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Alt-Text for Picture Books

This section will explain how to write Alt-Text specifically for images in picture books and illustrated books for children.

On top of describing the images in the book, we also describe the cover. For information on how to do this please see Cover Image [hyperlink]. For information on Alt-Text in general please see Images, Maps & Graphs.

Writing Tips

When writing the Alt-text, keep in mind the reading level of the book and write your Alt-Text at this reading level. It is also important to keep with the tone of the book so the descriptions are not jarring for the reader. To help with this it is useful to read part of the book. This will also help with getting the correct language, character names, location names, etc..

It is also important not to mention a character's name before it is told in the text. Before this, rely on a general identifier. For example: The boy in the blue hat, the bluebird, or the mouse with a ribbon on her head.

As with other types of Alt-Text, you only have to mention the style of the illustration once in the first image. After this, you can just keep with the description of the image itself.

It is also important to describe colours and shapes accurately in order to recreate the visual storytelling in your written description.

Note: If the image goes across two pages add 'This illustration is the continuation of the one before' at the beginning of the second image.

> Writing longer Alt-text within the Alt-Text Window can prove problematic. There is no way to track your spelling and grammar mistakes, and it can also be difficult edit. We recommend you write your description in a new document to help track mistakes and edits before copying it into the Alt-Text window.

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General Tips

The following are some other basic tips to help you in you description.

- Don't editorialize, interpret, or analyze the material.
- Be objective. You do not want to put your opinions of what is happening into the description, just what is literally in the image. The reader should have the freedom for their own interpretation given all the necessary details.

- Be clear and concise. It is important not to be too wordy or over describe, since this can lead to confusion in the reader.
- Choose words that are succinct, vivid, and imaginative to convey visual images. Think about getting as much content into as few words as possible, as describers convey visual information that is either inaccessible or only partially accessible to a segment of the population.
- Describe colour, space and texture.
- Be very specific to the what the artist created.
- Describing is highly contextual, so bear in mind cultural significance of items of clothing, tool, instruments, etc..
- Do a little bit of research to make sure you are describing the images correctly for that culture. It is important to be concise but also correct.
- Use third-person narrative style to show neutrality and noninterference.
- Use active verbs in the present tense. This is very important to keeping the flow of the narration moving.
- Two good resources to help out if needed:
    - Grammar Girl: Active vs Passive Voice
    - Owl: Purdue University Active Voice
- Do not give too much information, which can create an information overload. A good rule to follow is: Does this help with the narration of the story?
- Remember, you don't have to describe all the details, but describe what is necessary for the narration. It is a balancing act.
- First think about the story: What is in the image that is important to the story?
- Then think about what you personally see. Remember a person with a visual impairment wants to 'see' this too.

> 💡 For more on Writing go to the General Guidelines for Image Descriptions and Editing Alt-text.

Examples

Cultural Details

Grass dancers tread the northern earth. They dance over green grass with a large blue moon in the sky. On the left side, two dogs in traditional dancer's clothing

are dancing. Both dogs wear roach style headdresses and their clothes are dark blue and grey buckskin. On the right side of the image, two more dogs in fancy dress are dancing. One of these dogs wears black, buckskin clothing and the other dog wears bright red buckskin clothing with long tassels attached.

