Pitchforking sounds

Plain sentence:

I was standing in the hallway by the corner of the classroom.

Pitchforked sounds:

Standing by the corner of the classroom, I could hear the usual, routine hallway sounds: the <u>slamming of one locker</u>, which can only be done in a loud way; the <u>click of a pencil</u>, almost like a mouse-click; the <u>squeaking of too-small shoes</u>; the <u>crinkling of paper</u>; <u>high voices of children</u> feeling lost, asking for help; and the <u>commanding voice of a teacher</u> counting down from five.

—Phillip Kaplan

PRACTICE THE CONVERSATION:

A: Will you read the plain sentence, please?

B: *I was standing in the hallway by the corner of the classroom.*

A: Okay. Now let's hear the same sentence, with pitchforked sounds.

B: *Standing by the corner of the classroom, I could hear the usual, routine hallway sounds: the slamming of one locker, which can only be done in a loud way; the click of a pencil, almost like a mouse-click; the squeaking of too-small shoes; high voices of children feeling lost, asking for help; and the commanding voice of a teacher counting down from five.*

A: Wow. How many sounds were listed there?

B: Let's see. The locker, pencil, shoes, voices. Lots.

A: Great sentence, isn't it? Do you notice anything unusual about the punctuation?

B: Yes. There's a colon, and the pitchforked sounds have semicolons between them.

A: Why do you think this writer used those? To join different sentences?

B: No. To separate the items in the series.

A: I thought we used commas for that.

B: We do. But look at this set of items. The sounds are so detailed that they already have commas in each one of them. So instead of using *more* commas, the writer switched to semicolons. It makes it clearer to see what goes with what.

A: Great explanation!

B: Thanks. You know I'm just reading this, don't you?

A: Reading what?