

Building a Scene

Snapshots



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with adaptations by Shelly Durham 2014
Adapted from Barry Lane's *After THE END* (1993)



Compare and **contrast** the sentences below.

Jessica is tall and thin with long red hair.

Jessica is nearly six feet tall and built like a track star with long wavy fire-engine red locks framing her freckled face.



Compare and **contrast** the sentences below.

The living room is warm and cozy.

A fire crackles in front of the suede sofa as papa strums his guitar and we sip hot cocoa.



“Writers are like photographers with giant zoom lenses, observing life in incredibly fine detail, pulling back to make sweeping generalizations, then zooming in again to make those generalizations come alive with detail.”

—Barry Lane



What is a snapshot in writing?

Writers have magic cameras they can point at the world to create snapshots containing smells and sounds as well as colors and light.

Snapshot: written description that captures sharp physical details—smells, sounds, colors, and light



Sketch a Person

Writers often describe characters in a few sentences similar to the quick drawings artists make in their sketchbooks. The goal is to say as much as possible about a person with a few well chosen details.



Examples of sketching a person from literature:

Mr. Brunner was this middle-aged guy in a motorized wheelchair. He had thinning hair and a scruffy beard and a frayed tweed jacket, which always smelled like coffee.

—Rick Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*



Examples of sketching a person from literature:

A giant of a man was standing in the doorway. His face was almost completely hidden by a long, shaggy mane of hair and a wild, tangled beard, but you could make out his eyes, glinting like black beetles under all the hair.

—J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*



Examples of sketching a person from literature:

She wore an off-white dress so long it covered her shoes. It had ruffles around the neck and cuffs and looked like it could have been her great-grandmother's wedding gown. Her hair was the color of sand. It fell to her shoulders. Something was strapped across her back. At first I thought it was a miniature guitar. I found out later it was a ukulele.

—Jerry Spinelli, *Stargirl*



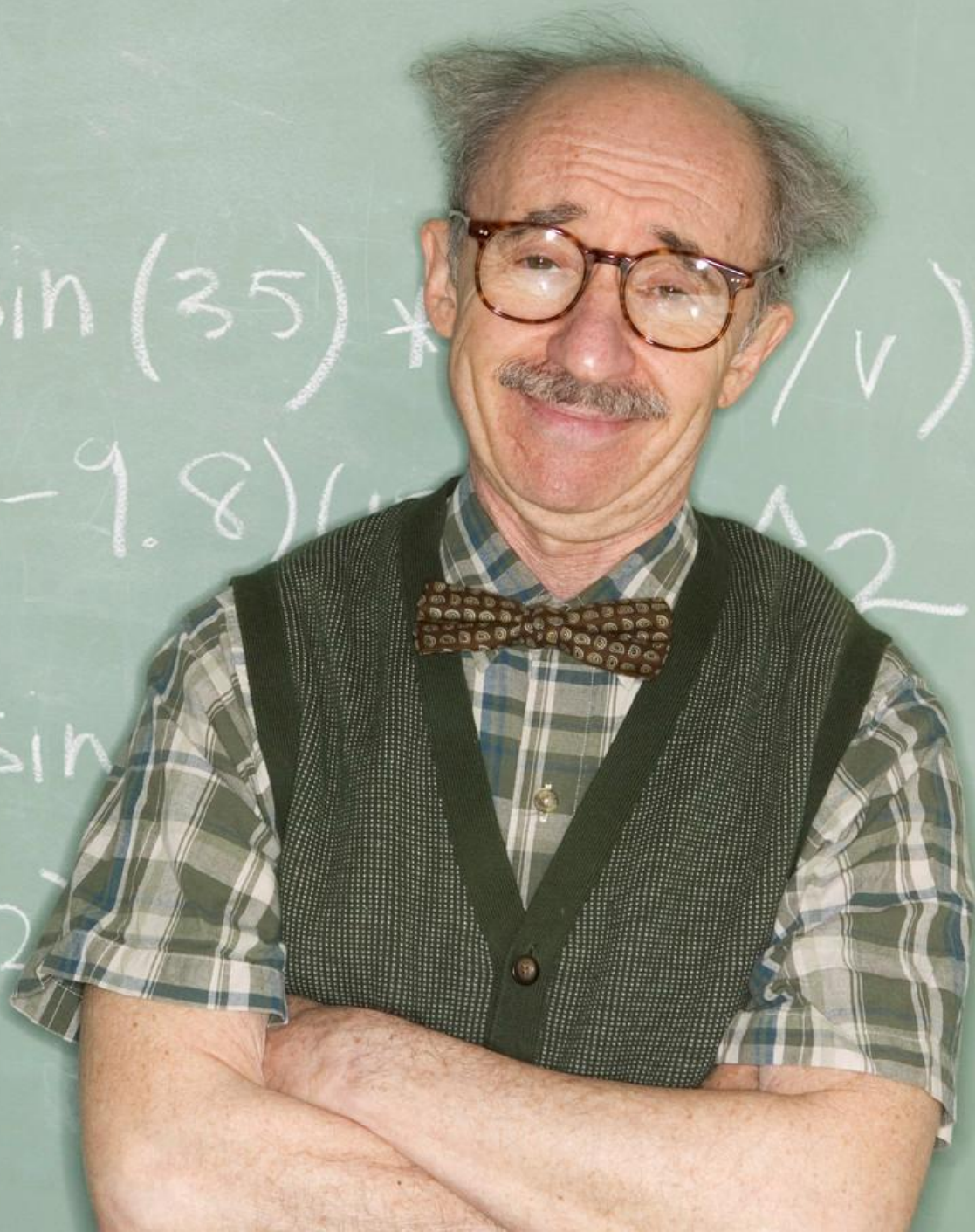
Examples of sketching a person from literature:

