



Literary sketch can pack wallop

The literary sketch is a convenient form of literature in that, like poetry, it says a lot with few words. It is a brief outline of a person or an incident.

Either type of sketch, the character or the incident, will be most successful if the writer provides the reader with a thorough, specific view of the subject or the happening.

The creative writing students at Oakland Community College, Orchard Ridge Campus, Farmington Hills, under the direction of their instructor, Sandra Sutherland, have written these sketches.

To effectively convey the figurative design of exactly what we are outlining in the readers' mind, we need to describe in a logical sequential form that which we are describing. In other words, if one were describing a ballerina, one

would begin from the tip of her tiara to the toe of her shoes. It would be unwise and confusing to first describe the tiara, skip to the shoes and then describe the tutu.

The line the writer draws in the mind should flow as does a charcoal sketch from the chalk to the paper. The term character sketch is self-descriptive. A person is drawn with words; to be able to do this, a writer needs to be very observant. The tiniest, slightest nuances must be captured. Looking and really seeing is the key.

From the description of obvious physical traits (calm hazel eyes), to the body posturing (her head tilted sideways as she spoke), to facial expressions (wine lines creased her lips), to mannerisms (she moved her hands so quickly, they looked like little birds), all detail is important.

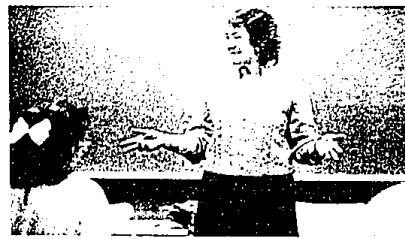
A SKETCH employing action is in some senses more difficult than a character sketch. Action verbs need to be employed and the flow of action needs to be sequential also. The reader should see a movie in his or her mind — a movie drawn by the words of the writer. Mood will be conveyed by word choice: Contrast "happily walked in" with "stormily burst in;" contrast "dancing lightly to the music" with "struggling with great difficulty to keep up with the beat."

It all depends on what the writer wants to say. How does the writer see the scene? What mood does the writer wish to convey?

In the noteworthy book, "The Art of Fiction," by John Gardner (Vintage Books, Random House, 1983), Gardner talks about the importance of description:

If we carefully inspect our experience as we read, we discover that the importance of physical detail is that it creates for us a kind of dream, a rich and vivid play in the mind. . . . We find ourselves seeing not words on a page but a train moving through Russia, an old Italian crying, or a farmhouse battered by rain. We read on — we dream on — not passively but actively, worrying about the choices the characters have to make.

Gardner is getting at the core of the matter: A writer creates a movie in the mind of the reader. The script is the text; the text may be as brief as a character/incident sketch. Power can be found in brevity if the words are well chosen.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Sandra Sutherland teaches creative writing at Oakland Community College Orchard Ridge Campus. Her students composed the accompanying sketches as part of a class assignment.

— Victoria Day Najjar

Victoria Day Najjar is a

Farmington resident, teacher of journalism at Bloomfield Hills Andover High School and is a nationally published poet.

I Remember Christmas

By Grace Womack
special writer

Always special, and always the same, Christmas was typified by the one when I was 10 years old.

I woke on that morning about 3 a.m. Did I hear the sound of hooves on the rooftop? He must be near; I listened, but heard nothing. My greatest fear was that he'd get stuck in the chimney, or burn up in the furnace in the basement when he slid down. We had no fireplace, but mom assured me he would simply appear magically in the living room. Mom knew everything about Christmas, and in my trusting naivete, I believed her.

We had a longstanding rule, a ritual as you could say: my brothers and I were to remain upstairs on Christmas morning until mom called "Merry Christmas" to us. I never questioned that thing; it added suspense to the whole experience.

That suspense was tangible, the anticipation almost unbearable. I had waited a whole year for this

night; now it was here. I wanted to share my excitement with my brothers. How could they sleep? Growling out of my warm bed, I scarcely noticed my feet touching the cold tile floor. Certain it was still early, I tiptoed to my older brother's room. "Dave . . . ?" Nothing but heavy breathing. I turned to my younger brother's room. Dennis would help me wake up Dave. "Dennis," I whispered loudly.

"Huh? What?"
"It's almost time. C'mon, get up."
He jumped up suddenly. "What time is it?"
"Shh! I don't know. Let's wake up Dave."

