

**Teaching Reading
and Writing
Narrative through
Moving Image**

Anthony Cockerill

'I was twelve going on thirteen the first time I saw a dead human being. It happened in the summer of 1960, a long time ago, although sometimes, it doesn't seem that long to me.' Stephen King.



This workshop explores **how we can use moving image to great effect to teach students to deconstruct and construct written narratives**, whilst capitalising on their prior knowledge of and interest in film.

At the centre of good English teaching are **texts which engage and provoke**, and which offer much to learn about **form, structure, and the language of the medium**. Using **film texts alongside the written word** is a great way to **capitalise on students' prior knowledge and understanding**, as young people often have a very strong sense of **media literacy**.

A well-chosen film clip can provide a great opportunity to model how we 'read' a text critically. It can also provide a great **stimulus for creative and narrative writing**, working through potentially tricky issues around **storytelling**, such as establishing clear **narrative perspective** and handling passage of time. It offers up a **package that includes plot, narrative perspective, character, structure and 'mise-en-scene'**. It also allows us to explore more conceptual ideas, such as **symbolism, theme and context** in a way that draws on the students' prior experience of **moving image**.



SHOPKEEPER

I remember the year he was All-Conference. Quarterback he played. Boy could he throw. Father God and Sonny Jesus! D'you play football?

GORDIE

Hm?

SHOPKEEPER

Do you play football?

GORDIE

No.

SHOPKEEPER

What do you do?


GORDIE

I don't know.





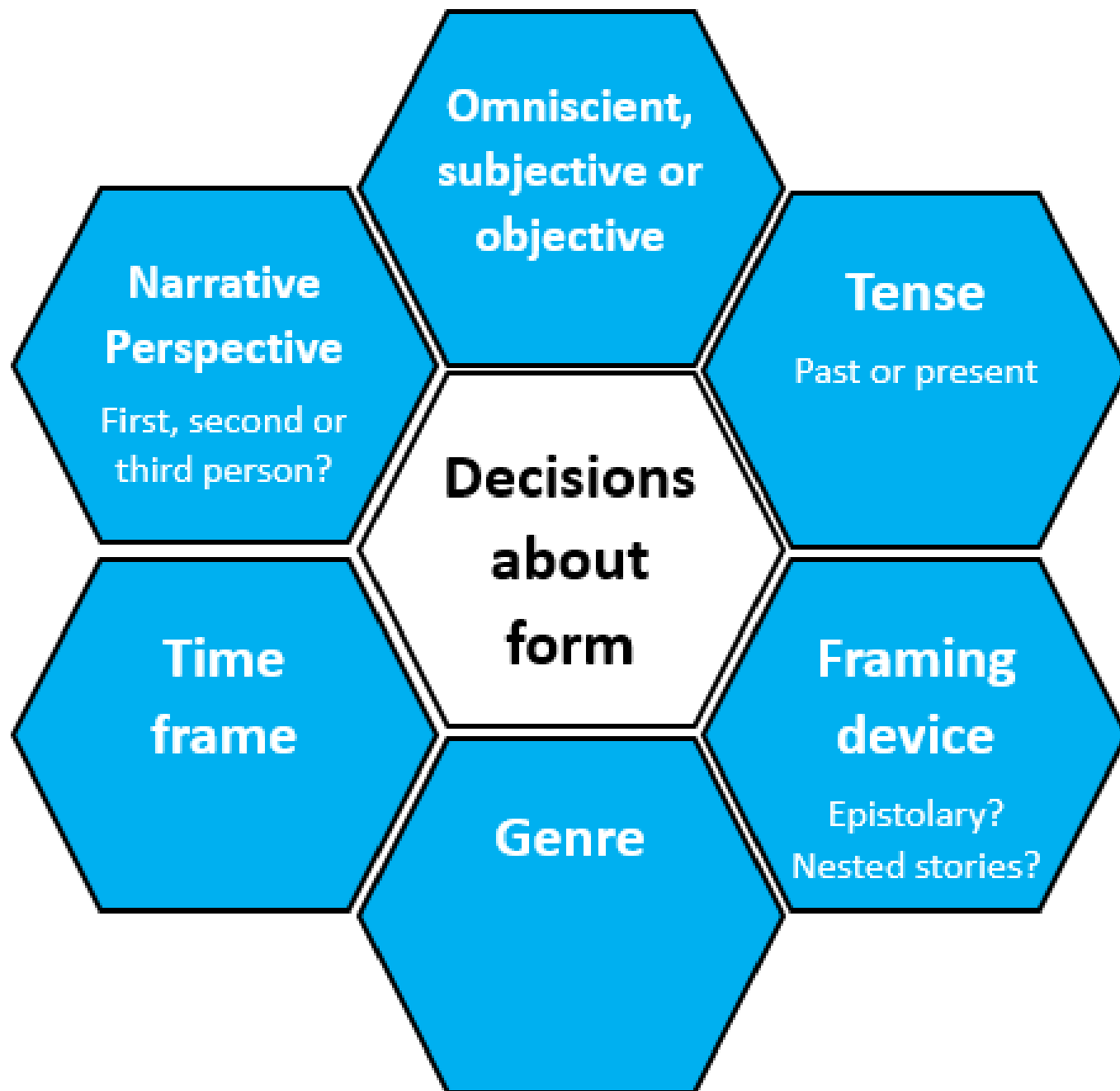
What's the
story?

