

Identifying and Writing Prepositional Phrases

One Skill at a Time Lesson

Teacher Overview

Skills Focus:

Remember Understand Apply Analyze Evaluate Create					
Close Reading		Grammar		Composition	
Reading Strategies Annotation		Parts of Speech Phrases Prepositional			

Materials and Resources

Prepositional phrases are introduced in the sixth grade skill progression chart. Lessons in the LTF guides which deal with prepositional phrases are:

- Sentence Structure Basics
- Sentence Variations
- The Poetry of Phrases
- Parts of Speech, Phrases, Clauses, and Sentences

Lesson Introduction

Authors use prepositional phrases to add specific detail, to add variety, to show relationships in location and in time, and to add imagery. If students deliberately begin to add prepositional phrases to their writing in the sixth grade, they will learn to write sentences that show, not tell.

Student Activities

Suggestions for using this lesson:

- Read the two Dickinson poems and the Dickinson quotes aloud, and have students orally answer the questions in the margin. Model first; then provide guided practice. You may have the students answer the questions in pairs.
- For the poem “After Apple-Picking,” students should be ready to answer the questions on their own. You can read each question and have the students underline the prepositional phrase that answers the question in each line.
- Require students to write commentary for “The Eagle” (Exercise A). Students should conclude that, like in the Dickinson poetry, the prepositional phrases Tennyson uses add particular detail and imagery and allow the reader to visualize what is happening in the poem.
- In Exercise B, several different prepositions will fit in the blank. Accept any that make sense.
- Have students write commentary for the Kinnell poem (Exercise C). They should see that, without the prepositional phrases, the poem lacks description, detail, and imagery. The whole poem is printed below if you want to show it to your students after they complete the exercise.

- All the stanzas of the Wordsworth poem (Exercise D) are also printed below. You may want to share the whole poem with your students after they complete the exercise.

“Blackberry Eating”
by Galway Kinnell

I love to go out in late September
among fat, overripe, icy, black blackberries
to eat blackberries for breakfast,
the stalks very prickly, a penalty
they earn for knowing the black art
of blackberry-making; and as I stand among them
lifting the stalks to my mouth, the ripest berries
fall almost unbidden to my tongue,
as words sometimes do, certain peculiar words
like *strengths* or *squinched*,
many-lettered, one-syllabled lumps,
which I squeeze, squinch open, and splurge well
in the silent, startled, icy black language
of blackberry-eating in late September.

“I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud”
by William Wordsworth

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o’er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves besides them danced; but they
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee;
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company;
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought.

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

Identifying and Writing Prepositional Phrases

A **preposition** links nouns, pronouns and phrases to other words in a sentence. The word or phrase that the preposition introduces is called the object of the preposition. A preposition usually indicates the time, direction, or location of its object to the rest of the sentence as in the following examples:

- The comforter is **on** the bed.
- The comforter is **beneath** the bed.
- The comforter is **between** the sheets.
- The comforter is **beside** the bed.
- She arranged the comforter **over** the bed.
- She covered up **with** the comforter **during** the movie.
- She slept **with** the comforter **until** spring.

In each of the preceding sentences, a preposition locates the noun “comforter” in a particular place or time.

A **prepositional phrase** is made up of the preposition, its object (underlined in the examples above), and any associated adjectives or adverbs. A prepositional phrase can function as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb. Below is a list of the most common prepositions:

about	above	across	after	against
along	among	around	at	before
behind	below	beneath	beside	between
beyond	by	despite	down	during
except	for	from	in	inside
into	like	near	of	off
on	onto	out	outside	over
past	since	through	throughout	till
to	toward	under	underneath	until
up	upon	with	within	without

Prepositions can be used to add great variety and detail to prose and poetry. The following poem was written by Emily Dickinson. Notice how she uses prepositional phrases to add specific detail to her writing. Look how many questions are being answered by the prepositional phrases. Without these phrases, this poem would be lacking both light and color.

A Light exists **in Spring**
Not present **on the Year**
At any other period—
When March is scarcely here.

When does the light exist?
When is this light not present?
Again, when is this light not present?

A Color stands abroad
On Solitary Fields
That Science cannot overtake
But Human Nature feels.

