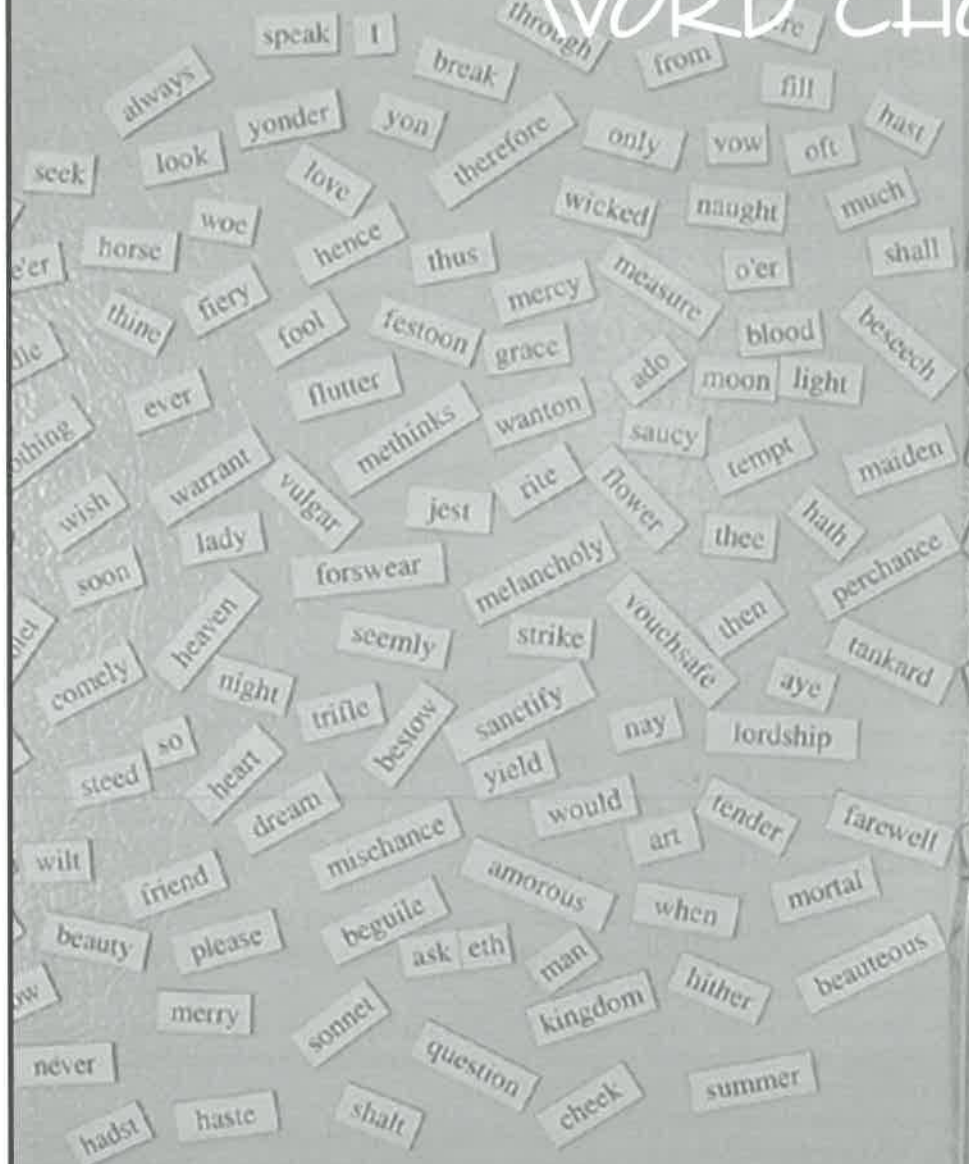


WORD CHOICE



*"It is not unusual words that count but
unusual combinations of usual words."*

Hart Day Leavitt



TEACHER TALK: SIMILE LESSONS

BETSY LASCH, New Prague Middle School

Eighth graders in the New Prague Middle School spend a good deal of time reading and writing similes. The concepts of simile and metaphor are discussed in connection with several different short stories. Many stories would certainly be appropriate for discussion and recognition of these literary devices, but we find that several Ray Bradbury stories ("All Summer in a Day" and "Hail and Farewell") and Truman Capote's "Christmas Memory" contain many excellent similes. After various activities connected with the stories and their figurative language, we attempt to write similes of our own. We stress the idea that good similes are unique and make fresh comparisons; we won't accept clichés.

