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that place you remember liking as a kid

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that place you remember liking as a kid

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Semester taught assignment: Spring 2023

Course Title: English 2: Critical Thinking and Writing

Assignment Title: that place you remember liking as a kid

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Context: This assignment is in-class free-write that helps students get used to the idea that their experiences are welcome. It is a way to start creating trust and to start accessing that capacity to reach into one's own mind and memories for source or text material. In this way it starts the counter storytelling ball rolling, or keeps it rolling if used later in the semester. It supports community creation.

Assignment:

Canvas discussion:

Writing is fun, and it comes connected to different parts of our brains and memories.

To shift gears, after a few conscious breaths, in a quick (5 minute) write, describe that place you remember liking as a kid.

It can be warm, safe, exciting, adventurous, open air, under a blanket, anywhere you remember liking.

This helps activate different writing spaces in your mind.

The idea underlying these in-class free-writes is that they strengthen a particular intellectual/creative muscle. They help to forge a link between thinking and writing, concentrate your attention on one aspect of writing, and help you to emphasize concrete writing. When you practice writing sensory details it helps you keep other (perhaps more academic and thus sometimes abstract) writing grounded.

After doing the writing, students talk in pairs or small groups about what came up. Alternatively, the same conversation might happen in large group through round-robin or popcorn. No forcing anyone to say what they saw, but curiosity and engagement with all who want to speak. It is sometimes new or vulnerable for students to talk about deep memory in class. Gentleness and appreciation go a long way.

Students can write their memories into the Canvas discussion page. Part of creating a sense of safety in the class can be self-disclosures. I give this example (after they have written theirs so they are not, consciously or unconsciously, trying to emulate the teacher in their own writing):

I remember liking the coach house out back of our old 3-story farm house in downtown Berkeley. The coach house belonged to the neighbor and he had machines and machine parts in it. It smelled like oils and metal. I used to climb beside it to the parapet over the first floor, slide out over on the fence and jump. I loved the feeling of climbing, my hands on the structure, and the feeling of falling thought the air. I would do that over and over for hours.