An aerial photograph of a long, green metal truss bridge spanning a wide river. The river is filled with numerous white logs floating downstream. The surrounding landscape is lush with green forest, and distant mountains are visible under a clear sky. A red rectangular box is superimposed on the left side of the image, containing white text.

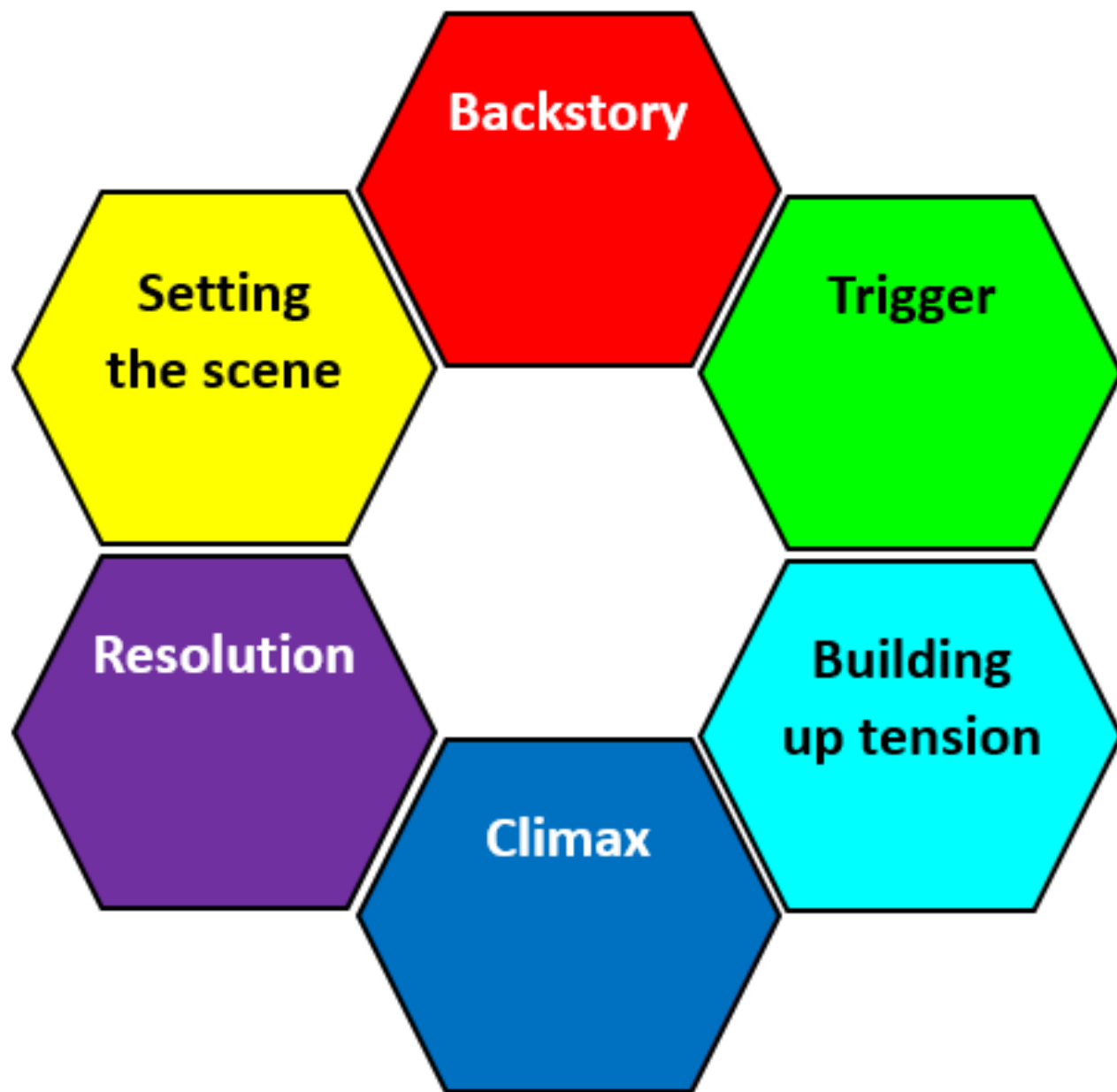
Whose
point of
view?