Sacagawea stands in the centre of the page, visible from the waist up, with her baby strapped on her back in a papoose. She has shiny, black hair in two long braids, brown eyes, and reddish-brown lips. She wears large, round shell earrings and a buckskin dress decorated at the neckline and shoulders with beadwork. The beadwork creates a light blue background, with a yellow and dark blue border, and there are two red and yellow triangular designs on each shoulder. Her baby has short, black hair, dark brown eyes, and reddish-brown lips. In the background, a light-blue river flows through a green field with tall green pine trees. The sky is a mix of swirling white, grey, and blue clouds under a starry sky. Sacagawea left arm is raised out of the frame of the illustration, she looks in the same direction.
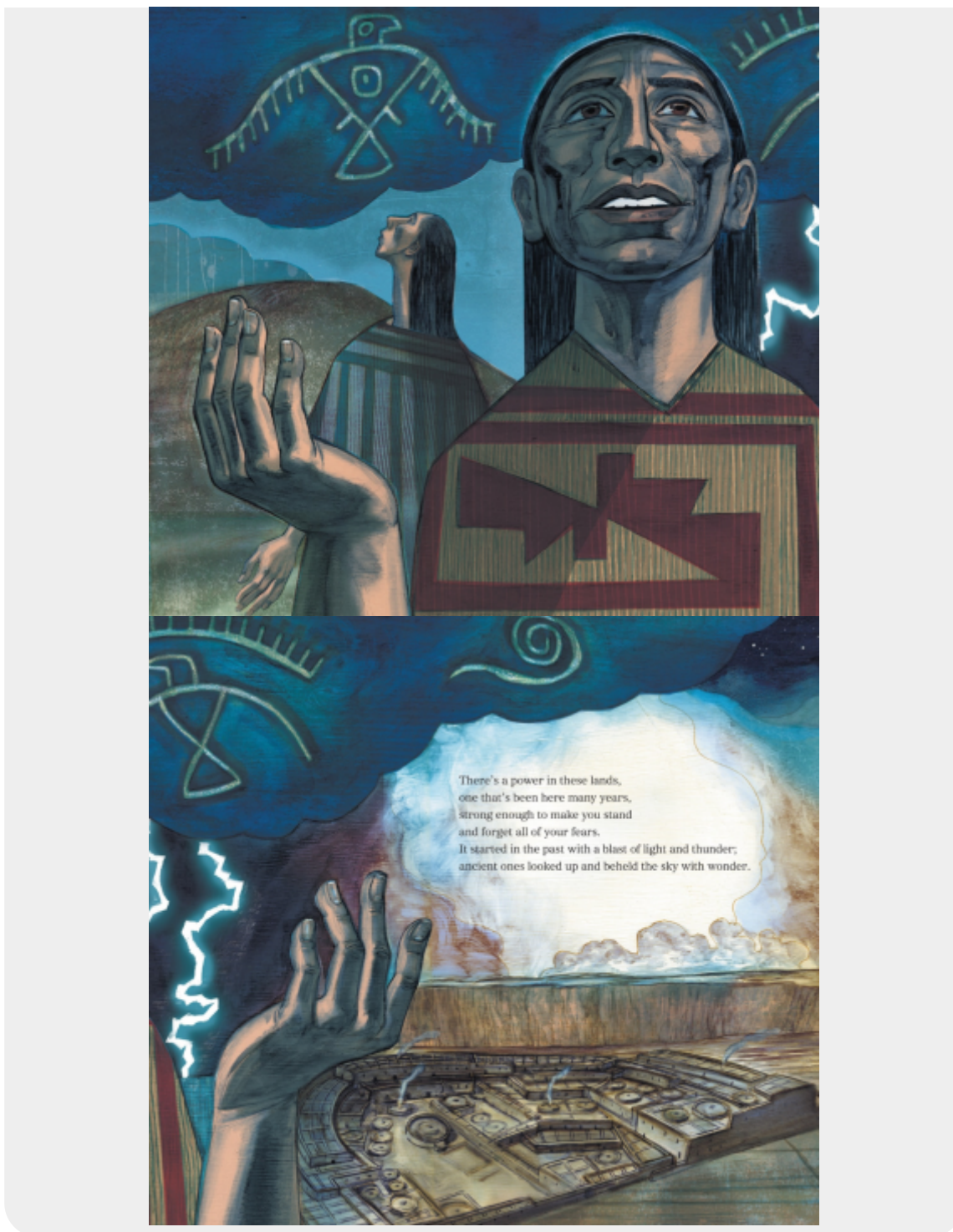
Children's Illustration

Mona stands at the base of the tree looking up at the heart. She reaches up to it
with one hand.

