Here, three fifth graders worked on their voice and idea development skills as they wrote and revised these descriptions. Inspired by Stephen Kramer's introduction to his book Caves, these writers first focused in on what wasn't in their settings before they described what was.

Read all three descriptions. Then work with a partner to determine where you think each writer showed his best skill for both voice and idea development. Be prepared to share your ideas with the whole class.

Mexico Trip

by Justin, fifth grade writer

My dad and I went to Mexico for summer vacation. What were we doing in Mexico? Good question. My dad would not tell me.

When we pulled up to this place, I went cold. It was definitely not a mansion. It was not even a medium-sized house! We got out of the car. When we got in the house as tiny as a mouse hole, my jaw dropped immediately. There were no living plants, no lights, no clean walls or countertops and …..NO TELEVISION! I felt a tear in my eye.

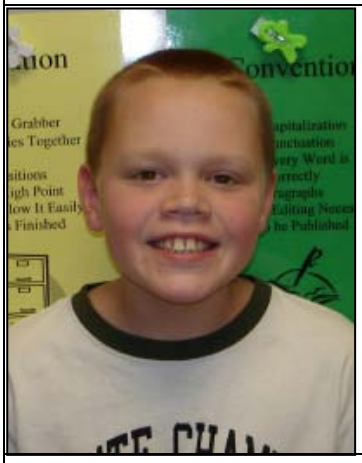
The beds were made out of pure stone. The toilets….you don't want to know. All of the nonliving plants were pure black. I finally blinked and tears came pouring out. My dad took me out on a hike to let me cool down, but it didn't work. I suffered in that cave my dad called a house for a month.

A Lake

by Faith, fifth grade writer

At the lake, when the sky darkens and the sun disappears, nobody is there to splash or jump in the water. The water sits still as if it were dead. You don't hear or see laughing or smiles. Nobody is talking, swimming or riding in boats. Nothing is heard. If you were to make a sound, it would only be repelled. The lake looks like a black hole in the earth as fog floats over it. Nobody would want to be at a lake on a dark gloomy night.

But then, the moon seems to flip and turn into the sun, and the trees seem to part, and the sun peers through the leaves and glimmers on the lake. After it rises, people come and the jump and splash in the lake. You hear laughing and talking. Smiles sprout out from the beams of sun, making your eyes water. But whether the sun rises or sets, it still is a lake.



The Mars Rover

by Joshua M., fifth grade writer

The planet had never been stepped on or known to have any life. No working probe had reached this world. Almost no one knew anything of the Red Planet until now.

If you were on Mars in the year of 2003, you could look up into the atmosphere and see an object parachuting down to you, even though nothing lives on Mars. The object was a space rover wrapped in a mechanical ball. When it unfolded, NASA had to direct it down the ramp. There was a big problem. The rover was too big and it wasn't facing the ramp. Finally, it made it down safe.

This was one small roll for the rover but one big step for mankind.

The lesson that inspired this writing can be found online at the WritingFix website:
http://writingfix.com/Picture_Book_Prompts/Caves1.htm