Where do you see the color?

It waits **upon the Lawn**,
It shows the furthest Tree
Upon the furthest Slope you know
It almost speaks **to you**.

Where does this light wait?

How far does this light show the furthest tree?
To whom does the light speak?

Then as Horizons step
Or Noons report away,
Without the Formula of sound
It passes and we stay—

How does the light pass away?

A quality **of loss**
Affecting our Content
As Trade had suddenly encroached
Upon a Sacrament.

What kind of quality does the light produce?

Where did trade suddenly encroach?

Look at how Emily Dickinson uses prepositional phrases in this poem to show relationships in **location**. **Underline the prepositional phrase that answers the question in the right-hand column.**

An altered look about the hills;
A Tyrian light the village fills;
A wider sunrise in the dawn;
A deeper twilight on the lawn;
A print of a vermilion foot;
A purple finger on the slope;
A flippant fly upon the pane;
A spider at his trade again;
An added strut in chanticleer;
A flower expected everywhere;
An axe shrill singing in the woods;
Fern-odors on untravelled roads,—
All this, and more I cannot tell,
A furtive look you know as well,
And Nicodemus' mystery
Receives its annual reply.

Where is the altered look?

Where is the wider sunrise?

Where is the deeper twilight?

Where is the purple finger?

Where is the flippant fly?

Where is the axe shrill singing?

Where are the fern-odors?

Following are lines of poetry written by Emily Dickinson which contain prepositional phrases showing relationships in **time**. **Underline the prepositional phrase that answers the question in the right-hand column.**

- After a hundred years
Nobody knows the place,— *When does nobody know the place?*
- After great pain, a formal feeling comes *When does a formal feeling come?*
- I have a bird in spring *When does the speaker have a bird?*
- God calls home the angels promptly
At the setting sun;
I missed mine. How dreary marbles,
After playing the Crown! *When does God call the angels home?*
When are marbles dreary?
- It burned me in the night, *When was the speaker burned?*
- On would they go on aching still
Through centuries above *When will they go on aching still?*

- Reeling, through endless summer days, *When is something reeling?*
- But just before the snows
There came a purple creature
That ravished all the hill; *When did a purple creature come?*
- I heard a fly buzz when I died;
The stillness in my form
Was like the stillness in the air
Between the heavens of storm. *Note that “when I died” is a dependent clause.*
When was her stillness like the stillness in the air?
- If you were coming in the fall,
I’d brush the summer by *When are you coming?*
- My life closed twice before its close *When did the speaker’s life close twice?*

Now look at all the prepositional phrases Robert Frost uses in his poem “After Apple-Picking.” Notice that the phrases help show the relationship of one thing to another. Isolating and identifying the questions answered by the prepositional phrases will help you to make sense of the poem. The prepositional phrases are answering the key questions of **where**, **what**, **how**, **which**, and **whose** as they relate to what the reader sees in the poem. Frost uses prepositional phrases to produce visual imagery, to show the relationship of one thing to another in the physical world.

What do the prepositional phrases enable you to see/know?

My long two-pointed ladder’s sticking **through a tree**
Toward heaven still,

where the exact placement of the ladder is
where that ladder is pointing

And there’s a barrel that I didn’t fill

where the unfilled barrel is

Beside it, and there may be two or three

where the unpicked apples are

Apples I didn’t pick **upon some bough.**

what the speaker is finished with

But I am done **with apple-picking** now.

what the essence is of, when it’s present

Essence **of winter sleep is on the night,**

what the scent is of

The scent **of apples:** I am drowsing off.

what sense is associated with the strangeness

I cannot rub the strangeness **from my sight**

what produced this strange seeing

I got from looking **through a pane of glass**

where the speaker got the pane of glass

I skimmed this morning **from the drinking trough**

where he held the pane of glass, what he saw

And held **against the world of hoary grass.**

It melted, and I let it fall and break.

But I was well

where the speaker was heading

Upon my way to sleep before it fell,

And I could tell

What form my dreaming was about to take.

Magnified apples appear and disappear,

Stem end and blossom end,

And every fleck of russet showing clear.

