

Storytelling vs Story-*Showing*: How the Tarot and Your Five Senses Can Help You Show Your Story

by Amanda Hughes for Haint Blue Creative®

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The best stories make us feel like we are part of them. Whether an article, book, movie, or stage play, a good story starts in the writer’s mind, and then spills out onto the page—literal or digital. While reading your favorite books or watching your favorite movies, you’re most likely imagining yourself as the character and/or placing yourself in their world. You can see, hear, smell, feel, and taste what they are experiencing, if only in your imagination.

If you are a fiction writer, you will most likely recognize the statement “Show, don’t tell.” Although this advice can be redundant, it’s important. While writing, *showing* your story—which includes using descriptive language, metaphor, and dialogue—offers the reader an experience, rather than simply *telling* the story and expecting readers to take your word at face value.

Sensory writing—using words and phrases that make a connection to the five senses—can enrich one’s storytelling with depth and nuance, offering the reader a virtually immersive experience. Here are five examples of *telling* a story compared with *showing* it:

Show vs. Tell Examples		
Senses	Telling	Showing
Sight / See	The girl cried.	Tears carved rivulets down the girl’s blushed cheeks.
Sound / Hear	The song was beautiful.	My skin erupted with chills as his fingertips tickled the piano keys.
Smell	The food smelled delicious.	When the server brought out the fajitas, my mind wafted with memories of eating chopped steak and onion hoagies at the autumn carnival.
Touch / Feel	It felt great to be hugged.	She melted in her lover’s embrace.
Taste	The coffee tasted so good.	As the latte warmed her belly, a ribbon of sweet foam lingered on her lips.

Immersive Practice

While writing fiction, I enjoy sharpening my skills through immersive practice. First and foremost, I mull over the ideas, characters, and stories that seem to appear out of the ether. Next, I pay close attention to my intuitive sensory responses: what I see, smell,

hear, taste, and feel as the details unfold. I make lots of notes, capturing my ideas so I might recall them later.

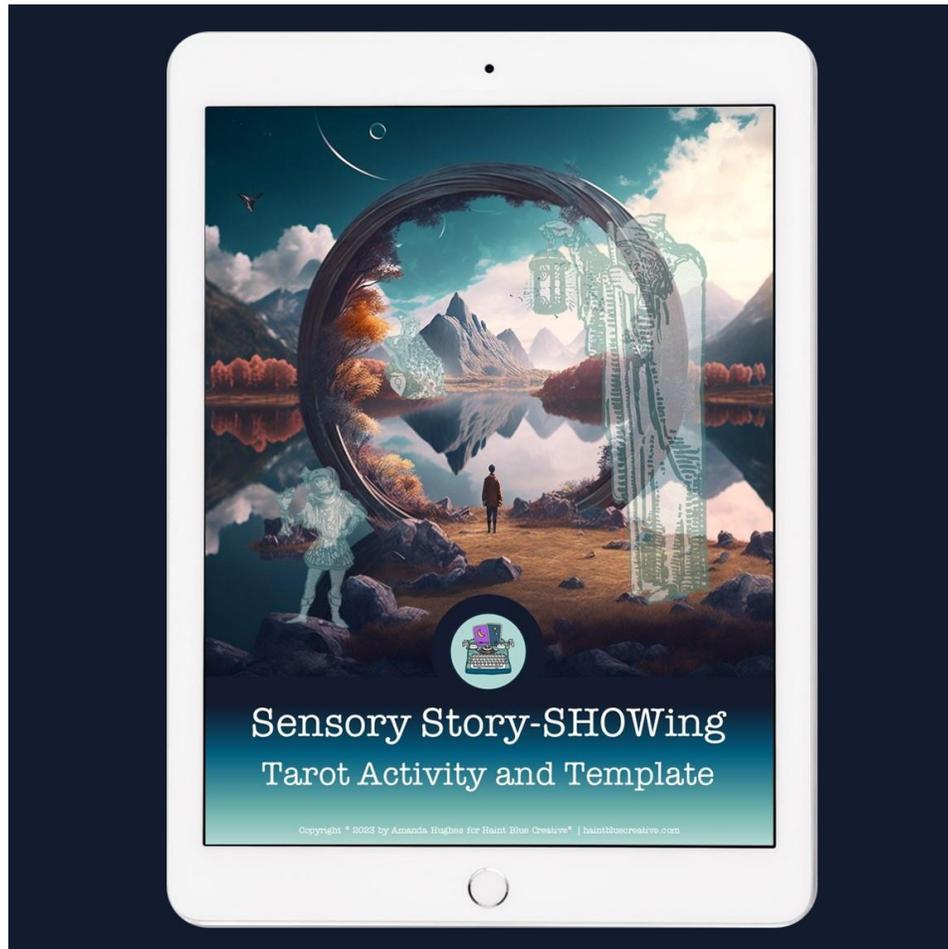
Because I never know what or who is going to inspire me, or when inspiration might occur, I pay close attention to specifics. No matter where I am, I examine my surroundings thoroughly, listening intently, and acknowledging how people, places, or situations make me feel. Like a tourist in a new town, I look up, down, and around, homing in with granular interest. Airports are terrific places for putting sensory awareness into practice—they are a kaleidoscope of things to see, smell, feel, hear, and taste. Malls, sporting events, parks, any place where people gather, also work well.

The tarot can be used in the same vein, serving as anchors for activating the senses. Let’s review examples of sensory story-*showing* as inspired by a selection of tarot cards:

Tarot and Sensory Story-<i>Showing</i>		
Tarot	Senses	Showing the Card’s Story
	Sight / See	From where he stood on the hill, Oliver had a clear view of the boat race. Defying the odds, and baffling those who wagered against the vessel, the <i>Joan of Arc</i> glided past the larger boats, winning first place.
	Sound / Hear	Although the instructor was a small man, his voice boomed from behind the podium, sailing around the auditorium and spilling out into the corridor.
	Smell	I could tell the storm was brewing. As the clouds billowed overhead, my nose prickled, my lungs filling with a warm and earthy petrichor.
	Touch / Feel	My migraine was no match for the sting of snow against my cheeks, or the chill settling into my throbbing, fractured ankle.
	Taste	Marco’s throat scorched with rising bile. He didn’t care how many of his friends loved his neighbor’s craft beer. He wasn’t falling for another rancid ale.

Sensory Story-Showing with the Tarot

Now it's your turn. For this two-part practice activity, I have crafted a free template that includes a selection of questions to help you glean sensory details from your tarot cards. You are invited to use these insights for more profound *story-showing*.



Download this FREE Template