Whose
point of
view?



Examining structure



Openings

Setting the scene



Contrasts



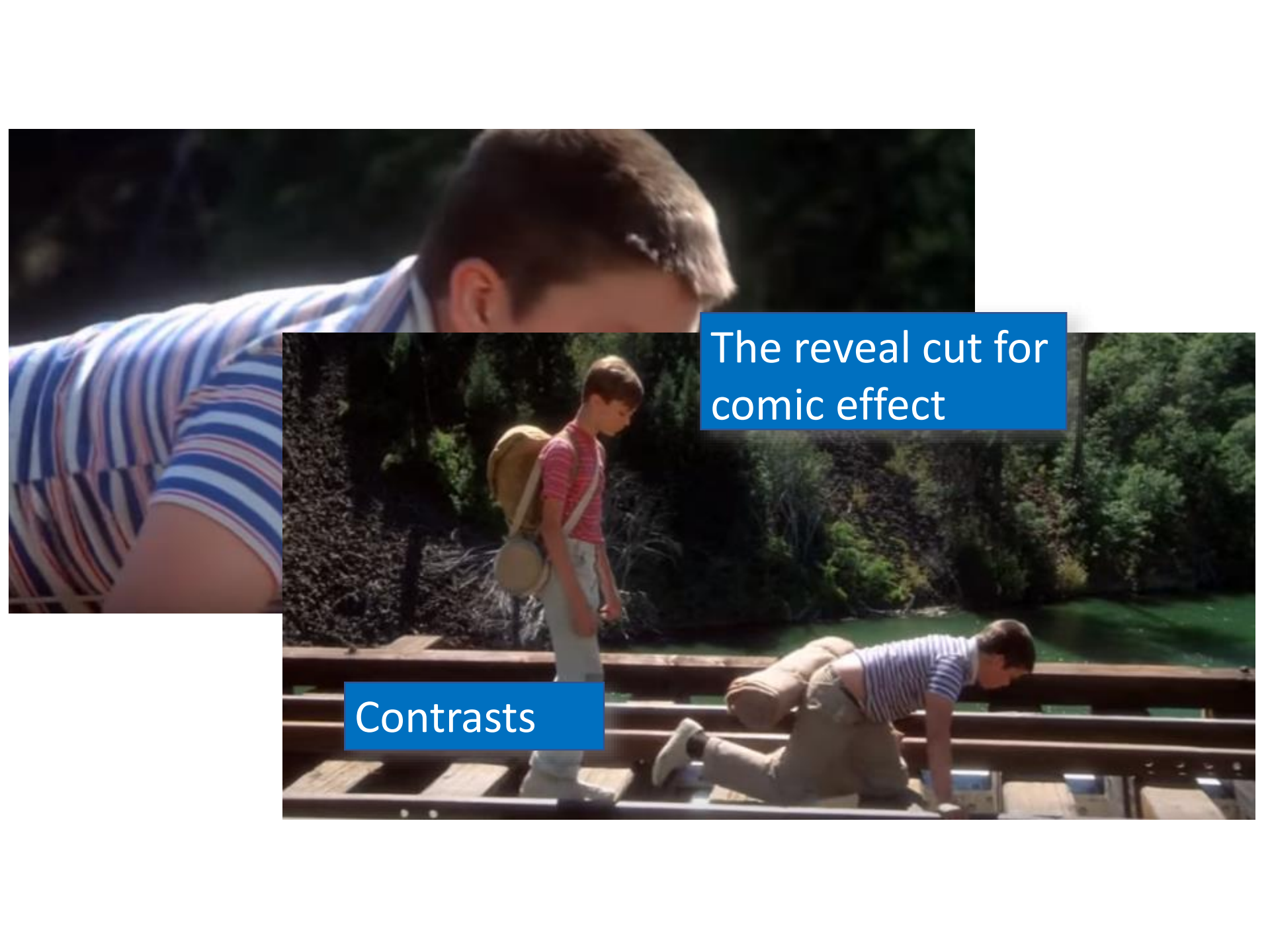


Foreshadowing



Zooming in on close-up details





The reveal cut for
comic effect

Contrasts

The shock tactic



A low-angle, close-up shot of several pairs of legs and feet walking on a wooden plank floor. The image is heavily blurred to convey a sense of rapid movement. A blue rectangular box with the text "Motion blur" is centered over the middle of the image.

