



An Adventure at Brownville by Ambrose Bierce

Before reading

- 1 Ask students to name some fiction which they have read and enjoyed. Encourage them to say what they like about it (for example, do they like fiction that is exciting, has a lot of dialogue, has suspense, etc.?). Explain that the text they are going to read is an example of descriptive writing. Read the list of features and ask the students to identify the four features of descriptive writing. Elicit answers.

Answers

- 1, 3, 4, 5
- 2 Read the opening lines of the text to the class and ask them to read the questions. In pairs, students discuss the questions and predict the answers. Encourage them to make brief notes of their answers. Discuss their ideas as a class but don't confirm any of their predictions at this stage.

While reading

- 1 Before students read the text, refer them to the *Vocabulary focus*, which will help them if there are words they don't understand. Read the list of paragraph summaries a-h. You may need to check they understand *defiant* (refusing to do what someone wants you to do). Students read the extract and match each paragraph to the correct summary. They can check answers in pairs before checking as a whole class.

Answers

Paragraph 1 c Paragraph 2 e Paragraph 3 h
Paragraph 4 g Paragraph 5 b Paragraph 6 a
Paragraph 7 f Paragraph 8 d

- 2 Students read the text again and answer the questions. Nominate a different student to give each answer.

Answers

- 1 to improve their health
- 2 because he lives in the boarding house where many of them stay
- 3 through the forest
- 4 a man and woman arguing
- 5 that she has a cultivated voice (speaks clearly and well)
- 3 Students work in pairs and look back at the questions in Before reading, exercise 2. They discuss their predictions, changing their answers if necessary now that they have read the text. Encourage them to find examples in the text to support their answers.

Possible answers

- 1 It's crowded in summer (when many visitors come to stay) but probably quiet in winter (the town is small, there's only one school, there are not many young people).
- 2 The text doesn't give much description of Brownville but says it is small, so there are probably not many buildings. The surrounding area is countryside – the town lies between hills and is near a forest, and it says the air is clean and fresh, which implies there are not many buildings.
- 3 The text doesn't say whether the narrator likes living in Brownville, but he does mention that the hills are beautiful and he likes talking to the visitors. He also mentions that the forest is calm and peaceful. This implies that he likes the quietness of Brownville.
- 4 Remind the students of the features of descriptive writing from Before reading, exercise 1. Students read the text again and make notes of how the writer describes Brownville, the forest, and the man and woman.

Answers

Brownville: some of the finest views in California; small town; lies between hills that are covered in beautiful, colorful trees

forest: [The sun's] golden light shone through the trees and made long shadows; [sat down on] an old, fallen tree; calm and peaceful

the man: deep and musical voice – the voice of a singer

the woman: she sounded angry; ... it was a cultivated voice – she spoke clearly and well

FAST FINISHERS

Students think of more ways to describe Brownville, the forest, and the man and woman, using adjectives, similes, metaphors and comparison.

After reading

- 1 Elicit what is meant by *mood* (the atmosphere that is created by the description). Students work in pairs to discuss the questions about the change of mood in the text. In less confident classes, help students by writing some key words on the board, e.g. *calm, gentle, tense, tension, suspense*, etc. Discuss answers as a class.

Answers

- 1 The mood in the beginning is calm and gentle. The author creates this through his description of the town, which paints a picture of a quiet, pretty, peaceful place.
- 2 The mood changes in paragraph 6. It becomes more threatening and tense.
- 3 The author uses a short sentence – 'Suddenly I heard voices.' – to change the mood of the text abruptly.



i CULTURAL INFORMATION

Although Ambrose Bierce produced a huge amount of writing during his lifetime, he is most renowned for his short stories, which many people claim to be the best of the 19th century. He is known for his unusual writing style, which uses a number of different techniques. One of his writing techniques is to combine two different worlds – one realistic, one fantastic. He uses two distinct writing styles to do this: a descriptive, detailed style to describe the fantasy part of his stories, and a more economical, straightforward style to describe the reality. His stories often contain dark humour, with one or more characters meeting a terrible death.

- 2** Explain to students that they are going to continue the story. Working in groups, they discuss the three questions and make notes of their answers.
- 3** Students use their notes to write a paragraph to continue the story. Encourage them to be as descriptive as possible in their writing.