DENNIS NEVER could be quiet. At 8 years old, he was a chunky steamroller in Davy Crockett pajamas. He jumped on Dave's bed, his added weight causing the springs to creak under the assault. "Hey, Dave, get up."
"Huh? What are you guys doing?" Dave mumbled.

"It's almost Christmas," Dennis

tried to whisper, "but we don't know what time it is."

Dave groaned as he started to get out of bed. "It's probably too early." At his age, he had begun to lose some of his youthful enthusiasm over Christmas. "Okay, I'll call TIME." Dave was the only one who could dial the numbers in the dark. He was 14; he could do anything.

Finding it only "three-fifteen, and twenty seconds," we sat on Dave's bed, waiting until Mom called us downstairs to open our presents.

"Umm, I smell turkey," Dennis said. His mind always on food, he asked, "Do you think Mom would hear me if I snuck downstairs and got a piece?"

"You can't do that!" I was appalled. "You might see the presents."

"I won't peek. I'm hungry!"
"You can wait," Dave closed the subject. "What do you think Santa brought you?"

"I asked him for a B-B gun. Do you think I'll get it?"

"I don't know, maybe; but you know how mom feels about guns." "Yeah. Maybe I'll get a new bike." "I wouldn't count on it. Santa is

kind of poor this year," Dave said knowingly.

"How do you know?" I asked. He hesitated, then said, "Mom told me."

"Oh," I said, satisfied. "Do you think he can afford to bring me the roller skates I asked for?"
"Maybe. I just hope I get the chemistry set I want."

THE MINUTES passed slowly. The TIME-lady reported to us in her sing-song voice at several intervals. Forty-five minutes later, we heard dad grumble, "It's only four, and the kids are already awake."

Then mom's soft voice. "They've been up for some time. I'll fix you a cup of coffee."

"I guess two hours sleep is better than none," he sighed. "I'll turn on the tree lights."

We held our breaths. It was time! We ran to the steps just above the landing where mom couldn't see us, and waited.

The tree lights twinkled below, flashing brightly in the darkened living room, beckoning to us three like the Star of the East.

Man in the Dermatologist's Office

By Gretchen Federlein
special writer

I heard a "fump" as the bottom of the door slid across the gray carpet and settled into its frame.

He walked into the room and chose a chair in the center of the gray-painted wall, peeling up a New Yorker from the magazine table on the way with all the skill and ease of a pickpocket. He sat on the edge of the seat and began to read. His powerful fingers moved the paper like each page was a small child that needed to be held.

He smiled. His lips separated to expose round, childlike teeth, the kind "your head grows into." His head had grown into them. His hair was reckless, and every few minutes, his hand instinctively reminded the part that touched the bottom of his scarf to behave.

He wore a tan mock-turtle and tattered jeans with genuine rips in the knees. His legs were muscular

and slightly bowed, as if his knees were separate and wanted nothing to do with each other. Rounded feet poked out of the bottom of his jeans in Reeboks.

STILL READING intensely, he pushed up one cotton sleeve, exposing thick muscles tapering to a flat, wide wrist. An antique looking, black-and-silver watch wrapped itself around the wrist.

"Clay Cosgrove," said the woman. A big-boned mouse in a white uniform waited, clipboard in hand, in the doorway. He rose, running his hands down his thighs. Absentmindedly, he looked around the room. His eyes were soft and searching, with thick lazy eyebrows to protect them. I thought he almost looked at me, and my insides did a grand jete en tournez. He patted his jingling pockets, turned on one heel and walked out after the white whale.

I went back to reading.

inkwell

Inkwell provides primary and secondary school news and information about Farmington-area students. The column appears monthly throughout the year as part of the Observer's "School Page." Send news items to: The School Page, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River, Farmington 48024. Include a telephone number where a person can be reached during the day.

● **SPECIAL PILOT**
Power Middle School teacher Marlene Angelo is piloting a Philosophy for Children program. The novel "Harry Stillemeier" provided a basis for classroom discussion, which centered around issues of fairness, patriotism, ambiguities, jumping to conclusions and use of inquiry in reasoning.

● **EXCHANGE STUDENT**
Jenni Talagrand, a junior at North Farmington High School, is leaving this month to be an exchange student in Australia as part of the Youth for Understanding program. Talagrand earned money for her trip baby-sitting, as a carrier for the Farmington Observer and working at Little Caesars Pizza.