Over the years, I have developed a system that seems to help the students produce unique similes. I begin by modeling the process with the entire class, and then each student uses the process to develop their own similes. I often supply the topic for the model. In this case I chose the subject of "mosquito" [figure 1]. The topic is written in the box in the upper left of the diagram. As a group we then brainstorm qualities of that subject. I stress that we need to think about all of the senses as we brainstorm, not just appearance. In the example with "mosquito", we identified the following qualities: a mosquito sucks blood; it is annoying; it causes a person to itch; a mosquito buzzes; a mosquito is tiny and light. After we brainstorm this list of characteristics, I cover up the word "mosquito", and the students are asked to brainstorm other things that have the same qualities as the initial list. They must forget about "mosquito" for a while, and I will not accept any responses that even come close to insects. For example, alarm clocks buzz. A drill can buzz. Gossipers buzz. A school bell makes a buzzing sound. We continue brainstorming until we have responses in all of the circles. [figure 1]

It is now possible to put together unique similes. We uncover the word "mosquito" and match it with the brainstormed qualities in order to create similes.

Examples: The mosquito buzzes like my alarm clock in the morning. The mosquito buzzes like a group of 8th grade girls who are gossiping. The mosquito itches like insulation. The mosquito is as annoying as my little brother.

Many similes can be generated from the chart. After students construct the initial similes, I ask them to expand the similes to specific situations in order make the comparison clearer.

Examples: The mosquito buzzing around my head was as annoying as my little brother when he wants to play catch with the football. The mosquitoes buzzed as loud as a group of 8th grade girls spreading the latest gossip.

This process generates unique similes. After enough experience, the students don't have to use a graphic organizer [figure 2], but the process helps them to think of unique comparisons.

Student examples:

My dog's paws scratch like tree branches in a thick woods. -Sara Meyer

The homecoming football game was as crowded as a shopping mall on Christmas Eve.

-Crystal Strawhacker

The butterfly landed on the grass like a delicate Japanese kite. -Danielle Thomas

The waves of an ocean blow like weeds in high winds. -Susan Nytes

My cat is as annoying as a cell phone at the movies. -Lacey Lange

Hockey is as intense as a teacher when you don't have your homework done.

-Kirsten Hauser

The multi-colored buttons on the delicate concertina were as complicated as a radio switchboard.

-Tim Chlan

The bird flew out of the cage like spitballs being thrown across the classroom. -Megan Bruzek

The bird sat in its cage looking like a mass murderer in a high security jail cell. -Megan Bruzek

Katie's braces with their newly changed rubber bands were as colorful as a deep-sea, tropical fish.

-Jill Olson

A hockey game is as fast as water running in a sewer during a thunderstorm. -Kevin Cassidy

The carabiners clicking against the rock are as loud as an old lady's false teeth when she's eating.

