

## SESSION TEN: PORTRAIT SKETCH

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### MATERIALS

Copies of attached poem “Grandpa” for participants.

### ENERGIZER AND TEAM BUILDER

#### **Observation Game**

Two people from the group volunteer. One of them is the ‘Object’, the other ‘Subject’. The ‘Subject’ has 30 seconds to observe the Object as minutely as possible. Then the Subject goes out of the room, and the workshop facilitator or any other volunteer makes a tiny change in the clothing of the Object: a button is unfastened, a sleeve rolled up, a wrist band moved from one wrist to the other etc. Then the Subject returns and has to guess what was changed. In the next round, two different people volunteer. After a couple of rounds, add variety by changing not the clothing, but the position of the arms or legs, or better still, the expression on the face.

The aim of the game is twofold: to improve observation skills, and to make a point about how many different details there are that make up a person’s appearance.

### INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION

#### **Writing about People**

Among things central to our existence are people and our relationships with them. Writing about life includes writing about people. Today we shall concentrate on writing a portrait sketch of a person.

Writing about a person requires great skills in observation. The more detailed the observation, the most realistic the description will be. (Refer to the warm up). The description must paint a picture in front of the reader’s/listener’s eyes. Although in describing someone convincingly it is not necessary to write everything about the person, it is however important that the most characteristic and unique features of that person be identified and rendered into words.

### ACTIVITY

#### **Describing your Friend**

Divide the group into teams of five/six. Choose one person from each team who will be described by the others in the minutest possible way. Assign each person in the team (except obviously the person who is being described) a different aspect to describe. The possible aspects are:

Face/Head: “black close-cropped hair”, “large ears that jut out”, “small dark eyes that dart around” etc.

Hands: “forearms with thick curly hair”, “manicured nails”, “a silver ring with a green stone” etc.

Sounds: Typical things one says, expressions or grunts etc.

Texture: “The skin on the feet is coarse”, “hair is smooth and soft”, “cheeks are smooth with just one outgrown pimple on the left one” etc.

Clothes: “T-shirt with red and white horizontal stripes, white buttons, one of which is missing”, “khaki coloured loose three-quarter pants”, “orange belt with five holes in it” etc.

Habits: “asks for tea every 45 minutes”, “mutters in his sleep”, “doesn’t want to wake up in the morning”, “mimics film stars every now and then” etc.

Emotions: How the person behave once (s)he is happy or sad or angry or disappointed etc.

Favourites: What are some of the person’s favourite dishes or movies or books? Are there any particular objects specific to the person, like a red notebook, or a pair of blue socks?

- This exercise should not take more than 20 minutes.
- The facilitator(s) must stress on the importance of details, and encourage the participants to observe as closely as possible and look for newer things that (s)he hadn’t noticed in the person before. It is necessary to guide participants through the exercise by closely following developments every now and then.
- The facilitator(s) must also emphasize that the description, though truthful, must not be in any manner derogatory or embarrassing for the person being described. Use discretion while describing.

## WRITING ACTIVITY

### **Group Reading**

Read Sample Poem: ‘Grandfather’.

### **Writing Activity: Portrait Sketch**

Choose a person you want to make a portrait sketch of. It is important that you choose someone who is not terribly intimate with you, nor totally unknown or unrelated. There needs to be a certain closeness yet a certain detachment. This makes a good portrait sketch.

Once the person of choice has been finalized by each participant, they must make notes from memory of the clothes that person normally wears, the things (s)he often or most characteristically says, and what the most characteristic features of her/his appearance are.

The poem will have three stanzas of five lines each:

Stanza 1: Description of clothes

Stanza 2: Sounds/Speech associated with person

Stanza 3: Description of the face, including, preferably, a mention of the eyes.

Each stanza must have at least one metaphor/simile comparing at least one aspect of the personality with something meaningful: What is her/his voice like when (s)he says “Get out of here” or “What a strange world!”? What is her sari like, or his flowing hair? Etc.

### **Sample Poem**

#### Grandfather

Old outdated flip-flops discoloured into a now-unchanging grey,  
Starched white pajamas,  
Starched white kurta,  
A beige overcoat wrapping him like a coffin;  
The oppressive smell of snuff on a snuff-coloured handkerchief that once  
was white.

The arrogant taps of a wooden stick,  
And the asthmatic growls of a tired aged lion  
On a generation gone to waste:  
“You boys never read what you oughtta read  
Never learn what you oughtta learn!”

Platinum hair thinned into the relic of a forest,  
Platinum beard always three days old,  
Thick black frames sheltering eyes  
That look like the Milky Way  
And speak of a certain sadness almost a century old.

*Bishan Samaddar*

## CONCLUDING ACTIVITY

### **Check-Out**

Go around the room and ask the group to “sign” how they felt about this session. Thumb up, Great Session. Thumbs Down, Bad Session. Thumbs Sideways, So-so session.

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