> The character's name, physical description, and the description of
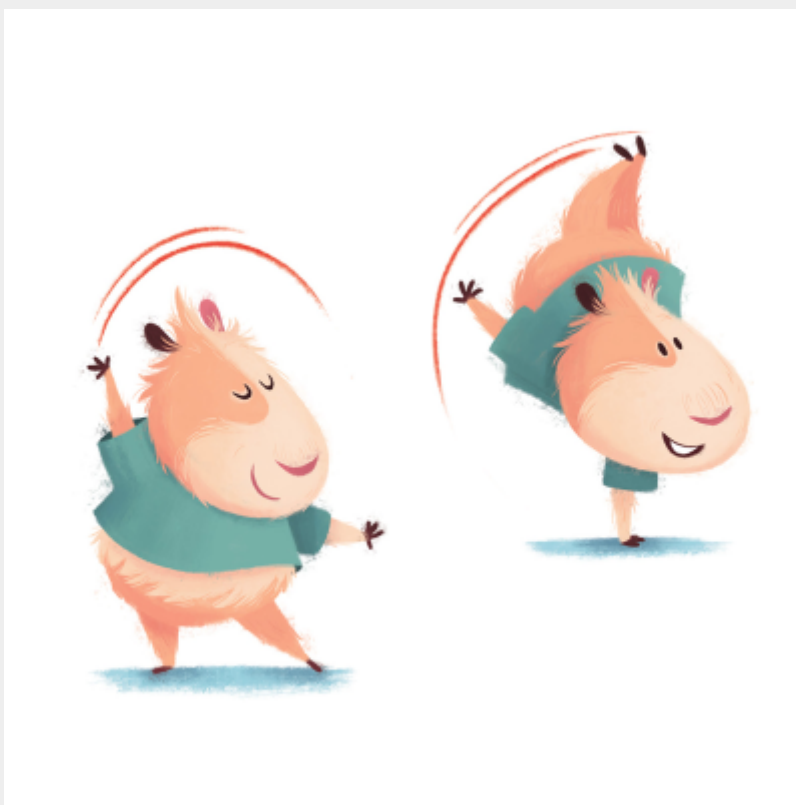> the tree and the door, are in the surrounding text.

Image Over Two Pages

There's a power in these lands,
one that's been here many years,
strong enough to make you stand
and forget all of your fears.
It started in the past with a blast of light and thunder;
ancient ones looked up and beheld the sky with wonder.

First Image Alt-Text: An indigenous man with long, black hair and brown eyes stands visible from the chest up. He looks up to towards the sky with a smile, his right palm open and facing upwards. Light casts a shadow to the left over his face. He wears a yellow buckskin robe with thick red squared lines and block patterns. Further back, a few feet behind him, an Indigenous woman with long, black flowing hair stands facing away from the man with her head tilted up towards the sky and her left arm held outwards with fingertips facing the ground. She wears a blue and green striped robe. In the background, there is a green field and a brown hill at the horizon. Dark blue clouds fill the sky with rain, and a single flash of white lightning. Pale blue and yellow pictographs of thunderbirds are in the clouds.

Second Image Alt-Text: This illustration is the continuation of the one before. The man's left hand is held upwards towards the sky. In the background, there is brown village complex that seems to be carved out of the ground. Behind it, there is a tall cliff. Above the cliff, there are brown clouds that mix with bigger, dark blue clouds above. A bolt of lightning shoots from the left side of the dark blue clouds, while on the right side, some stars are faintly visible in the sky. Inside the dark clouds, there is a yellow pictograph of a thunderbird, and a swirling gust of wind.

Images with Multiple Sections

Alt-Text: Two images side by side. In the first, Peanut stands with one arm up in the air and the other extended straight to the side. They point one foot forward and smile with their eyes closed. Curved motion lines arch over their head. In the second image, Peanut is upside down with their legs together above their head. They balance on one arm, with the other extended out to the side. They open their eyes with a wide smile. Curved motion lines arch over their feet.

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Character Description

You only have to describe a character in full the first time they appear, after this you can identify them by their name, or another feature such as an item of clothing, or a physical feature unique to

that character (e.g. the boy in the blue hat, the girl with the curly hair). Use pronouns only when it is clear to whom or what the pronoun refers. When describing characters, include skin colour. Please avoid comparing skin colour to a food or beverage. The following is a list of suggestions.

In order to be objective, we suggest using the following terminology to describe skin tone:

- Light Skin Tone
- Medium-Light Skin Tone
- Medium Skin Tone
- Medium-Dark Skin Tone
- Dark Skin Tone

Examples

The top half of this image is a photograph of a little girl and her mother and father sitting together on a couch and looking at an iPad. They have medium-dark skin tone and smile. On the bottom half of this image, there is an illustration of a little girl with red, braided hair and glasses. She has a light skin tone and wears a yellow dress with a yellow and red pattern across it over top of a blue, long-sleeved shirt. She hold one finger in front of her face as if she is about to ask a question, and in the other hand she holds a cell phone.

Scene Description

Begin a scene description from biggest details to smallest details. What is in the background, mid-ground, and foreground? Remember you don't have to describe everything in the scene, just what is important to the story. Also, if the scene is the same over more than one page, you only have to

describe it once.

Examples

A large pink blanket sits in the grass near the river surronded by bushes. A group of young First Nation boys and girls sit cross-legged in a circle on the blanket. A male elder stands above them with his hand out as he asks a question. Some of the kids raise their hands. Across the river Spirit Bear and Uncle Huckleberry peak out at the group from behind a blue berry bush.

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