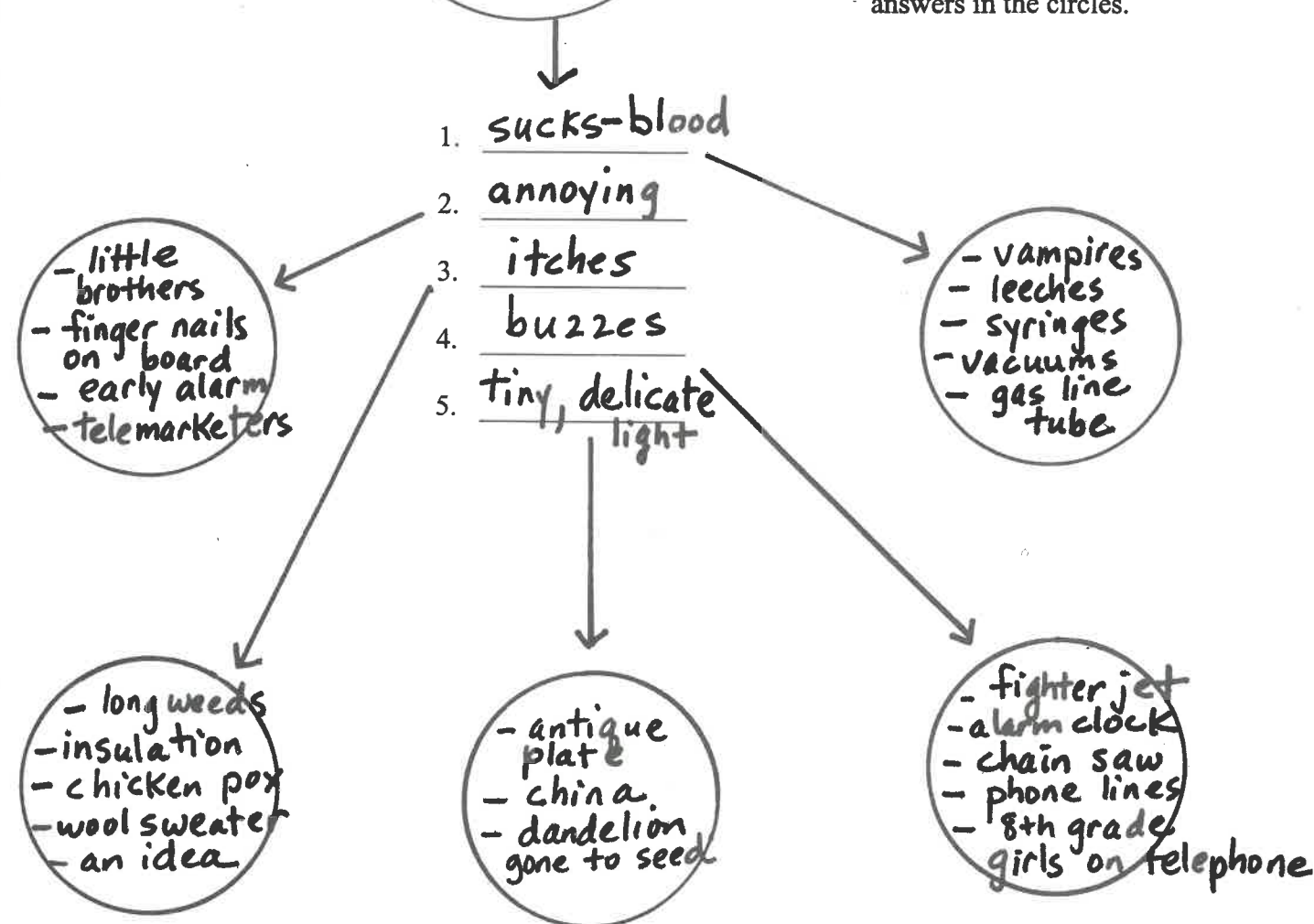
-Ashley Lehman

mosquito

Subject you want to write about.

Qualities, actions, characteristics.

Forget the topic: Brainstorm other things with same qualities. Write your answers in the circles.