Motion blur



Climax

The 'everyone
laughs' ending



Considering Film Language



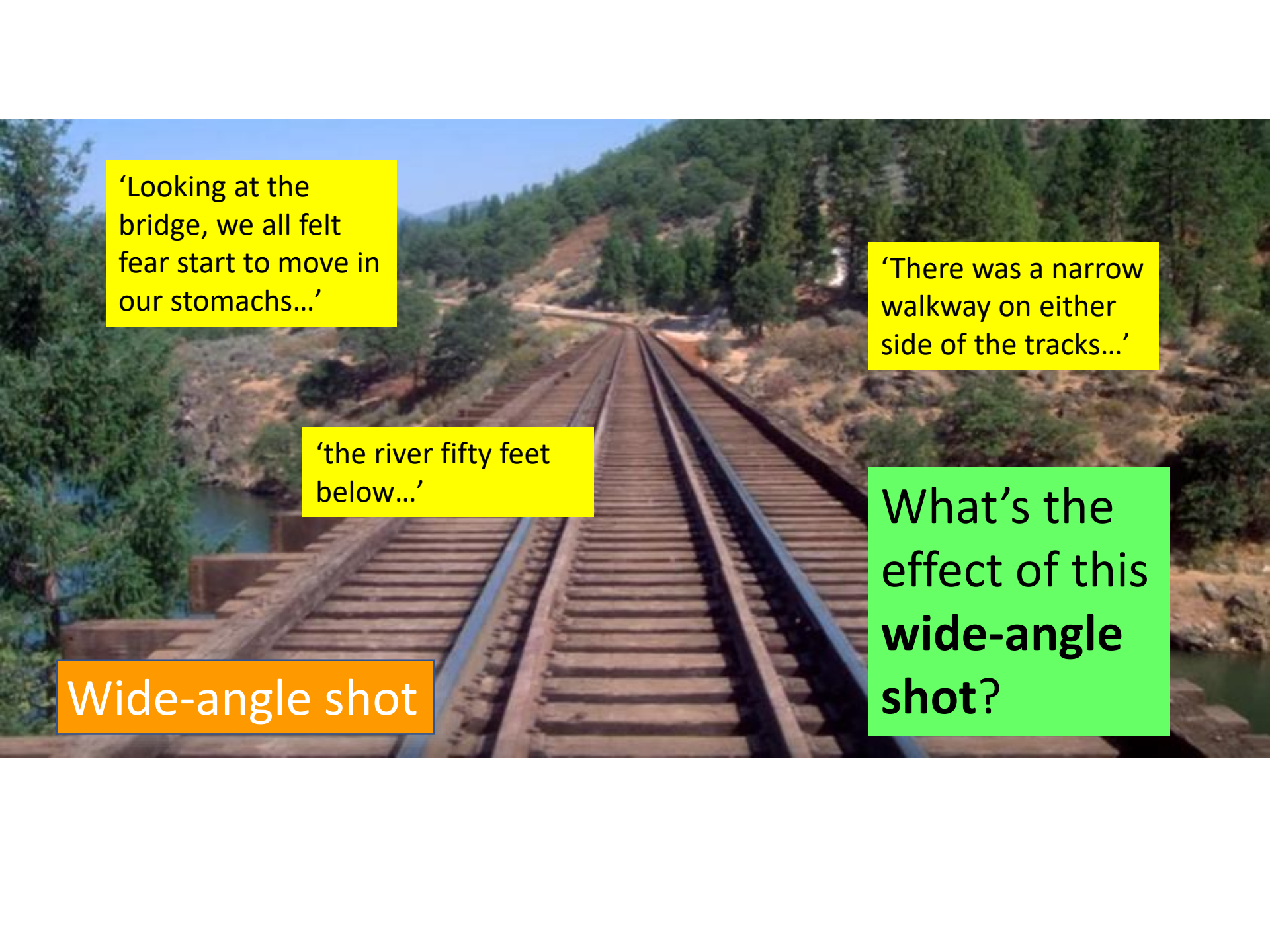
What's the
effect of this
high-angle
shot?

High angle shot



This **medium-shot** establishes character by showing not telling: Vern looks back cautiously, the other three boys consider the challenge ahead...

Medium-shot

A wide-angle shot of a railway bridge over a river. The tracks recede into the distance, creating a strong sense of perspective. The bridge is surrounded by dense green trees and foliage on both sides. The river is visible below the bridge, and the sky is clear and blue.

‘Looking at the bridge, we all felt fear start to move in our stomachs...’

‘There was a narrow walkway on either side of the tracks...’

‘the river fifty feet below...’

