This way we really can paint a picture using words!

Along with nouns, adjectives and verbs, writers use synonyms and adverbs to help them describe a scene. A synonym is a word that means the same as another word. Using synonyms ensures that your writing won't be repetitive—it'll be more interesting! For example, instead of saying 'nice', you could say 'pleasant', 'delightful' or 'agreeable'. An adverb modifies the meaning of a verb to tell us how, when or where something is happening (for example, to sing **loudly**).