● **THEY'RE WINNERS**
Three Farmington Hills residents were among the top 1,000 high school students in the state on the first part of the Michigan Mathematics Prize Competition. All are students at Detroit Country Day School, Beverly Hills.

● **NEW EMPLOYEES**
Several employees were hired during the fall months by Farmington Public Schools. All were support personnel.

In November, the following staff members were hired: Patricia Baers, special education assistant at William Grace Elementary; Mary DiCicco, teacher/noon aide at Eagle Elementary; Lydia Drelles, secretary for the district architect; Karen Fluh, special education aide at Farmington Training Center; and Denise McCarthy, office/noon aide at Longacre Elementary.

In December, seven additional employees were added to the payroll: Judy Chin, paraprofessional at the Farmington Training Center; Hamid Dana, Japanese bilingual aide at East Middle School; Norma Goers, bookkeeper/secretary at central office; Ljuka Juncal, Albanian bilingual aide at East Middle School; Lynn Levin, social worker at Oll Elementary and Duncel and Warner middle schools; Flora Perkins, special education paraprofessional at Alameda Early Childhood Center; and Leslie Stevens, paraprofessional at Harrison High School.

● **STEPPING DOWN**
Two Farmington Public Schools employees announced their retirements during the fall.

Violet Kopacki, a secretary in maintenance/operations retired in October and Grace Waack, a bookkeeper in central office will retire in February.

● **STUDENT LIAISON**
Drew McDougall, president of the Student Round Table for the 1987-88 school year, is attending regular Farmington Board of Education meetings to report on his group's activities.

McDougall is a senior at Farmington High School.

● **STUDENT FEATURED**
Candace Simon, speech and language pathologist at East Middle School and Farmington High School, was featured in the fall 1987 issue of the Michigan Speech and Hearing Association Journal.

She wrote an article titled "Factors Affecting Treatment of Chronic Stuttering."

● **PARENTS SHARE**
Three parents from Duncel Middle School shared their expertise recently with the Farmington school's Home Economics Department.

Chocolate painting, Williamsburg decorating and plantain cooking experiences were shared with students. The department is trying to use more parent contacts in the classes when appropriate, according to teacher Barbara Carlson.

● **THEY GIVE**
Money raised recently by the Farmington Public Schools transportation department went to help needy people in the Farmington area.

The fund-raiser is self-supporting without expense, and 100 percent of the money goes to a list of people

provided by the Special Services Department of Farmington Hills. It is supported by local merchants, school employees and other providers, according to a release from the schools.

● **GOOD CHOICE**
With the rush of the holidays over and the winter months ahead, children will look for activities to occupy their time.

Reading is an excellent choice, say employees of the Huntington Learning Center, a private company in Farmington Hills.

Reading improves thinking and listening skills; it improves the ability to draw conclusions, to solve problems and to make decisions," said Vivienne Manwaring, the center's director.

She suggests parents begin reading to a child at a young age to help the child value reading. Other suggestions: Set aside time to read to your child and set aside a special place to read. Reward reading activities, and praise attempts.

"All children, regardless of age, enjoy having their own subscription to a magazine or book club," she said. "It makes them more responsible and aware of the importance of reading materials."

● **FINANCIAL AID**
Fifty-four colleges and universities across Michigan will simultaneously televise information about student financial aid on Thursday, Jan. 21 at 7:15 p.m.

Called "Student Financial Aid: Putting It to Work for You," the 52-minute program was praised as a "unique approach" by interim state superintendent Gary Hawks.

This is a "first" for the Department of Education, and we are pleased to offer this information in a televised form," he said.

Twenty-four of the sites will be satellite downlink sites and the remaining 30 will air the program as a tape replay.

State officials suggest preservations. The following colleges in the Farmington area will air the program:

● Madonna College, Livonia. Call Chris Ziegler at 591-5036.
● Lawrence Institute of Technology in Southfield. Call Paul Kinder at 356-0200.
● Oakland Community College, Farmington Hills. Call Cathy Archer at 471-7539.
● Schoolcraft College, Livonia. Call John Tomey at 591-5400.

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Sale ends January 24th. Lord & Taylor, Fairlane—336-3100 Lakeside—247-4500 Twelve Oaks—348-3400 Brierwood Mall—665-4500 All open Monday to Saturday 10 to 9 Sunday 12 to 6