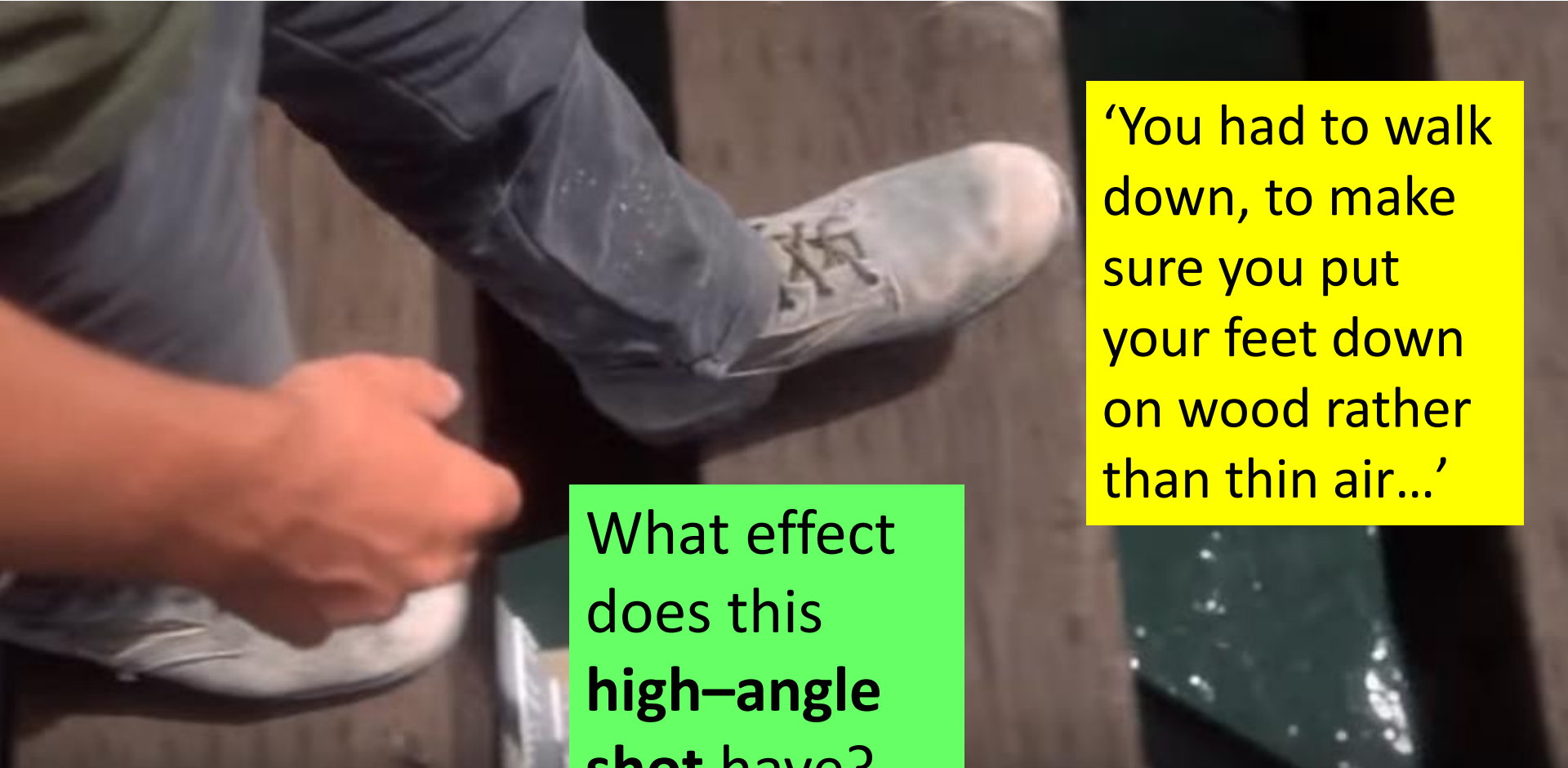
Wide-angle shot

What’s the effect of this **wide-angle shot**?

‘I knelt
down and
touched
the steel.
Nothing.’

How does this
medium-shot
foreshadow
what will
happen?





‘You had to walk down, to make sure you put your feet down on wood rather than thin air...’

What effect does this **high-angle shot** have?



Why so
quiet? What
can we hear?