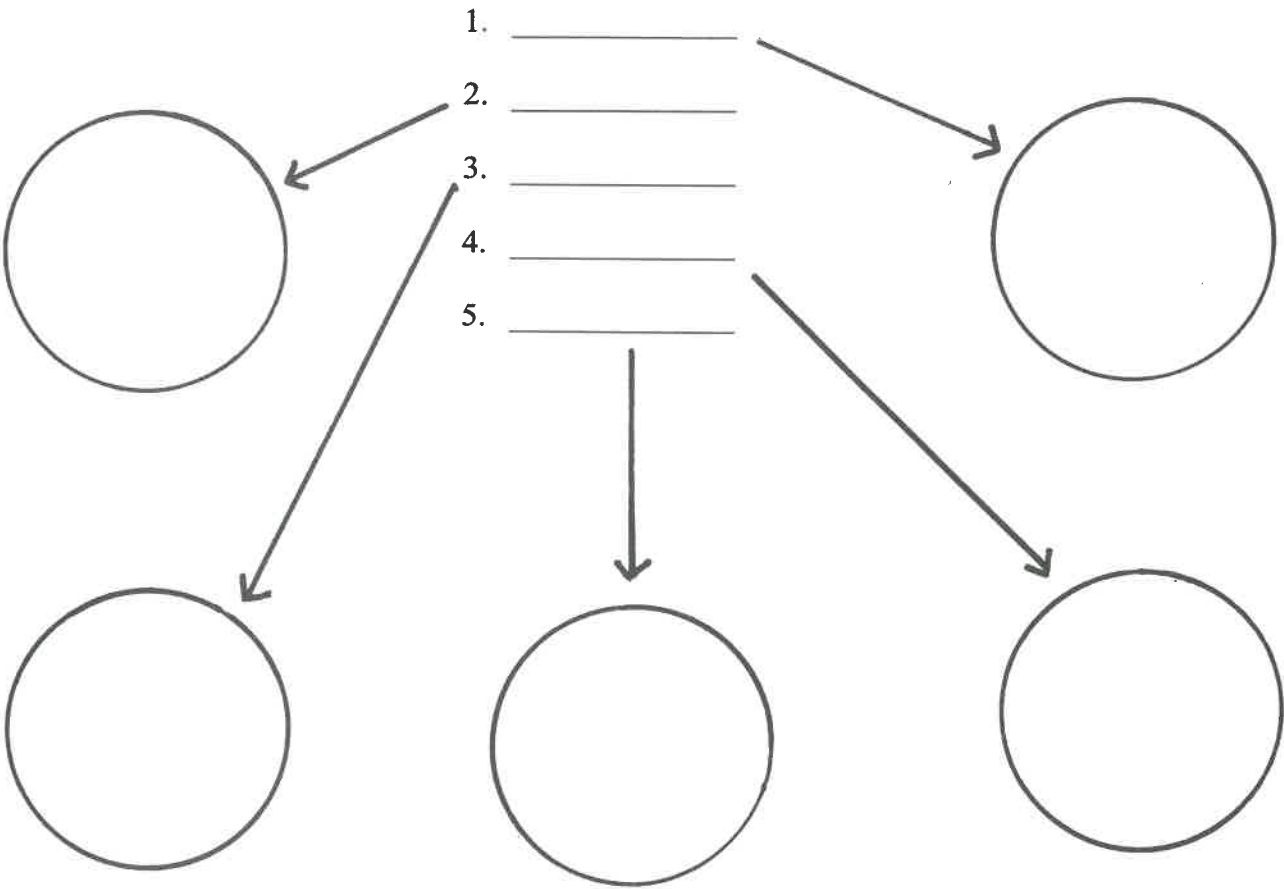
Write your similes:

The mosquito buzzing my head is as annoying as telemarketers at dinner time.
The mosquito is as delicate as my aunt's antique plate.

Subject you want to write about.

Qualities, actions, characteristics.

Forget the topic: Brainstorm other things with same qualities. Write your answers in the circles.



Write your similes:

EXTENDING THE LESSON

After studying similes, the students were asked to write a poem that described an emotion. The model was a student-written poem found in *Read Magazine*. Using a pattern from the model poem, students substituted their own emotions and ideas.

Title (The emotion)

(Give name of emotion) is (name a color).

It smells like _____

It tastes like _____

It looks like _____

It sounds like _____

It feels like _____

Loneliness

Loneliness is gray.
It smells like the musty pages of an old yearbook.
It tastes like sour milk.
It looks like a robin that's been left behind on the flight south.
It sounds like your voice echoing back to you.
It feels like a full room with no one to talk to.
Trisha Benson

Fear

Fear is so black you cannot see through it.
It has the coppery taste of blood in your mouth.
Fear smells like dark soot mixed with your own sweat.
Fear looks like a looming shadow darting just out of sight.
Fear feels like a cold, unfamiliar breath down the back of your neck.
Fear sounds like a twig snapped behind you by a huge foot.
Matt Kane

