

## Writer's Block: Creative Writing Exercises

# Memory Mapping (Grades 6 - 12)



**By Mackayla Kelsey**

### **Introduction:**

When we think or speak sentiments like “Oh, I wish I could go back to that time when...”, we have a habit of *spatializing time* and *temporalizing space*. Spatial refers to space, temporal refers to time, and positional or locational refers to a place. Memory is a measurement of place, time, and space.

Time is a unit of measurement given to the existences of things, people, places, objects, and events. Space can be thought of as the abstraction of place (think of the concept of power dynamics in a classroom between teacher and students as an expression of space). Place is the physical and concreteness given to space, like the walls, floors, windows, and doors. Our memories are a measurement of place, time, and space that hold information. This writing exercise is intended to help us flex our descriptive muscles by using information that we already know: our lived experiences, to help us better describe things in the abstract and concrete!

### **Description:**

#### ***Part I:***

Sometimes, choosing a memory can feel like a flood of overwhelm. As writers, if we feel overwhelmed, we can make a list. Find something to write with and on, and number the surface with #1 – 20. Either in chronological order or other, make a list of the most significant

experiences you've had that you remember (divorce, graduation, driving for the first time, going to prom, etc).

Next, cross out numbers 1 – 5, and 13 – 18. Choose either #7, 9, 11, or 12, or #19 or 20. Write a short story about this memory in as much detail as possible. When writing details, use your senses: what fragrances do you remember smelling - warm cookies baking? Freshly cut grass? What textures do you remember touching? What do you remember hearing?

### ***Part II:***

Find a blank surface to create on – paper, screen, anything in between. Close your eyes and take a few slow, deep breaths in and think back to your childhood home(s). Maybe you had one home or maybe you had many, pick the one that holds the most memories for you.

Think about where this memory took place, and picture yourself being there: maybe it is a bedroom or a backyard. Make a map or visual diagram of the space in the center of the blank surface. Sketch any and all details that come back to you: where the door was, the garden, the windows, the fence.

Then, take note of as many specific details as possible on your map by labeling or by listing. The color of the curtains, the way the light came through the window, anything and everything.

### ***Part II (Expanded):***

Take another blank surface, however this time we will travel beyond our first and center location we chose before. Close your eyes, and step beyond the threshold of your door and walk into the hallway or out to the street and around the block.

Next, draw a map of the neighborhood as it was during this time. You might include street names, yard fixtures, individuals you saw often.

Then, mark any and all special places on the map: your best friend's house, a secret hideout, a big green happy hill that met the sky. Use details in this map of colors, positions, textures, sounds, smells, etc.

These exercises can be completed in any order - the writing or the drawing. Pairing the two together helps us to visualize our *movement* through the writing, which can include a range of concepts from transitioning between moments, pacing the speed of reading, the way we describe physical movement, and much more!