Soda is handsomer than anyone else I know. Not like Darry—Soda’s movie-star kind of handsome, the kind that people stop on the street to watch go by. He’s not as tall as Darry, and he’s a little slimmer, but he has a finely drawn, sensitive face that somehow manages to be reckless and thoughtful at the same time. He’s got dark-gold hair that he combs back—long and silky and straight—and in the summer the sun bleaches it to a shining wheat-gold. His eyes the dark brown—lively, dancing, recklessly laughing eyes that can be gentle and sympathetic one moment and blazing with anger the next.

—S.E. Hinton, *The Outsiders*







$$20 = (v) \sin(35) + 0.5(-9.8)(v/v)^2 +$$

$$v^2 = (\sin(35) \cdot 159)^2 + (-9.8)^2$$



Sketch a Place

When writers introduce a setting, they often create a sketch of a place. With a few quick “strokes,” they capture concrete details and evoke a mood or personality or aura beyond what’s physically there.



Examples of sketching a place from literature:

The wind suddenly fell and then veered round to the south. The swift-floating clouds lifted and melted away, and the sun came out, pale and bright. There came a cold clear dawn at the end of a long stumbling night-march. The travelers reached a low ridge crowned with ancient holly-trees whose grey-green trunks seemed to have been built out of the very stone of the hills. Their dark leaves shone and their berries glowed red in the light of the rising sun.

—J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*



Examples of sketching a place from literature:

I got the west bedroom that faced out over the front yard. The room was familiar; it had belonged to me since I was born. The wooden floor, the light blue walls, the peaked ceiling, the yellowed lace curtains around the window—these were all a part of my childhood. The only changes Charlie had ever made were switching the crib for a bed and adding a desk as I grew. The desk now held a secondhand computer, with the phone line for a modem stapled along the floor to the nearest phone jack. This was a stipulation from my mother, so that we could stay in touch easily. The rocking chair from my baby days was still in the corner.

—Stephenie Meyer, *Twilight*



Examples of sketching a place from literature:

Being careful not to wake Johnny up, I went to sit on the steps and smoke a cigarette. The dawn was coming up then. All the lower valley was covered with mist, and sometimes little pieces of it broke off and floated away in small clouds. The sky was lighter in the east, and the horizon was a thin golden line. The clouds changed from gray to pink, and the mist was touched with gold. There was a silent moment when everything held its breath and then the sun rose. It was beautiful.

—S.E. Hinton, *The Outsiders*









Sketch an Object

Now that you know how to create vivid snapshots in your writing of people and places, apply those same descriptive skills as you describe an object. Remember, sensory details appeal to our five senses.



Examples of sketching an object from literature:

Two-Bit reached into his back pocket for his prize possession. It was a jet-handled switchblade, ten inches long, that would flash open at a mere breath. It was the reward of two hours of walking aimlessly around a hardware store to divert suspicion. He kept it razor sharp. As far as I knew, he had never pulled it on anyone.

—S.E. Hinton, *The Outsiders*



Examples of sketching an object from literature:

Compact means small. I am small. I also like the way it sounds when you say it: com-pact. Saying the word makes a sound like the one the artifact itself makes when it snaps shut.

I run my finger across the letters ACM and numbers 1940 carved across the golden surface. “But look,” I tell him, popping the compact open to show him the inside: a little mirror, made of real glass, and a small hollow where the original owner once stored powder for her face...

—Ally Condie, *Matched*