Boredom

Boredom is dull-gray.
It smells like the dust of an old social book.
It tastes like non-salted crackers.
It looks like a deserted room.
It sounds like the constant slamming of the screen door in the wind.
It feels like my foot is asleep.
Jill Olson

Relaxation

Relaxation is a blue-green color.
It smells like wood smoke from a backyard bonfire with my family.
It tastes like fresh, warm cinnamon rolls.
It looks like your own bed after a long trip.
It sound like an old hymn on the piano.
It feels like the fleece blanket that you got for Christmas.
Kristi Peterson

Happiness

Happiness is baby blue.
It smells like the cool spring air in the morning.
It tastes like a big glass of ice cold lemonade on a hot summer day.
It looks like the sunset over the lake in the summer.
It sounds like grandma cooking breakfast in the morning.
It feels like Christmas when everyone is having fun.
Nick Heinen

THE MUSIC OF LOVE: POEMS FOUND IN LYRICS

DAYDREAMING

DANIELLE SORENSEN, Osseo Learning Center

Why do you want to turn your back on love?
Please tell me you haven't given up
Baby, give me one more chance
To make a true romance.

I'm trying to do some things that'll make you proud
You always were the one to show me how
You know I love you
And it's all right if you love me

I want to always be with you
I promise I will always be true
Thinking about you all day long
Love is blind, it'll take over your mind

I tremble when you touch my lips
When we start to kiss, it's marvelous
Softly you whisper, you're so sincere

I dream about us being together forever
I picture tears running down my cheeks
Happy thoughts running through my head
As you whisper, "Lord, with this ring I thee wed."

Tell me you love me
Tell me you will always be mine
Maybe I'm crazy
But Baby, you're the right kind of wrong.

TEACHER TALK

STEPHEN SMARJESSE, Osseo Learning Center

As an alternative to writing their own love poems, students were asked to collect lyrics from songs about love. Students searched for appropriate lyrics from different types of music, from various recording artists, and from different decades. Each student wrote down four lines from four different songs.

Students shared their 16 lines with classmates by passing them around the room. As they read the choices of other students, they copied down single lines which they found attractive because of unusual word choice, strong metaphor, or pleasing rhythm. From this collection of 20 or more lines, students selected the most interesting or unique phrases and combined them to form an original poem. Each new poem included lyrics from as many as 15 different songs.

IS THIS LOVE?

AMY KENNETH, Osseo Learning Center

Ever since we met, you've had a hold on me
I think of you every step of the way
I've stretched myself beyond my means
And I don't care if we only spend moments
a day

Is this love?

Love rain down on me,
All I want is all you want.
Please know my heart is in your hands
Life is too short so love the one you got.

Is this love?

I'm falling deeper than the ocean
Hold me; love me;
Let me kiss off that falling tear
I give all my love.

Is this love?

MY LOVE

ALLEN BRYANT, Osseo Learning Center

Life is short
let my love wipe away that falling tear.
Your words touch my heart
let me love you twice a day
my heart beats deeply after every kiss.
Close your eyes let my love take over your
mind.

My girl is the angel of my life.
Will she take my life
or will she take my heart?
Your love blinds my eyes
but will my angel love me or let me fall?
Life is short
let me wipe away that falling tear.

STITCHES, SEAMS, & HANDS

MERCEDES BURNS, Richfield High School, grade 11

When they came together, their meeting was like the perfect joining of hands.

Simplicity reinforced that bond, that strange, pure, magical energy that knit them together, like a pair of sweater sleeves secured to the body of the garment by some doting hand.

That, stated plainly, was their connection — one came from the left, another from the right... but they always met in the middle of things. And stitch by stitch, those gentle hands went to work, pulling together all their loose ends and ragged holes, forming the new seams, and strengthening them overall.

For what are sleeves without their sweater?

They are like stray hands, with no body, no purpose, no work.

Nothing to do, and no one to hold.

There had always been something about his form, his eyes, the very set of his shoulders, that told her, "You know me. You know what I am. Nothing more, nothing less."

