

## Detail Development in Gary Paulsen's Nonfiction *Puppies, Dogs, and Blue Northers*: Using Thoughtshots and Snapshots

This lovely book for grades 5-8 is full of excellent detail development using both **thoughtshots** and **snapshots**. These two terms, used by Barry Lane in his masterful writing craft book *After the End: Teaching and Learning Creative Revision*, distinguish between **details that show concrete, physical details and actions (snapshots)** and **details that express feelings or opinions (thoughtshots)** that express the writer's or narrator's personality and reflections.

Using both types create powerful voice and elaboration. Defining each type of detail for students allows them to consciously switch back and forth between the two. As Barry Lane states, "Learning to portray the objective world through the filter of their own emotions without revealing those emotions is a sophisticated and important skill" (p.49).

Share some of the following examples to help students discern each type and then practice their own. Also share examples from your literature text.

### 1. (p.12)

I poured a cup of tea and leaned back against the straw, my legs in the sleeping bag, my headlamp adjusted down for reading, and settled in to spend the night with Cookie and Anthony Trollop. ← **SNAPSHOT**. I had for some time wanted to read *The Pallisters* and this looked like a good time to at least start. ← **THOUGHTSHOT**

### 2. (p.12)

And I was not exaggerating when I said it was better than I was accustomed to sleeping in. ← **THOUGHTSHOT** We had spent years, thousands of miles alone together, camping in rain and open storms, on ice and mud, sleeping huddled under an overhang of snow.... ← **SNAPSHOT**

### 3. (p. 19)

Without awakening me, Cookie had gotten up during the night, gone out, found the

[dead] pup and brought it back, arranged it to “feed” with the others, and gone back to sleep. ←**SNAPSHOT** I was caught somewhere between heartbreak and admiration, and I thought suddenly of orphan children.... ←**THOUGHTSHOT**.

#### 4. (p.20)

I left the pup and it was not for three days, almost four, when the still-frozen pup was clearly not going to come back to life, that she finally surrendered to her grief and let me take it away. ←**SNAPSHOT** But even then she growled, this time not at me but at the fates, at all of it. That she would lose a young one – a growl at life.←**THOUGHTSHOT**

### Tinting a Thoughtshot

Writers often use metaphorical language to express inner feelings.

#### 5. (p.30)

As it was, they put **a joyous frosting on an already merry cake**, and many times I caught myself laughing out loud...