

what's inside?

by Ethan G. Salwen

Aaron Goodman's "SAT Nightmare"

or less. After reading the *Newsweek* article, he wrote this: "Many teenagers dread taking the SATs. Some even have nightmares."

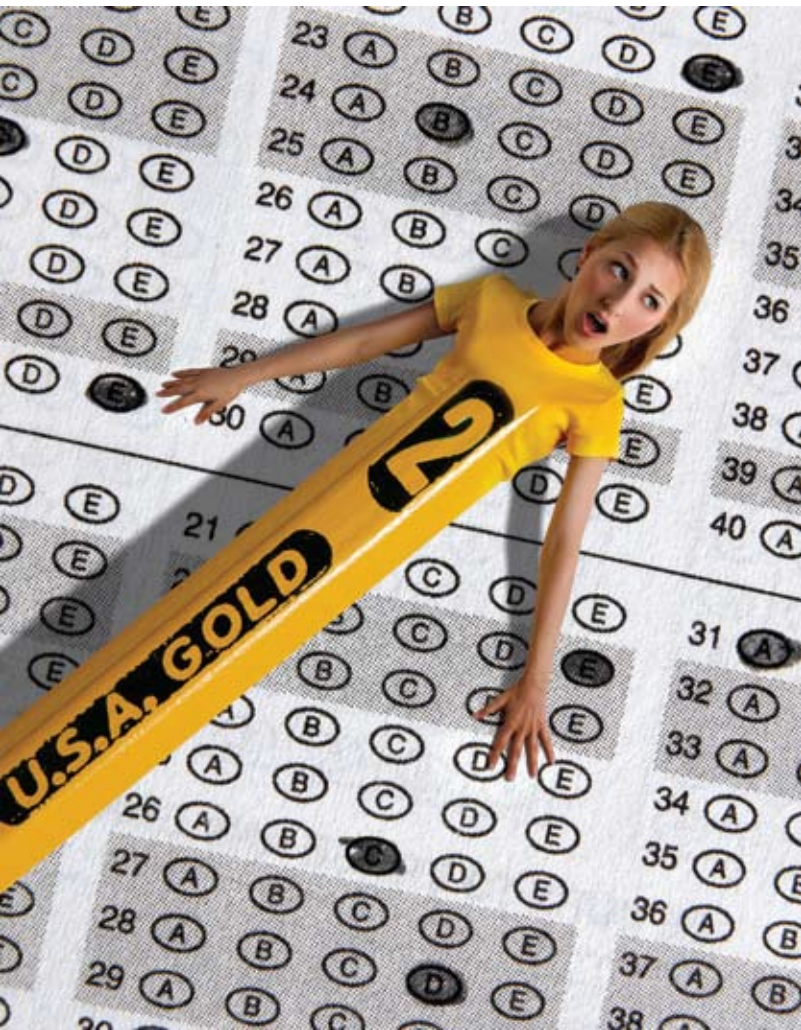
Step 2: The Sketch. The second, and most critical step in Goodman's creative process is to generate the concept sketch that will serve as the blueprint for his illustration. "In this case, my process of sketching focused on playing around with how I could combine a student having a nightmare into the iconic imagery of the SAT."

Step 3: Focusing on Icons.

Goodman decided that the No. 2 pencil and the standardized test form are the SAT's most iconic images. Goodman first photographed the test sheet, with and without pencil marks, to give him options during composing. "I lit it with extremely hard sidelight to really bring out the rough, enlarged texture of the paper," he says. "I wanted it to look



enormous next to the girl." Goodman then photographed the pencil on a white background, using a small two-foot Chimera Strip Bank with a white card for fill "to create a smaller scale version of the light we would use for the girl."



"For me, the most elegant image is the simplest," says Aaron Goodman, a New York-based editorial and commercial photographic illustrator. He created "SAT Nightmare" for *Newsweek* magazine's annual *Kaplan College Guide*. "When I start to work on a project, I ask myself, 'What is the least I can do to communicate this idea?'"



Step 1: The Concept Sentence.

Goodman's creative process always begins with him clarifying the exact concept driving each assignment, in one sentence

Step 4: Creating a Sense of Story. “I love that she is obviously looking at something out of frame,” Goodman said,



SMOOTH SHIRT



EXPRESSION



ARMS

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explaining why he chose this facial expression. “As always, I want readers to ask themselves, ‘What is going on here?’ ” Goodman chose a slender model with a body type that would lend itself to transforming into a pencil, lighting her with a four-foot Chimera Strip Bank aligned along the axis of her body and using white cards for fill. Before photographing the model, Goodman quickly mocked up a rough version of the pencil on the test sheet so he could exactly match the perspective and lighting.

Step 5: Compositing in Photoshop.

Goodman used a Hasselblad 503 CW with a 50mm CFI lens to photograph all elements in the image, employing a Phase One P25 digital back and using Phase One’s Capture One software for RAW processing. He added extension tubes to

capture the close-up images of the pencil and test form. He brought all elements into Photoshop, silhouetted them and made tonal and color adjustments. “We wound up using three different shots of the model,” Goodman says. “One where her shirt was smoothed out for easy blending into the pencil, one for the best expression, and one in which her arms were outstretched the way I liked best. I tweaked the shirt color to match the pencil color, and I added the shadows that make it appear that she and the pencil are actually sitting on the paper.”

Step 6: Critical Color Balance and Tonality.

“What makes or breaks digital compositing are color balancing and tonality,” Goodman says. “If you think white objects don’t need color balancing, think again. The paper needed to be balanced to the warmth of the pencil and the girl. You need to know that everything in a frame will affect the color of whatever is next to it.” Regarding tonality, Goodman advises, “Start out with a good RAW capture, slightly flatter in contrast than you need. This gives you the room to pull out shadow or highlight detail when you need it. You can always get rid of detail. You can never bring it back.”

See Goodman In Action. The “At Work” section of Goodman’s Web site features short movies that show how many of his photo illustrations came to life, from concept sketch to final image (www.aarongoodmanphotography.com).



Ethan G. Salwen is an independent photographer and writer based in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He specializes in Latin American cultures, and also covers a wide variety of topics for professional photographers including digital technology, marketing techniques and industry trends. Visit his blog at www.aftercapture.com.