

ELEMENTS OF NONFICTION: AUTHOR'S PURPOSE

Author's purpose is the reason why a writer writes. An author may write to explain a process, to describe a scene, to reflect on an idea, or, in the case of Diane Ackerman, to do all three. Her overall purpose in this essay is to explain why leaves turn color and fall from trees. To that end, she uses scientific terms.

A corky layer of cells forms at the leaves' slender petioles, then scars over. Undernourished, the leaves stop producing the pigment chlorophyll, and photosynthesis ceases.

Ackerman also wants to describe the beauty of autumn leaves, and to that end she uses poetic diction and **imagery**, words and phrases that re-create sensory experiences.

They glide and swoop, rocking in invisible cradles. They are all wing and may flutter from yard to yard on small whirlwinds or updrafts, swiveling as they go.

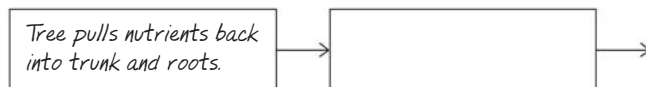
As you read, determine the main purpose of each paragraph—to explain, to describe, or to reflect.

READING SKILL: ANALYZE CAUSE AND EFFECT

Ackerman uses at least three **patterns of organization**:

- **cause and effect**, to explain a process
- **comparison and contrast**, to show likeness and difference
- **main idea and supporting details**, to present insights

As you read, look for cause-and-effect organization. Fill out two cause-and-effect chains—one to show why leaves turn color and another to show why they fall.



VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Diane Ackerman conveys the richness of her subject by using the following boldfaced words. Define each word.

1. **stealth** in her smooth, silent movement
2. a judge issuing an **edict** in the courtroom
3. an athlete, tall and **robustly** built
4. a painter's son, **predisposed** to the arts
5. **adaptation** of an animal to its environment
6. the monkey's **capricious**, unpredictable nature

Done It All Diane Ackerman considers herself a nature writer “if what we mean by Nature is . . . the full sum of Creation.” She has worked as a sports journalist and a crisis counselor as well as a writer-in-residence. She has dared to fly planes, scuba dive, swim with a whale, and sit on an alligator with its mouth taped shut. Naturally, she has written about all of these experiences. She often finds herself “in a state of complete rapture about a discipline or field,” which helps explain why science and natural history are so often incorporated into her work.



Diane Ackerman
born 1948

Science and Poetry Ackerman's interest in science began in childhood when she raised turtles and observed that plums hanging from a tree looked like bats. She lives in upstate New York on two acres of wooded land that includes a portion set aside for deer. She is an accomplished poet as well as a nature writer. One of her works is a verse play about Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, a 17th-century Mexican nun who was a poet and a scientist.

MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR
For more on Diane Ackerman, visit the Literature Center at ClassZone.com.