Sound effects

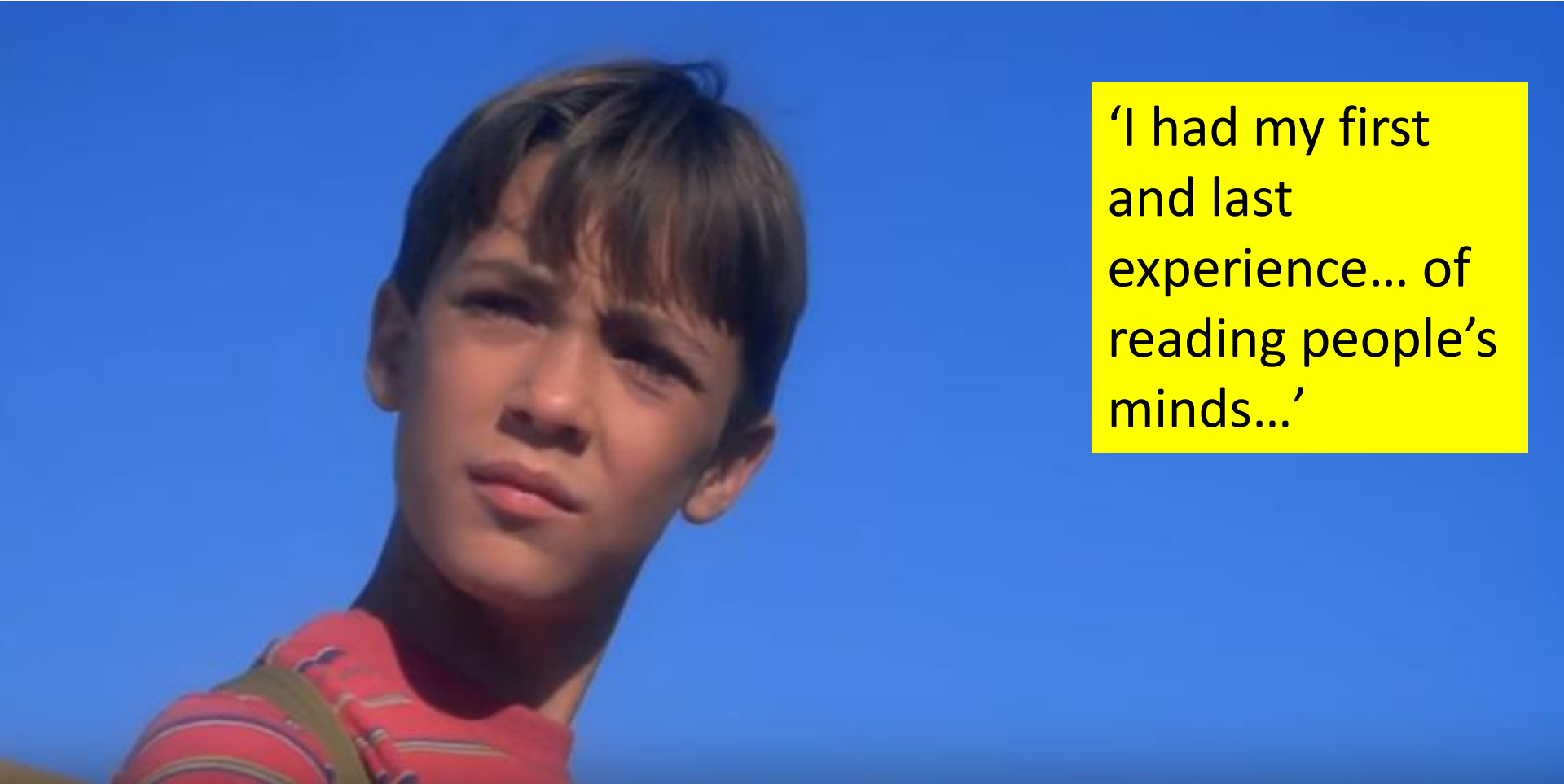
'The bridge was
made of wood and
had spaces all the
way across...'





‘Vern... was
being very
cautious...’





'I had my first
and last
experience... of
reading people's
minds...'





Why has the director used this **slow-motion shot** at exactly this point?



'I screamed
'*TRAIN!*' and
began to run.'















Performance





What is the
effect of the
motion-blur
here?







'...metal
screaming
against metal...'



‘I clapped my hands over my ears and dug my face into the hot dirt as the train went by...’

