

Creative writing class outline, May 2022

Students will choose an object that has personal significance to them, and prepare a pen (or pencil) and paper to write by hand. They should have the personal object with them for the class.

The goal is to help students develop descriptive language and engage imagination rather than using only linear and rational thinking to describe their object.

PART 1

Step 1: Students will make a list of five to ten objects with a similar color to their personal object. For example, if the personal object is black, the list might include the night sky, the asphalt of a street, motor oil, a crow's feathers, a burnt piece of wood, a formal shoe, the pupil of one's eye, a coal mine, etc. The more objects the students can list, the better, as imagination and associations will be increasingly engaged as the students have to reach further and further to think of different comparisons. By making a list rather than consciously trying to describe or define the personal object, we hope to disengage linear thinking and allow the mind to open to subconscious associations.

Step 1A: Repeat Step 1 but with a different sensory perception—what does the object feel/smell/taste/sound like. (Choose one.)

Step 2: Students write a paragraph using the objects in their lists to describe their personal object, what it looks like, how it feels/sounds/smells, how they use it, why it is meaningful to them. Example: My cell phone is black like a beetle. When I hold it in my hand it feels smooth like a piece of glass...

Step 3 (Optional, or for homework?): Students make another list of other people who have interacted with their personal object, and what the others' relationship to the object is—who mined or created the materials it is made from? Who designed its shape and function? Who sold it to them? Who is in the company that produced it? Is it made by hand, or by someone operating a machine in a factory? Are the materials organic or industrial?

Step 3A: Write a paragraph describing: How are these people's relationships to the object different from the students'? Are they in the same country? Is their economic class higher or lower than the students'? What benefits or profit do they get from the students? How is this different from how the students relate to the object?

PART 2 (for homework or the second class)

Step 1: The students will imagine a landscape that represents or reminds them of how they feel about themselves or their lives. It could be a city, a forest, a factory, a room, an agricultural field, a beach, daytime or at night, and it could be a real or imaginary place...close your eyes and imagine this place, then make another list of objects and sensations in the scene. Colors, smells, sounds, sensations (like wind, heat, cold), trying to focus on concrete objects. Don't try to describe or define the place, just make another list of these elements.

Step 2: Use this list to write a description of the landscape. This can be part of the “letter to my future self” to explain and evoke how students feel about their lives and situations now. In a way it can serve as a kind of picture or snapshot of the present, to remind them in the future of their thoughts and feelings now.

Step 3: After the description of the landscape is finished, write one more paragraph to describe how they hope or expect it to change. Do they want to add structures or technology to it? Do they want it to include other people? Do they want to build a wall around it to keep it exactly the same? Do they want to plant trees or flowers, add windows, remove some of the elements it contains? This is a way to express hopes for the future, and a way to remind the future self of what they wanted, hoped for, or dreamed of at this point in their lives.

Discussion questions: Did listing things instead of trying to describe their objects or landscapes change the way they thought about them or expressed themselves? Did imagining a landscape help them to understand how they feel about their present situations, goals, and concerns? Is this a helpful way to write a letter to their future selves? What else do they want to express that these exercises did not help with? Was there any benefit for them in this form of “creative writing”?