

SHOW, DON'T TELL

Telling

Little Marty acted like a real brat the next morning and made an awful mess on the kitchen floor, which his mother had to clean up.

Showing

"I don't want any," Marty said, glowering.

It looked as if he had not gotten enough sleep the night before. Yet she knew he'd slept like a railroad tie.

Now Marty, "Elvira said, "be a good boy and try it."

"I hate that stuff."

"Please dear," she said. "Mustn't say hate. Try it first, then see, Oatmeal is good for you. You'll love it."

But the heartier she sounded, the darker became Marty's scowl. "I hate it," he repeated.

She sighed and placed the bowl of steaming oatmeal down in front of him. "Wait until it cools, dear," she said.

She stepped back—which was a good thing.

With one swift accurate sweep of his right arm, Marty caught the bowl perfectly and sent it spinning through the air. When it struck the floor, it did not break. Still spinning, it spewed its contents over the newly waxed floor until it came to a halt against the wall. That was when it broke.

Rushing over in an attempt to catch the spinning dish before it broke, Elvira stepped into the steaming porridge. It was not secure footing. Her feet flew out from under her, and she sat down in it—heavily.

"Oh Marty!" she moaned.

The surface all around, even to the farthest edge, roiled when he hit as if the pool were alive, but they didn't see the snakes at first. The boy's face was white as bleached bone when he came up. "God," he said to them, "don't come in!" And though it was no more than a whisper, they all heard. He seemed to struggle and wallow and make pitifully small headway, though he was a strong swimmer. When he got in waist deep water, they could see snakes hanging on him, dozens of them, biting and holding on. He was already staggering and crying in a thin wheezy voice and he brushed and slapped at the snakes trying to knock them off. He got almost to the bank before he fell, and though they wanted to help him, they couldn't help backing away. But he didn't need them then. He tried only a little while to get up before the movement of his arms and legs lost purpose and he began to shudder and then to stiffen and settle out. One moccasin pinned under his chest, stuck his cheek again and again, but they could see he didn't know it, for there was only the unresponsive bounce of flesh.

STRATEGIES FOR SHOWING

Descriptive detail, facts, statistics, anecdotes, direct quotations