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Noticing Place Assignment

As you've heard me state in class I'm an avid gardener. Thus, I chose a garden to sit in this past week. The Clemens-Munsinger Gardens in St. Cloud are right along the bank of the Mississippi River. They are well kept, spectacular gardens of an age long past. The history of St. Cloud's Munsinger Gardens is comparable to the garden's well-worn paths; for both have interesting stories and unexpected turns. During the 1880s the lower east bank of the Mississippi River was the site of a sawmill, but by 1915 the city purchased the area for use as a neighborhood park. Eventually, the site became known as Riverside Park and Munsinger Gardens, the latter section named in honor of a former superintendent of parks, Joseph Munsinger. Munsinger Gardens has experienced many different stages of development. Improvements to the gardens occurred during the Great Depression through the Works Progress Administration. Projects from this period included planting trees and flowerbeds. Other additions included the creation of rock-lined paths, a lily pond, and a fountain. However, most of the work in developing the garden was directed by Joseph Munsinger. The first greenhouse was built in 1938. While the original greenhouse is gone, new ones stand in its place, and garden staff continues the tradition of growing flowers that help beautify this wonderful jewel known as Munsinger Gardens.

When a plot of land came up for sale across the street from the home of Bill and Virginia Clemens, they purchased it and then donated the land to the City of St. Cloud Park Department. Known for her love of roses and flowers, the late Virginia Clemens battled multiple sclerosis for more than 40 years. As a true act of love, and a way to give something back to the community, Bill Clemens funded the establishment and maintenance of the Clemens Gardens. In 1990 Bill and Virginia Clemens funded the construction of the rose garden, purchased 1100 rose bushes, and even paid the wages for a rose grower. This led to the development of the Virginia Clemens Rose Garden, which is now part of six separate gardens along Kilian Boulevard that make up the Clemens Gardens.

The flavor of European gardens comes alive along this stretch of Kilian Boulevard. The six gardens that make up the Clemens Gardens offer a feast for the senses - especially for the eyes. Savor the sweet-smelling roses. Gaze at the explosions of color set off by the various shades and hues of green. Be surprised by the interesting shapes formed by the gardeners' creative trimming of various small trees, hedges, and bushes.

Stroll along the red-brick walkways of Clemens Gardens and you can see firsthand the nurturing that has gone into this series of gardens. Stand just south of the restroom area and the rose garden, and look further south, up the hill to the fountain and treillage garden, and you can feel an inspiring symmetry in the design of these gardens.

For this assignment, I chose to sit in the Munsinger garden right along the river. Watching hostas poke through the ground is one of my favorite rites of spring, and given the hundreds of hostas nestled in beds under the hundred year old pine trees, it seemed like a logical place to sit and notice. Spring lends itself to cool breezes off the river and the bright warmth of the sunshine! Each session was very different, largely affected by the weather.

### **April 27, 12pm**

A beautiful, sunny day along the river. The gardens are a great place to relax and enjoy lunch. Lots of people sitting on benches, tables and the ground. The gardens are about half cleaned out of their winter carpet of leaves and needles. Volunteers work on raking, pruning, and various other spring cleaning items. Several people walk their dogs along the river path. Some college students from SCSU right across the river are playing Frisbee, others are studying for finals I imagine. The air is filled with the smell of dirt, pine and springtime. While the sun is out and feels great on my skin, helping winter starved, vitamin D deprived body, there is a slight breeze, and it is cool. The hostas are just peeking through the still cold crust of the earth.

### **May 1, 2pm**

Another sunny day, but very windy. Very few people here in the garden at this time of day other than myself and the volunteer gardeners. Lots more bird noise today and many more squirrels picking up pinecones and running around burying them. Hostas are about an inch out of the ground...mostly. Much of the garden is now uncovered and cleaned out, and volunteers are spreading manure that I can smell when the wind gusts my direction. The water on the river is very choppy. There are some trumpeter swans floating around, as well as ducks and geese. A boat trolls by upstream with 2 men fishing.

### **May 4, 10am**

Oddly, there are tons of people here for 10:00am on a Monday. People must be playing hooky because of the nice weather and impending rain. It's already 70 and I'm a little sweaty with my jeans on. Lots of students today lounging in the grass and on benches with their noses in iPad's and books. The tulips are blooming now. I can smell the stark white magnolia blossoms when the breeze is right. The magenta Rhododendrons are gorgeous in the light of the early morning sun. Hostas are over 6 inches now, and some are even beginning to unfurl their variegated leaves. The fountain is being cleaned out to begin in summer water dance soon. Several runners pass by on the path along the river. Less squirrels today, must be scared away by the people, but plenty of bird activity up in the giant pines.