**Screen to
Page**

1

Equilibrium

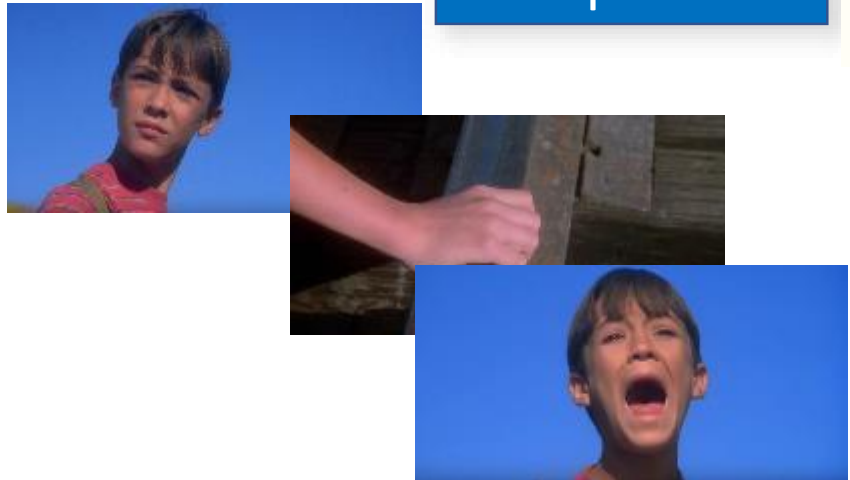


3

Struggle



Disruption



2

Resolution



4

Modelling writing



Ineffective
opening sentence.

Needs more
exposition of the
plot so far.

My friends and I were walking along the railroad tracks. Our parents thought we were camping out for the night. In fact, we were walking a long way, from our home in Castle Rock to the Back Harlow Road. We were searching for a missing kid from our school named Ray Brower. We loved the idea of getting our photos in the local newspaper.

Modelling redrafting



How dangerous could walking the length of a railroad track actually be? Especially when there's only ever a couple of trains a day from Castle Rock to Harlow. At least that's what we'd told ourselves. It was the summer before we all started high school. Our parents thought we were camping out for the night. ~~In fact, we were walking~~ By now, we were a long way, from our home in Castle Rock to the Back Harlow Road. We were searching for a missing kid from our school named Ray Brower. We loved the idea of getting our photos in the local newspaper.

Modelling writing



Nice **adjectives**, such as 'rickety' and 'febrile' have an **onomatopoeic** quality...

The dark copse of trees that we had been walking through for some time began to thin out and shafts of bright sunlight shone through the branches. We emerged from the trees and saw, right ahead, the bridge that spanned the chasm of the Royal River. The river was dwarfed by the bridge. The bridge itself appeared rickety and febrile, a series of wooden slats that looked like they could barely support the weight of the iron rails.

Thinking closely about the effects of grammar in practice



Why is the **passive voice** more effective than the **active voice** here?

The river was dwarfed by the bridge.

The bridge dwarfed the river.

What's the impact of this sensory description?

'The steady **thump** of my heart, **the bloodbeat in my ears like a drum** being played with brushes, the **creak of sinews** like the strings of a violin that has been tuned radically upward, **the steady hiss of the river**, the **hot hum of a locust** digging into tight bark, the **monotonous cry of a chickadee**, and somewhere, far away, a **barking** dog. Chopper, maybe. **The mildewy smell of the Castle River** was strong in my nose. The long muscles in my thighs were **trembling**.'

What's the impact of the cumulative sentence?

'The steady **thump** of my heart, **the bloodbeat in my ears like a drum** being played with brushes, the **creak of sinews** like the strings of a violin that has been tuned radically upward, **the steady hiss of the river**, the **hot hum of a locust** digging into tight bark, the **monotonous cry of a chickadee**, and somewhere, far away, a **barking** dog. Chopper, maybe. **The mildewy smell of the Castle River** was strong in my nose. The long muscles in my thighs were **trembling**.'







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