She had learned to look for and trust in these unspoken words in his countenance and frame, for they told her what his lips often would not say. But there came a time when, little by little, she could not read him like she read the many books on her shelf. And, when she looked into his eyes, noted his tense shoulders and neck, and, finally, when she saw his hands become useless and idle, and creep to their pockets, defeated, she knew.

Something had gone wrong.

Rough hands were rending their careful seams asunder.

Determined to save those suddenly fragile stitches, she plumbed the depths of her heart, soul, and mind, speaking to him of her dreams, her desires, and most of all, her love, but he listened with one ear only. He did not know how her longings came, as she lay awake late into the night, eyes fever-bright with wanting for the feather-light touch of his hands, as temperate as the hands that had made *he* and *she* ...

... into *they*.

And so, confused and hurt as she was, she sat down one day with a sheet of paper and pencil in hand and decided she would write down every good and unique thing that she loved about him. And in doing so, she hoped, she would learn how to repair a ripped seam.

She put pencil to paper, expecting a sudden rush of thoughts to overtake her. But all she could think of

... were his hands.

His hands.

Here were the nails he kept so clean and neat. Here were the scars he had earned in his diligent work. Here were the cuts he had received after playing guitar until his fingers bled. Here were the fingers that had many times stroked her shoulder so tenderly. Here were the tools of his creation.

All the things she loved best about him were right there, in his hands.

She realized now that she had been wrong. Her own hands alone were not enough to mend what had come undone between them. Finished stitches — of the sort that would last a long time — required both of their hands, working together.

And so she came to him.

And she told him

that, without him,

she was like a sweater

With no sleeves

and a body

with empty hands.

With nothing to do,

and no one to hold.

And he told her, that, although one came from the left and one from the right, sometimes they would need to join hands to meet in the middle of things.

For she was the purpose of his hands,

and he needed her

desperately.

And the meeting of their bodies was like the perfect joining of hands.

THE WATCHMAN

MEGAN EAGEN, John Marshall High, grade 11

Marking time under haunted moon—
Hanging cleft from scaffold sky—
Shadows cast by rotting sun
Descend upon the earth to fly

Join with Watchman pointing West
And turn with the river, slow and deep
Its pace, arrested by the night,
Prolongs the Time the waters keep

Oh how subtle is the wind
Whose chill hands play what sound forsakes
As falling softly, on silver-lined shores
Like shattered glass the surface breaks

As darkness spreads its velvet cloak
The Watchman slowly turns his face
And in this hour of light and dark
The sun and moon at last embrace

Weaving and bending 'neath star-lit skies
The skeletal branches of aspen and pine
Cast shadow on shadow upon the earth
In the forgotten dance of a younger time

Once again the Watchman turns,
This time to veneer the eastern rise
Play one last tune upon your lute
Under comforting shadow of dragon-spanned skies

The tolling bell seeks passage of time—
The sky remarks by distant light—
Rise up from your sleep's inspiration and dreams
And wait once again for haunted night

TEACHER TALK

STEPHEN SMARJESSE, Osseo Learning Center

The use of similes, metaphors, and other types of figurative language is obvious in poetry, but can also enliven descriptive writing. In preparation for writing longer fiction, students were asked to write a character sketch. The writers began by choosing a person and filling in a matrix with descriptive details about physical appearance and personality. This was followed by a review of effective metaphors and similes. Students began by selecting distinctive details from the completed matrix and then composing sentences around those details; some of the sentences included metaphors or similes. These key sentences served as the basis for the paragraphs describing the person. Having practiced character description, students were directed to apply these techniques to a longer narrative.

BRIAN

ROBYN MEYER, Osseo Learning Center

Brian has a physical appearance that would make anybody look his way. He has a shaved head and blue eyes that are like shining stars in the midnight sky. Tattoos are painted onto his body. One of his tattoos is very special to me because it is our son's name with a crown above it. His other tattoo is his initials with a cross that he did himself. That brings in one of his talents, which is his art. A rainbow is how I would describe Brian's art: colorful, different, and mysterious. Brian's voice is an exploding volcano if he is angry or excited. When it is ready to erupt; it rumbles loudly. His appetite contradicts his body size, but he can handle anything. His clothes hang off of his body like a weeping willow touching her fingers to the ground. He has teeth that are as white as fresh snow. Brian's smile lights up even the darkest room at night.

