

ESSAY UNIT

Narrative Essay

*VERTICAL DANCER*

By  
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- (1) Like a rag doll, the young climber hangs suspended in space, tenuously connected to the overhang rock by the fast-rising tendons of his left arm. The sun is quickly disappearing, and the wind whistles past in ever-increasing gusts, but Peter Croft is oblivious to the waning light and the wind as he is to the passing hours. He is 300 very empty metres above the valley floor, and with no partner to belay him and no ropes to protect him, his life depends on the ability to focus on the granite puzzle before him. His vertical progress has just been interrupted by a massive block of stone that juts out almost horizontally, forming a roof of rock which Croft must negotiate. His only possible line of attack is along a crack that neatly cuts the overhang. Any mistake, any loss of concentration, and the game is terminally over.
- (2) Croft inhales once. Twice. Then, suddenly, he pulls his body up with his left hand, which is jammed into the crack and reaches out with the other in a bid for a new hold. The crack is too wide for the flat of his hand to fit snugly, but Croft has anticipated the problem: he makes a fist and punches is deep into the fissure, wedging his bloody knuckles against the finely grained stone. Next, with lightening speed, he swings his feet up against the overhang; they scabble blindly, seeking purchase. First one foot, then the other, smears itself against invisible blemishes in the rock. He now has four point contact, but no rest: he is one move further along but still inching horizontally out across the underside of the overhang, clinging to the rock like a spider on a ceiling, and gravity sucks him hard toward the valley floor. Working his left hand out of the crack, he lets it drop by his side, then shakes it vigorously to get the circulation going again. The veins on his forearm stand hard-pressed against his skin; his rock-scraped fingers tremble from the effort.
- (3) Croft pauses for a moment, tensing his muscles for the next move. He breathes deeply again, then explodes into a weird, kinesthetic dance: hand over hand along the crack, push against the rock with the left foot, kick leg up, wedge other hand. Gecko-like, he levitates his way across the lip of the overhang and up into saner territory. Upright again, with his feet beneath him, he can finally rest.
- (4) The freshening breeze whips through his sun bleached hair, tickling his nose with the faint perfume of bayberry and wild mint. Far below, the lush vegetation of California's Yosemite National Park – the oaks and pines and giant junipers that cover the valley floor – has blurred into a many-shaded carpet of green. The shadows are becoming very long, though, and with a twinge of regret, Croft turns to the rock and renews his ascent. Gracefully now, he climbs rapidly and sinuously upward from one minuscule hold to the next. He will reach the top of the wall, still a few hundred metres above him, by nightfall. A half smile plays on the weather-lined features; his brown eyes seem almost unfocused. Peter Croft is in his element.

(From *Gender Issues*, ed. Greta Hofmann Nimiroff  
McGrath-Hill Ryerson: Toronto, 1993)

1. Consider the following aspects of **narrative** writing:

- A narrative essay covers the **plot**, usually of a single **incident**. Though this essay is very short, it contains all the elements of a narrative plot. Provide these elements below:

Setting (where and when): \_\_\_\_\_

Conflict (what and why): \_\_\_\_\_

Complication (what): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Resolution (how): \_\_\_\_\_

Character Development (who): \_\_\_\_\_

- A writer usually employs **vivid verbs** in a narrative and *Vertical Dancer* is an excellent example of word choice. Provide examples from throughout the essay (indicate the paragraph).

\_\_\_\_\_ par. \_\_\_\_                      \_\_\_\_\_ par. \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ par. \_\_\_\_                      \_\_\_\_\_ par. \_\_\_\_

- Provide an example of **sentence structure** which contributes to the atmosphere or mood. Explain your choice.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Explanation: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- **Details and description** help to recreate the experience. Provide two examples of descriptive detail from different paragraphs of the essay, and explain why each is effective.

\_\_\_\_\_ Effect: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Effect: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What is the **dominant impression** created through the description in this piece?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Review your notes on **coherence**.

- a. In the essay, underline and notate an example for each of
  - **pronoun/antecedent reference**
  - **repetition**

- b. Narration requires **temporal or chronological transitions** to ensure coherence. Locate, circle, and notate at least four examples in the essay *Vertical Dancer*.

(Please continue on back of page)

3. What would be the writer's **purpose** in writing and publishing this piece?

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4. The writer of *Vertical Dancer* has employed effective **language techniques** in every sentence of this narrative essay. IN YOUR EXERCISE BOOK, write out any TWO sentences **which you have not already written in the above responses**, and which you find particularly effective. Using neat arrows or bullets, note the language techniques (eg. **emphatic devices, sentence structure, diction**, etc.) employed by the writer.