My instep arch not only keeps the ache,

It keeps the pressure **of a ladder-round**.
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.
And I keep hearing **from the cellar bin**
The rumbling sound
Of load on load of apples coming in.
For I have had too much
Of apple-picking: I am overtired
Of the great harvest I myself desired.
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
Cherish **in hand**, lift down, and not let fall.
For all
That struck the earth,
No matter if not bruised or spiked **with stubble**,
Went surely **to the cider-apple heap**
As of no worth.
One can see what will trouble
This sleep **of mine**, whatever sleep it is.
Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it's **like his**
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.

what the shape on his instep feels like
where he hears this rumbling sound
what exactly the rumbling sound is
what the speaker has had too much of
what he is overtired of
how and where he cherishes the apples
which apples went to the cider-apple heap
what the fallen apples looked like
where the fallen apples ended up
what the worth is of the fallen apples
whose sleep is involved
what the speaker's sleep is like

Exercise A

Underline the prepositional phrases in the following poem, "The Eagle" by Alfred, Lord Tennyson. The poem contains seven prepositional phrases.

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.
The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

Explain the overall effect and the purpose of the prepositional phrases in this poem by completing the sentence.

The prepositional phrases Tennyson uses add _____ and _____
_____, which allows the reader to _____

Exercise B

Prepositions show time and direction/location. In the following exercise, choose from the proper category to complete the prepositional phrase in each sentence. Then highlight the complete prepositional phrase. Don't worry about making the statements correct, just make the sentence logical.

Prepositions of Time				
after	before	during	since	throughout
till	until	at	in	through

1. Most of Emily Dickinson's poems were published _____ her death.
2. _____ his life, Shakespeare exhibited great creativity.
3. Robert Frost was invited to the White House by John F. Kennedy, who was known for inviting artists there _____ his Presidency.
4. Emily Dickinson was born _____ 1830.
5. Walt Whitman wrote poetry _____ death.

Prepositions of Direction/Location				
above	across	against	along	among
around	at	behind	below	beneath
beside	between	beyond	by	down
in	inside	into	near	of
on	onto	out	outside	over
through	toward	under	underneath	upon
within				

6. Galway Kinnell must have been strolling _____ blackberry bushes when he wrote "Blackberry Eating."
7. Emily Dickinson bundled up her poems, sewing them _____ needle and thread.
8. Emily Dickinson stayed _____ her father's house for the last years of her life.
9. Robert Frost wrote famous poems about stopping _____ a wood, swinging _____ birch trees, mending a wall _____ his property, and finding a dimpled spider _____ a plant.

Exercise C

In the following poem, “Blackberry Eating,” by Galway Kinnell, the preposition has been removed from each prepositional phrase, leaving the object of the preposition and modifiers. Supply a preposition to create a complete prepositional phrase that makes sense in the line of poetry. The first line is done for you as an example.

I love to go out in late September
_____ fat, overripe, icy, black blackberries
to eat blackberries _____ breakfast,
the stalks very prickly, a penalty
they earn for knowing the black art
_____ blackberry-making; and as I stand _____ them
lifting the stalks _____ my mouth, the ripest berries
fall almost unbidden _____ my tongue,
as words sometimes do, certain peculiar words
_____ strengths or squinched,
many-lettered, one-syllabled lumps,
which I squeeze, squinch open, and splurge well
_____ the silent, startled, icy black language
_____ blackberry-eating _____ late September.

What is the purpose of the prepositional phrases in Kinnell’s poem? (Model your sentence after the analysis sentence in Exercise A.)

Exercise D

Below are the first two stanzas of the poem “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” by William Wordsworth. Some of the prepositional phrases have been removed. Write complete prepositional phrases in the blanks to add detail and imagery to the poem. Some of the prepositional phrases are given to you. In Wordsworth’s poem, every other line rhymes: you might try to add rhyme in some places as a challenge.

I wandered lonely as a cloud

That floats _____ (where)

When all _____ I saw a crowd, (when)

A host, of golden daffodils,

_____, _____, (where)

Fluttering and dancing _____.

Continuous _____ that shine

And twinkle _____,

They stretched _____

Along the margin of a bay:

Ten thousand saw I _____,

Tossing their heads _____.