Not only does Brian have a great smile, he also has the personality to match it. People don't get to see the side of him that I know. When he has nothing to give, he still gives all he can. Brian is as nice as a sunny day. He is willing to help, but only if you are the right person.

Brian's habits are a bear. So cute and cuddly, but if you encounter one in a bad mood, scary. Some of his habits are not good ones. His room is a tornado. Brian is a messy person. He has one habit that I think is a good one, and that is hanging out with me.

RACHEL

DOUG WILSON, Osseo Learning Center

Rachel Voight's hair looks like a flower that's been turned upside down. It has the shape of a flower because it blossoms out at the bottom. Because Rachel is always wearing a big white winter coat, she looks like a marshmallow. When she's sitting down, she always unzips her coat and removes it for some reason. She moves like a steady and graceful machine, and she sits leaned forward when she writes. The look on her face is never very serious or happy. Rachel is very consistent, never sporadic or random.

Rachel is a very relaxed person who is never fidgety or hyper. She acts and speaks mellow, not real quick like she's about to explode. If you ever have something you need to say, remember that she is a good listener. She isn't at all the shallow type of girl. So that she can do the fun things later, she knows how to stay focused and get her work done. Rachel is a good friend.

DOWN MAIN STREET

CHARLIE BUFFIE, St. Louis Park High School, grade 11

The rickety bus blasted by me, headed north down Main Street, kicking dust into my eyes and spewing noxious gasoline fumes into the air. You could practically taste the stench of sulfur, which permeated the air every three minutes or so as a bus barreled down the street. The locals said the buses ran every eight minutes, but ever since I had arrived in Cancun, it seemed like the parade of "Autocars" had never ceased.

Cancun, Mexico is a city with a convoluted identity, rooted in the traditions of the ancient Mayans, but built with the dollars of modern day tourists. Where humble Mayan villages once stood, monolithic hotel complexes are now erected. These pristine fortresses of capitalism look so clean and ripe, you can almost smell the wet paint. They carpet the island like a hideous moss, intermittently spewing a load of sunburned visitors from far away lands who reek of chlorine and Hawaiian Tropic. And while these deep-fried foreigners are in one of the most beautiful places in the world, all they can think of is the next item on their itinerary.

The artery through which this mass of humanity flows is a single main street running straight down the middle of the island, along which buses barrel down twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. And in between the powerful current of buses are streams of old 1960's VW Beetles, being driven at speeds well over the posted forty kilometers per hour. Walking alongside that street, it is hard not to feel as if you have entered some strange parallel universe, where Volkswagen and tourists have taken over the world and forced the natives to pilot cumbersome "Autocar"-chariots for all eternity. Actually, that isn't too far from the truth.

Walking along that tired strip of road, it is easy to lose yourself in the chaos. Passing the naive American tourist who obsesses over making a clear cell phone connection or panics over missing a bus, it is easy to feel akin to the relentless pursuit of perfection so common in your Americano brethren. Passing local construction workers, whose brown skin gleams with sweat from the hot summer sun using primitive tools that make a two-hour job last two days, it is easy to empathize in what appears to be the plight of the native worker. The two images foster a sense of appreciation for the drive and work ethic that helped create the comfortable country you call home, and a

feeling of disgust for such a plastic palace built over poverty. But there is more to life in Cancun than this.

Although the natives toil as the heat drips off their backs, they also bask in the shade at noontime for a siesta. The same sun that drives its harsh rays into the moist, bare flesh of the worker's back later comforts him as he reclines against a tree with a bottle of Coca-Cola. The teenage merchants practically beg for customers in their run-down t-shirt shops, yet they laugh with and enjoy their family who work alongside them in a way that is too uncommon in my native land. By American standards, they live in destitution, yet they seem to possess a happiness that is often blatantly absent in my home country to the north. Their lack of the Americano drive for perfection has precluded many of their material aspirations, but cultivated a natural and immaculate appreciation for the fundamental pleasures of everyday life. Theirs is a simple existence filled with harsh realities, yet peppered with the most basic pleasures commonly neglected in the every day lives of many cultures. It is a life built around basic needs, but firmly rooted in basic happiness.

I walk down that dusty road in the blazing heat on some distant Mexican island. I dodge the speeding Volkswagens and the kamikaze buses, but only to return to the haven of my hotel room. I drink a warm glass of water, but only because I am thirsty. And I turn out my light and fall asleep, but only because I am tired. I am on vacation in my hotel. It's a hotel built with the dollars of thousands of tourists like me, by the labor of the natives who work countless hours for meaningless pay. It's not an extravagant hotel, but it has a bed to sleep in, a table to eat at, and it houses a family that I cherish and enjoy. Life along that chaotic street in Mexico may seem primitive, but it's alive with the simple intuitive pleasures that are dead in so many places people call home.

THE STREET WHERE I LIVE

BEN KNELMAN, *Edina High School, grade 11*

When I enter the street where I live, I am always struck by its contrast to the busy boulevard just left behind. A sense of comfort and peace seems to wave in the breeze through the green lawns and trees of the quiet street. Because it is not a through street, it is quiet in every sense of the word; the road always seems meant more for walkers, bicyclers and gardeners than, for cars. My mom always told us we made our home here because it was peaceful for children. At that time we moved in, the neighborhood had none of the imposing houses that now dominate its appearance. However, through all the years it has retained the quality that my parents were initially drawn to. Somehow it remains hidden from hectic suburbia or urbia, and yet this quiet is a refreshing, comforting peace, not a lethargic isolation. This peace seems able to calm and invigorate me simultaneously as I continue to travel into a shaded canopy of towering elm trees that line both sides of the quiet pebble paved road. These guardians, generations old, will always be the most important signposts of my home. Every time one of these trees falls or is cut down, I feel as though the neighborhood itself has been changed or altered in some way. Many of the elms at the beginning of the street have disappeared along with the old homes as they ceded their positions for newer, larger residents. However, it always fills me with a kind of inner happiness to know that along the section of the road passing my home there still remains a bulwark of these green, gentle towers. Every tree still stands as a memory of the past and a guide for the future.

HUNTINGTON STATE BEACH

BRIE CLARK, *SW Jr High, Forest Lake, grade 7*

Rachael Sabre walked along the shore at Huntington State Beach, pondering the roaring Pacific, wishing that she could make a boat magically appear to sail her all around the coastlines of California, and to have a life here, so she would never have to see the uninteresting, familiar terrain of her snowy hometown again. You see, Rachael was bored. Very bored, in fact. She wanted so badly to move to another town, to another house, to another school district.

Then no one would judge her by outdated hearsay. Meanwhile, Rachael felt at peace in California, especially down at Huntington Beach. The stillness was soothing. From this spot on the beach, she could see an industrial plant with its large, white storage tanks, and also a power plant which served the grid of Orange County. This part of Huntington State Beach was mysterious, and she liked that.

Rachael resumed walking along, sometimes kicking beach litter, and scaring away giant sea gulls. She closed her eyes, and felt the sea breeze caress her cheek. Although it had been raining and was still quite chilly, Rachael felt a faint warmth on her face from the sun, which was beginning to peer out from the clouds. That was when she sat on the sand, halfway between the bustling downtown Huntington area and the bone-chilling **Warning! Restricted Area: No Admittance by California Law** sign down by the salt-water marsh and the white-tank industry.

She contemplated the oil rigs out on the ocean. She thought over the beautiful scenery in Laguna Beach. She was mystified by the quaint atmosphere of Balboa Island. She was captivated just thinking about the busy oil refineries in Long Beach and Torrance. She wondered why Anaheim had been the place that planners had chosen all the attractions to be located. She daydreamed about Los Angeles, and all the superstars that filled the downtown. She giggled thinking about San Diego, and how the roads felt like they belonged in Mexico. Rachael knew she had found her place in the world, and it was called Southern California.